



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

SPEAK UP 

**GENDER INEQUALITIES AND INCLUSION:
A LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF HIDDEN DIFFERENCES IN CARE ECONOMY**

A LINGUIST POINT OF VIEW – ISABELLA CHIARI



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CHIARI - GENDER INEQUALITIES AND INCLUSION:
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GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE OR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

TWO PERSPECTIVES: ONE BACKGROUND

WHY LANGUAGE IS RELEVANT?

- The way we perceive women and men in society is partly grounded in the way we **SPEAK** or **WRITE** about these two groups. With language we **BUILD** representations.
- Cross-linguistic comparisons will remain useful for documenting the effect of language on thought (and on social constructs)
- Most cross-linguistic comparisons of grammatical gender effects on mental representations have documented interesting variations.



GENDER AND SEX

- The **WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION** summarises the difference between sex and gender in the following way:
- **SEX** refers to “the different **biological and physiological** characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.”
- **GENDER** refers to "the **socially** constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed.
 - The concept of gender includes five important elements: relational, hierarchical, historical, contextual and institutional. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. When individuals or groups do not “fit” established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion – all of which adversely affect health
- And then we have **GRAMMATICAL GENDER**



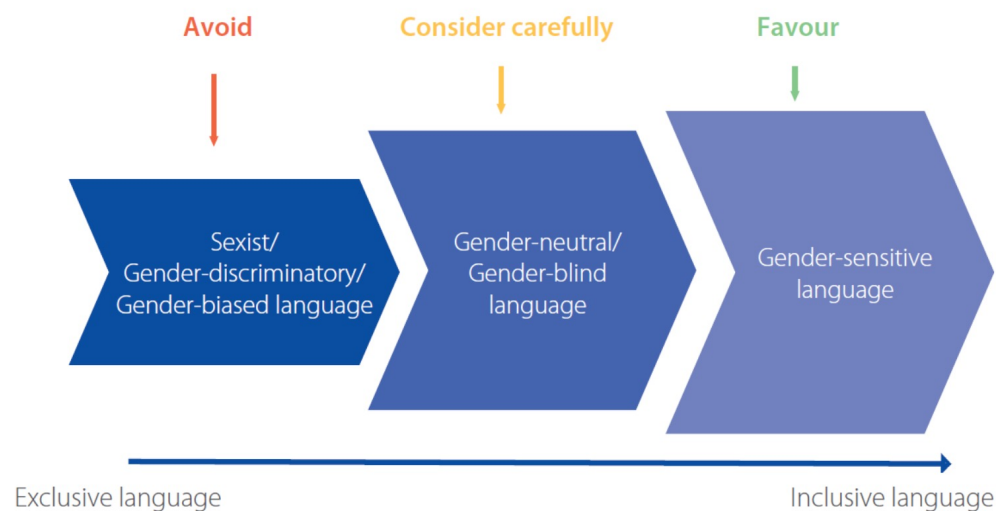
TWO VIEWS OF THE ISSUE

GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE

- This approach reflects the assumption that language, here gender-fair language, is a tool to **influence** people's gendered perception of reality.
 - Countries with grammatical gender languages (e.g., French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Arabic,) suggest that they are perceived in a less gender-typed manner when they are described in gender-fair language, more specifically in pair forms.
- Languages without grammatical gender (e.g. English, Turkish)

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- The inclusive language approach is broader and includes issues such as: gender, disability, sexual orientation, race, age, diverse vulnerable groups.



GENDER IN LANGUAGE

- Referring to *a woman and a man* or to *a man and a woman* is not perceived as being the same, and the resulting biased representations – toward the first person mentioned – have been well documented (Hegarty et al., 2016).
- There are some universal features such as the existence of **lexical gender words** (e.g., *woman, father, male, female*) or the possibility of combining lexical gender elements with other nouns (as in English *girlfriend, male teacher*).
- Most research on grammatical gender and gender representations has reflected the extent to which formal features of a language, such as the existence and number of grammatical gender categories (i.e., gender marking of pronouns, and/or nouns), may contribute to (biased) gender-related representations.
- In gendered (e.g., French, German) and semi-gendered languages (e.g., English, for which this feature only applies to pronouns), the masculine form tends to be used either *specifically* – referring exclusively to **men** – or in a so-called *generic way* – when there are **female and male referents**, or when the gender of referents is **unknown** or **irrelevant**. (Gygax et al. 2019)
 - Interestingly, the dual meaning of masculine forms is often grounded in **historical androcentric (and sexist) pressures**



EFFECTS OF GRAMMATICAL GENDER AND LEXICON ON PERCEPTION

- “Recent studies from countries with **grammatical gender languages** (e.g., French) found both children and adults to more frequently think of female jobholders and to consider women’s success in male dominated occupations more likely when the jobs were described in pair forms (i.e., by explicit reference to male and female jobholders, e.g., *inventeuses* et *inventeurs*; French feminine and masculine plural forms for *inventors*), rather than masculine only forms (e.g., *inventors*).“Vervecken, et al. 2015.
- According to a recent typological sample, they occur in **40% of the world’s languages possess grammatical gender** distinctions (Corbett, 2013a). From those, **75% have a gender distinction based on sex**.
- This distinction is relevant for research of the way gender distinction affects our representation of women and men.



3 TYPES OF LANGUAGES : DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

1. Natural gender languages

- English
- personal nouns are mostly gender neutral and don't classify inanimate nouns according to different genders
 - Most personal nouns behave similarly, meaning that they are not specified for sex or gender identity (e.g. child, people, individual, person)
- there are personal pronouns specific to each gender
 - (e.g., my child – she, your teacher – he).

2. Grammatical gender languages

- German, Italian, Arabic
- every noun (human and inanimate) has a grammatical gender
 - It. figlio (m. son), figlia (m. daughter), sole (m. sun), luna (f. moon)
 - Ger. der Sohn (m) die Tochter (f), die Sonne (f) der Mond (m)
 - Ar. الابن (m) الابنة (f) - الشمس (f) القمر (m)
- the gender of personal pronouns usually matches the reference noun
- These nouns control agreement of various other lexical categories such as determiners, adjectives or pronouns.

3. Genderless languages

- Turkish
- most human nouns as well as pronouns are generally unspecified for gender
 - Tur. Öğretmen (teacher), kişi (person) güneş (sun), ay (moon)
 - O (he/she)
- The structure of these languages
- do not enforce the use of gender-marked forms, even though this information can be conveyed by lexical means, such as the Turkish erkek “man or male” or kız “girl.”



MORE ON GRAMMAR AND GENDER

- **Gender assignment** is mostly semantically **arbitrary** for inanimate nouns, whereas the grammatical gender of human nouns shows considerable correspondence with the **sex** of the referent (or gender identity). In some cases, the grammatical gender of nouns denoting human referents is different from their lexical gender (German **das Mädchen** n.n. “the girl,”)
- In other cases, nouns denoting humans may be used to refer to women and men (French **la personne** n.f. “the person,” **l’individu** n.m. “the individual”). – Italian – Arabic
- In a language such as Italian, some feminine/female forms (names as well as nouns) are morphologically derived from masculine/male (e.g., **poeta** n.m. > **poetessa** n.f., “poet”), sometime the feminine bears derogatory connotations.



MORE ON GRAMMAR AND GENDER

- **Masculine-male generics:** masculine word forms are not used specifically to refer to male referents, but may be used with the intention to generically refer to (groups of) individuals whose referential/biological gender is irrelevant or unknown. It. **studenti** (m) Ger. **die Studenten** (inherent), Ar. **الطلاب** (m)
- **Asymmetries:** address terms may not be symmetrical between women and men
- (e.g., in English, the potentially sexist distinction between **Mrs** and **Miss** for women, while only one form, **Mr.**, exists for men)
- (e.g., in Italian the lack of corresponding forms for **medico** n.m., “medical doctor” or **sage-femme** n.f., “midwife.” Other asymmetries, for example, can be found in morphology, semantic connotations related to masculine feminine equivalent forms, or in various types of derogatory meanings attached to certain forms.



STRATEGIES TOWARDS GENDER NEUTRALITY (INCLUSIVE)

- **Gender Neutral Pronoun:**

- En. An applicant may submit *their* complaint

- **Using Plural Nouns:**

- En. Employees may apply only if *they*

- **Pronoun Deletion:**

- En. An official's leave entitlement depends on ~~his~~ age

- **Change the possessive pronoun “his” to “a” or “the”:**

- En. The candidate must submit ~~his~~ *an* application.

- **Use the relative pronoun “ who ” instead of “if he:**

- En. Priority will be given to an applicant if ~~he~~ *who* fulfils... / Priority will be given to an applicant *to those who* fulfil...



EFFECTS OF GENDER FAIR OR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE CHOICES

- **Gender-fair language** use by teachers, parents, or the media may thus contribute to an attenuation of adolescents' gender related stereotypes about occupations and roles.





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EXAMPLES FROM THE FAMILY DOMAIN

CARE ROLES, RECONCILIATION AND THE STEREOTYPES MODEL AND

THE 'RECONCILIATION' STEREOTYPE

«Family and labour market changes have been dramatic and have presented modern welfare states with new social risks. Policy makers have tended to promote women's employment and to assume that care work will increasingly be commodified.» Lewis, 2006.

CARE GAP coiveived «reconciliation»

- work-family reconciliation arises from asymmetric gendered behaviour
 - Women have entered labour market more than man have entered houshold work: gender inequality

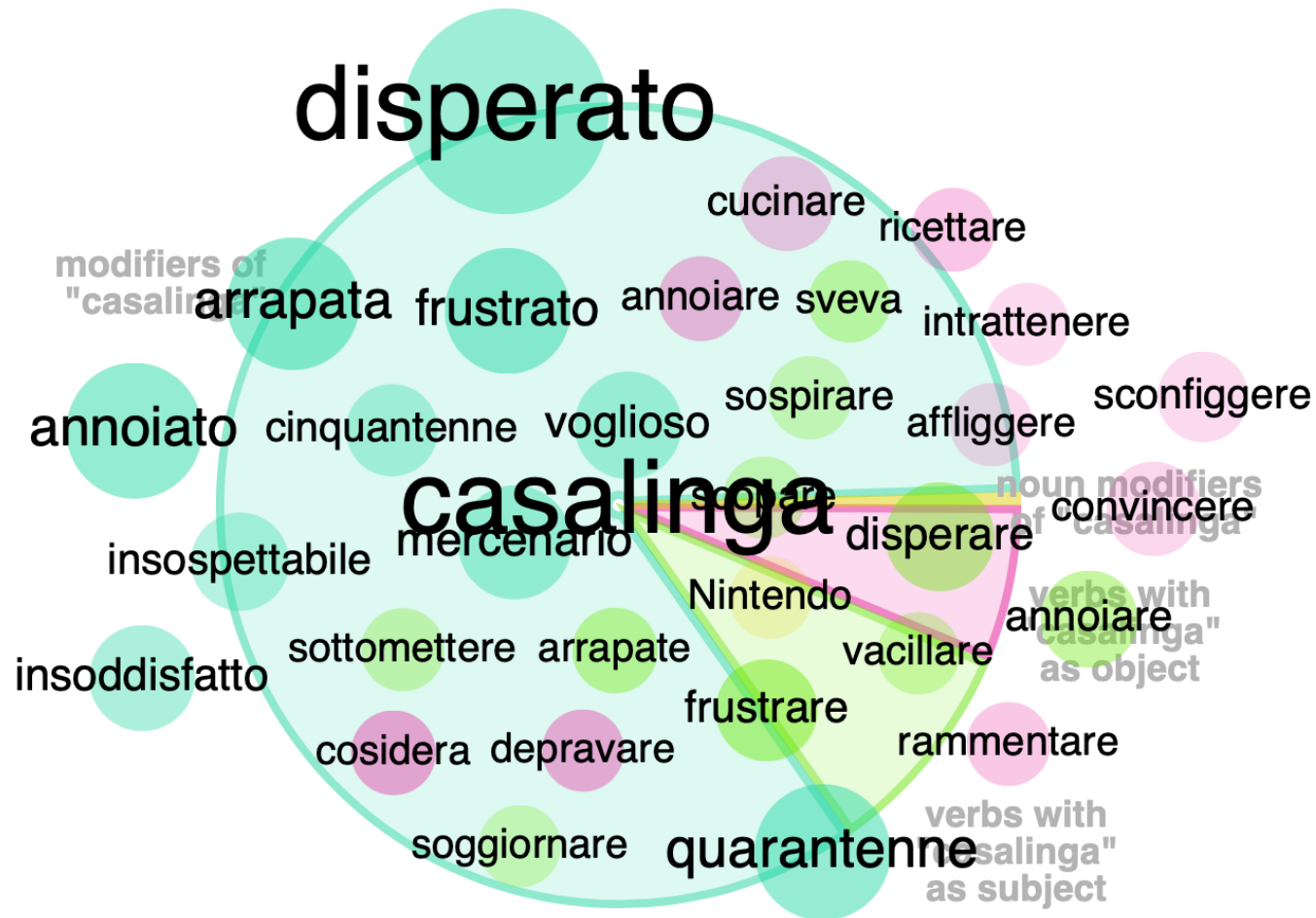


GENDER-DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE

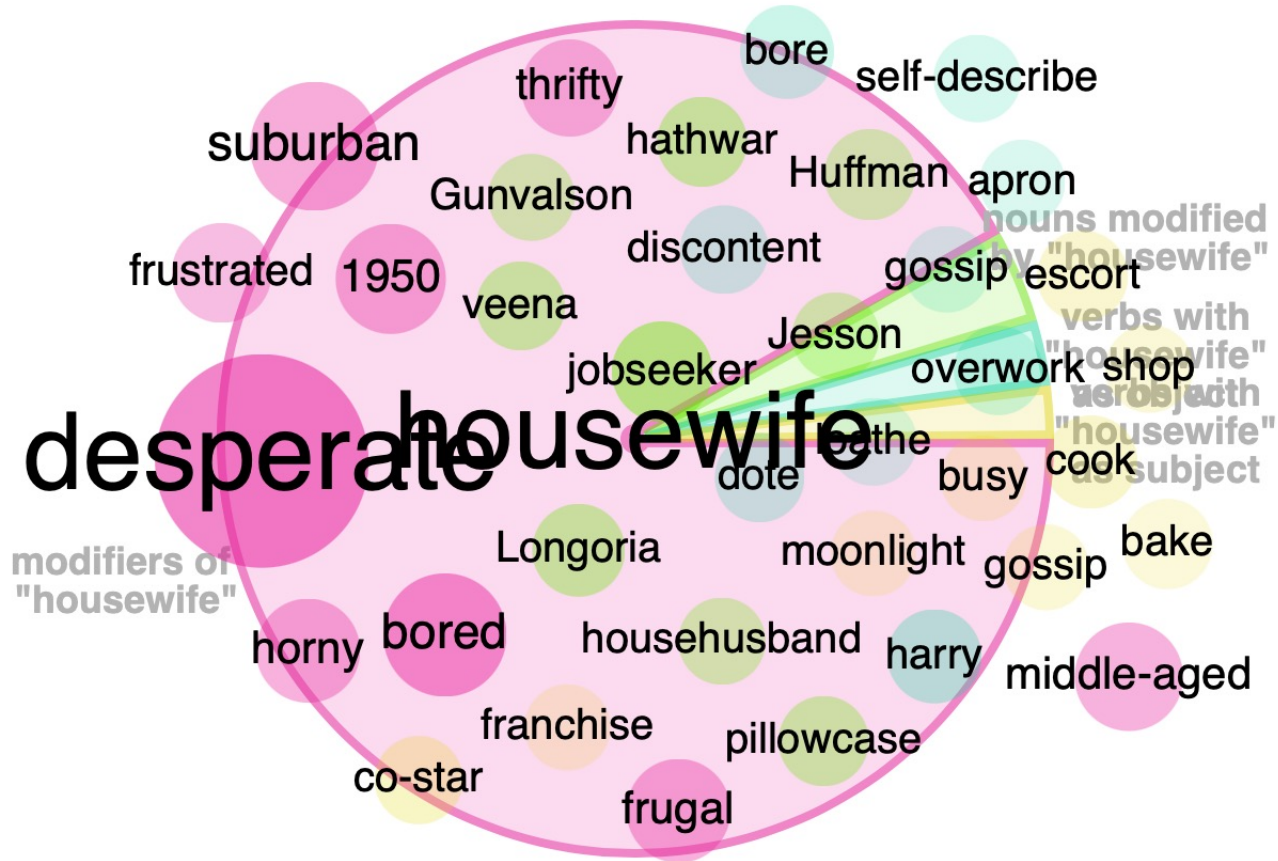
There are three broad categories under which much gender-discriminatory language falls:

- **STEREOTYPES**: assigning gender when gender is unknown or irrelevant as a result of stereotypes.
- **INVISIBILITY** and omission: language which casts the male as the generic norm and keeps women from being visible in public life.
- **SUBORDINATION AND TRIVIALISATION**: language which paints one gender, often women, as inferior, or belittles them.



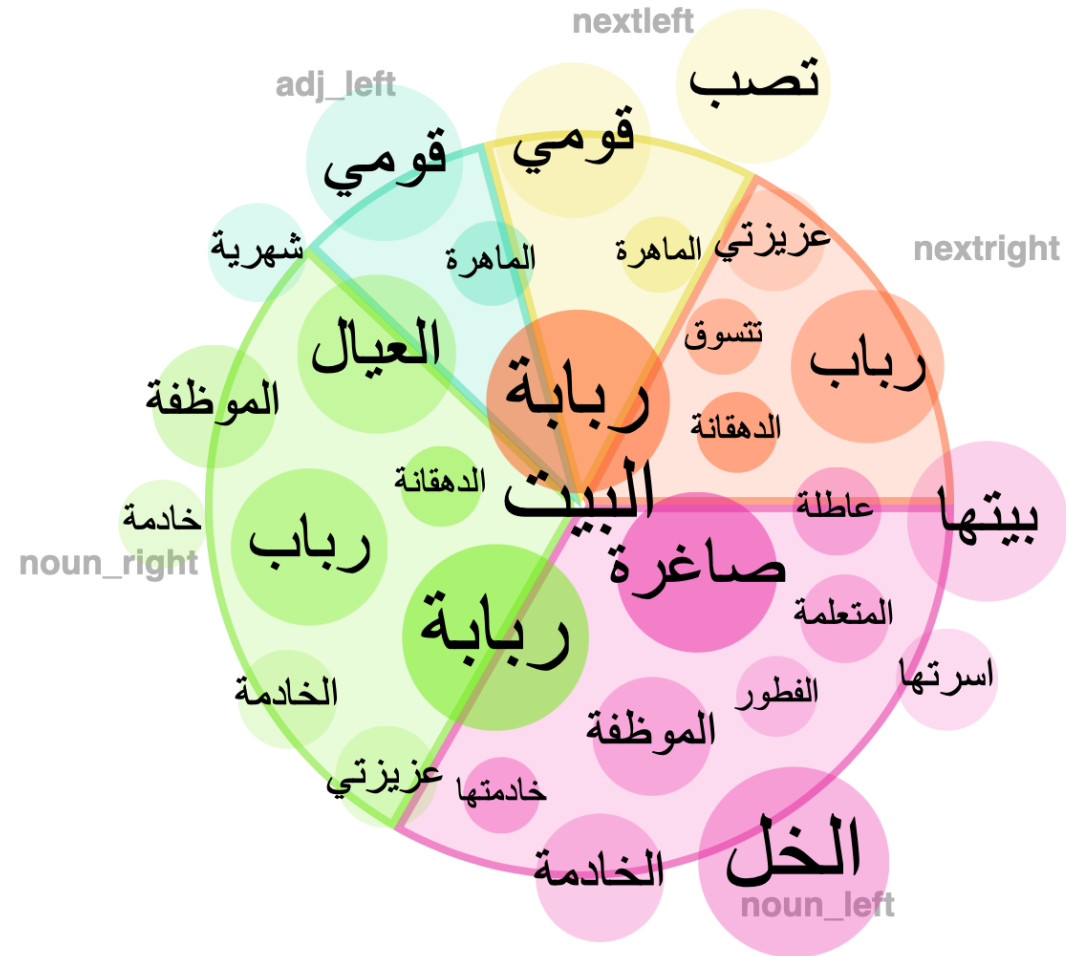


housewife as noun 102,665x ...



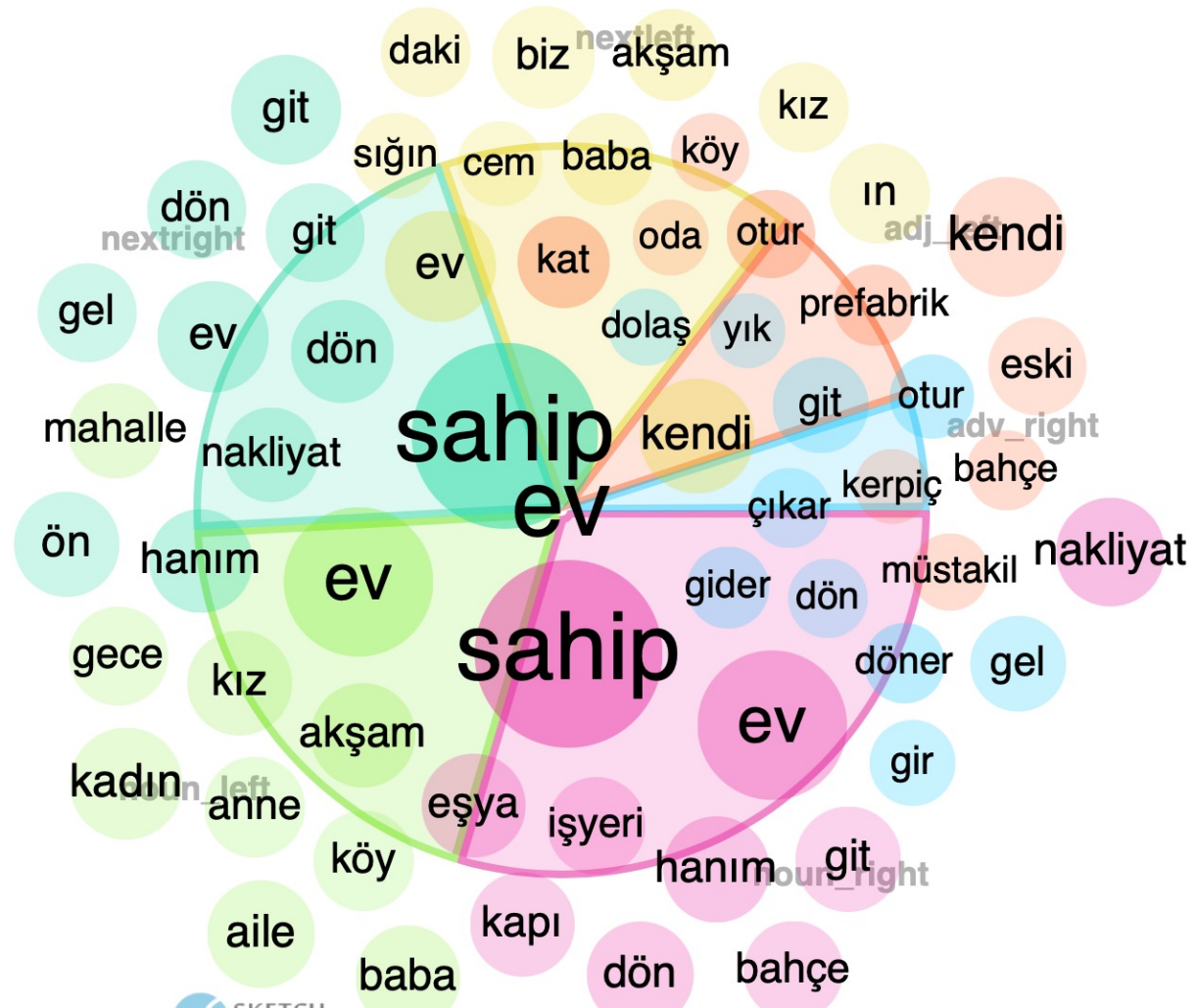
3,899x ربة البيت ...

× ر > -3 البيت



ev as -n 3,563,568x ▾

...



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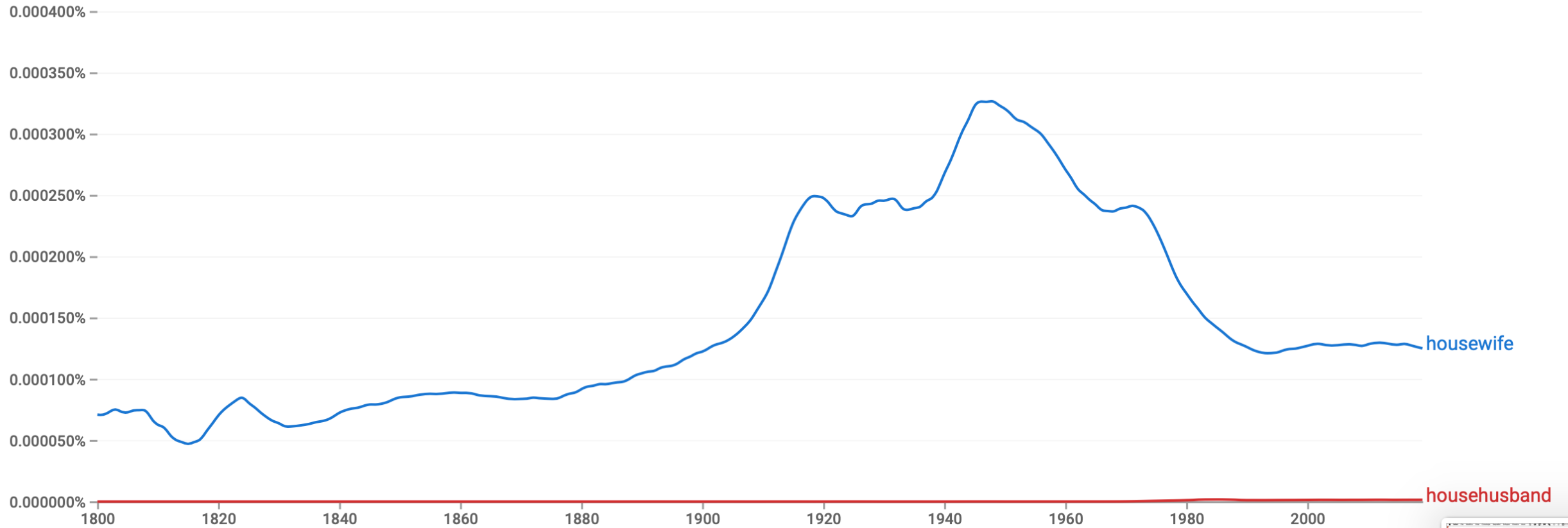
housewife,househusband

1800 - 2019

English (2019)

Case-Insensitive

Smoothing



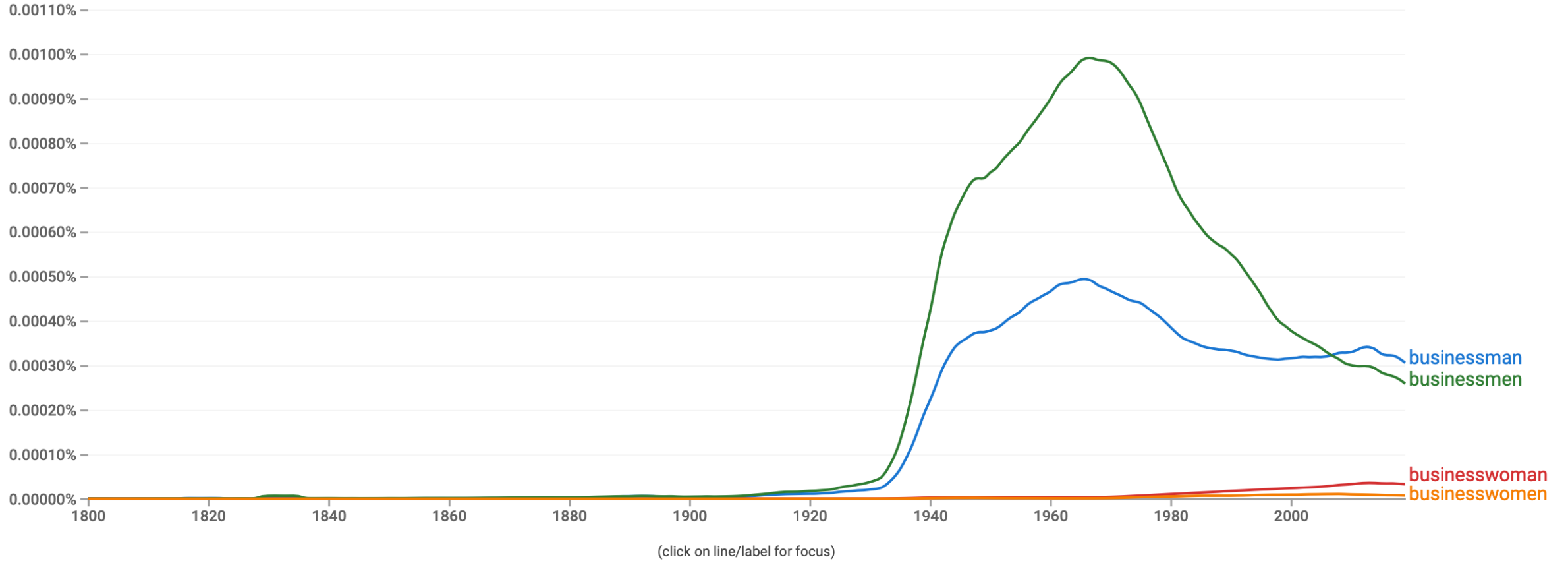
businessman,businesswoman,businessmen,businesswomen

1800 - 2019

English (2019)

Case-Insensitive

Smoothing



businesswoman 27,620x

6.0

4.0

2.0

0

-2.0

-4.0

-6.0

businessman 377,677x

heiress	39	8	6.2	0.9	...
socialite	95	82	7.7	4.3	...
businessman	453	202	6.7	4.6	...
philanthropist	367	3,076	7.8	9.1	...
entrepreneur	396	2,582	5.6	7.8	...
diplomat	30	837	3.3	6.9	...
politician	354	10,597	4.4	9.0	...
banker	22	1,793	2.7	8.0	...
tourist	0	1,000	—	6.9	...
industrialist	0	976	—	7.7	...





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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON INTERVENTION

TECHNIQUES, PERCEPTION AND STEREOTYPING AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

USING GENDER-FAIR OR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- Involves equally all member of the target audience (of any kind of communication)
- In order to tackle gender inequality, we must look at the way we communicate.
- Using gender-sensitive language can:
 - Make it easier to see important differences between the needs of women and men;
 - Challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society;
 - Lay the foundation for greater gender equality throughout society;
 - Raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour;
 - Make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were once not considered 'typical' of their gender.
- Promotes values of inclusion and diversity
- Reduces stereotyping roles related to gender
- Remember there is **lexicon!**



AND EUROPE

- In the multilingual environment of the European Parliament, the principles of gender neutrality in language and gender-inclusive language require the use of different strategies in the various official languages, depending on the grammatical typology of each language. (GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE in the European Parliament)

- <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sensitive-communication/overview>



European Institute
for Gender Equality



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