Lisa Marie Frauenknecht ♦ Hanna Sofie Heizmann ♦ Joachim Grzega

# Gender-Inclusive Job Titles and Gender Gap in Ten European Countries (A Seminar Project)[*]

Abstract

The aim of this study was the investigation of the relationship between gender equality and gender-inclusive language. Ten job-related expressions, traditionally associated with men, in ten different countries (UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Russia, Slovenia) were compared on the basis of their gender-inclusiveness. We expected (1) a positive association between gender equality according to the Global Gender Gap index 2020 and gender-inclusive words and (2) significantly more gender equality in countries using more gender inclusive words. The quantitative analysis revealed a small but insignificant correlation between the two variables with *tau* = .0698 and *p* =.8553. Furthermore, the conduction of a Welch's *t*-test revealed a non-significant difference between countries with more gender-inclusive words compared to countries with fewer gender-inclusive words with *p* = .9338. Possible limitations of these outcomes are discussed.

Sommaire

Le but de cette étude était l'analyse du rapport entre l'égalité des genres et la langue inclusive. Dans ce but, dix expressions autour d'emplois traditionellement liées à des hommes, sont analysées, dans dix pays (Angleterre, Allemagne, France, Espagne, Italie, Suède, Finlande, Pologne, Russie, Slovénie), quant à leur inclusivité genrée. Il est expecté qu'il y a (1) une relation positive entre le Global Gender Gap Index de 2020 et un vocabulaire inclusif et (2) une égalité des genres plus élevée dans les pays qui emploient un taux élevé de mots inclusifs. L'analyse quantitative montre une correlation petite, mais non-signifiante entre les deux variables (*tau* = .0698 et *p* =.9338). De surcroît, un Welch's *t*-test montre une différence non-signifiante entre les pays avec plus d'expressions inclusives et les pays avec moins d'expressions inclusives (*p* = .2385). Des limitations à ces résultats sont discutées.

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Studie war die Untersuchung des Zusammenhangs zwischen Geschlechtergleichstellung und geschlechtergerechter Sprache. Dazu wurden zehn traditionell mit Männern verbundene berufliche Bezeichnungen in zehn verschiedenen Ländern (Großbritannien, Deutschland, Frankreich, Spanien, Italien, Schweden, Finnland, Polen, Russland, Slowenien) auf ihre Gender-Inklusivität hin verglichen. Erwartet wurde (1) ein positiver Zusammenhang zwischen Geschlechtergleichstellung gemäß dem Global Gender Gap Index 2020 und geschlechterinklusiven Ausdrücken und (2) eine signifikant höhere Geschlechtergleichstellung in Ländern, die geschlechtergerechtere Wörter verwenden. Die quantitative Analyse ergab eine geringe, aber nicht signifikante Korrelation zwischen den beiden Variablen mit *tau* = .0698 und *p* =.9338. Darüber hinaus ergab die Durchführung eines Welch-*t*-Tests einen nicht signifikanten Unterschied zwischen Ländern mit mehr geschlechtergerechteren Wörtern und Ländern mit weniger geschlechtergerechten Wörtern mit *p* = .2385. Mögliche Einschränkungen zu diesen Ergebnissen werden diskutiert.

## 1. Introduction: Gender-Inclusive Language and its Effects

An issue that has increasingly received scientific and public attention throughout the past few years is gender-inclusive language. As research shows, gender-inclusive language, defined as "speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender

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identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes" (United Nations 2020), not only leads to increased tolerance toward women and non-binary people (cf. Tavits/Pérez 2019: 16781), but also impacts people's job choice (cf. Bem/Bem 1973: 6; Horvath/Sczesny 2015: 2). In a study conducted by Bem & Bem (cf. 1973: 6), women were less likely to apply for a job if grammatically masculine job titles were used. Furthermore, they were less likely to actually receive the job at the same level of qualification (cf. Horvath/Sczesny 2015: 2) In addition to this, Vervecken & Hannover (cf. 2015: 76) were able to show that primary school girls felt more self-efficient towards traditionally male occupations in contexts where gender-inclusive language was used.

This paper will focus on the analysis of gender-inclusive language and gender equality in the respective speech communities in order to find out whether the usage of gender-inclusive language is associated with a greater degree of equality between the genders. This will provoke a deeper understanding of the role that language plays in the development of individual attitudes.

First, this paper will provide some theoretical background information with regard to gender-inclusive language, on the basis of which two concrete hypotheses will be derived. Section three outlines the methodology used for the study. Including multivariate analyses, section four contains the primary findings of this study, which will be interpreted and discussed in section five. Lastly, the conclusion summarises the main findings and relates them to the hypotheses as well as the research question stated above.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

"The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality" (Sapir 1929: 209). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also referred to as the hypothesis of linguistic relativity, is based on the works of Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1940) (cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 465; Hussein 2012: 642). The hypothesis states that language has a causal influence on speakers' perception of reality (cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 465; Hussein 2012: 642; Khalfan et al. 2020: 117). Due to the fact that there exists a wide variety of languages across the world, the perception of reality thus depends on the specific languages that are spoken by speakers of a certain speech community (cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 465; Hussein 2012: 642).

### 2.2. The Realisation of Gender in Different Languages

When it comes to grammatical gender languages, masculine word forms can be used to refer to groups of people consisting of men only (cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 465; Misersky et al. 2019: 644). However, they can additionally be used for groups of people consisting of men and women, or groups in which the members' gender is either not of interest or uncertain. These latter usages of the masculine are perceived as its generic use. In contrast to the masculine word forms, the feminine word forms are reserved for groups of women only (cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 465; Misersky et al. 2019: 644). Despite the theoretical inclusion of all genders when using the generic masculine, feminist linguistics assumes that these forms lead to a decrease of the visibility of women in society (cf. Stahlberg/Sczesny 2001: 131). This hypothesis is supported by empirical studies proving that the generic masculine serves a male bias through primarily evoking pictures of males (cf. Payr 2021: 1).

Furthermore, a study by Prewitt-Freilino et al. (cf. 2012: 268) revealed that the equality between the genders is smaller in countries with a grammatical gender language as an official language than in countries with languages other than a grammatical gender language. The Global Gender Gap Index, which considers various areas like education or politics to determine the inequalities between men and women (cf. Crotti et al. 2020: 8-9), served as an operationalisation of the degree of gender equality (cf. Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2012: 272).

## 2.3. The Realisation of Gender-Inclusive Language

In order to achieve gender-fairness in languages, processes like neutralisation or feminisation can be applied (cf. Sczesny et al. 2016: 1, 3). Neutralisation is the creation and use of forms without any marking of gender instead of the masculine word form, like *police officer* instead of *policeman*. Another means of achieving gender fairness in language is feminisation, the mentioning of the feminine word forms in addition to the masculine ones when referring to groups of people (cf. Sczesny et al. 2016: 1, 3). There are several possibilities with regard to the word-formation of feminine role-nouns (cf. Grzega 2017: 31-32). One possibility is the adding of a suffix to the masculine word form, as in G. *Lehrer > Lehrer·in* 'teacher-woman'. Another word formation process takes place through adding suffixes for either the masculine or the feminine word form, as in *maestr·o* and *maestr·a*. Suppletion refers to pairs of words with divergent forms, as in *father/mother* (cf. Grzega 2017: 31-32).

In that context, Grzega (cf. 2017: 32-33) found that the use of suppletions in a language is associated with several aspects of a greater degree of social progress within the respective speech community. Thus, an increased use of suppletions is not only connected to more respect towards women, but also to more tolerance towards immigrants, less homophobia, and other progressive socioeconomic factors (cf. Grzega 2017: 32-33).

## 2.4. Hypotheses

As mentioned before, gender-inclusivity in languages can be achieved in various ways, for example through neutralisation or feminisation (cf. Sczesny et al. 2016: 1, 3). Instead of using the generic masculine that is said to support a male bias (cf. Payr 2021: 1) and decrease the visibility of women in society (cf. Stahlberg/Sczesny 2001: 131), gender-inclusive language many benefits, such as increased tolerance towards women (cf. Tavits/Pérez 2019: 16781). In addition to this, due to the varying realisations of grammatical gender in different languages (cf. Stahlberg et al. 2007: 164-166) there are some languages that are naturally more gender-inclusive and also display more gender equality in society (cf. Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2012: 268, 279). On the other hand, in some gendered languages, such as Russian (cf. Stahlberg et al. 2007: 164), job titles only exist in the generic masculine, even though the jobs are occupied by both men and women. Based on the fact that there is a connection between lexical gender-inequality and social progress, such as respect towards women (cf. Grzega 2017: 32-33), as well as the fact that the generic masculine supports a male bias (cf. Payr 2021: 1), we hypothesize that

H1: based on the analysis of traditionally male job titles, there is a positive association between gender equality and gender-inclusive language.

H2: based on the analysis of traditionally male job titles, there is significantly more gender equality in speech communities using more gender-inclusive language than in speech communities using less gender-inclusive language.

## 3. Methods and Data

To determine each language's gender inclusiveness, ten "job titles" (in the sense of occupations and company positions) with male connotations were investigated in ten distinct languages. On the basis of previous research investigating gender associations in job titles (cf. Gabriel et al. 2008: Appendix B) and the selection of these used by Gygax et al. (2008: 473), the following ten expressions were examined, as they are experienced to be some of the most associated with maleness: spy, golfer, politician, police officer, statistician, boss, computer specialist, surgeon, technician and engineer. For their underlying patriarchal notion, the analysis of traditionally male job titles seemed an appropriate sample when examining gender equality. As in the study conducted by Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2012: 272), the Global Gender Gap Index (Crotti et al. 2020: 9) served as a measure of gender equality.

The job titles were analysed in Swedish, Finnish, Russian, Slovenian, Italian, Spanish, English, French, German and Hungarian. These languages were chosen not only to represent Europe adequately, examining an equal number of languages from northern, eastern, southern, western as well as central Europe, but also to include roughly the same number of gendered (German, Italian, Spanish, French, Slovenian, Russian) and non-gendered languages, in the form of natural languages (English, Swedish) and genderless languages (Hungarian, Finnish), where nouns, such as job titles, do not carry any grammatical gender (cf. Stahlberg et al. 2007: 165-166). The latter classification into gendered and non-gendered languages was carried out on the basis of the criteria given by Stahlberg et al. (2007: 164-166) and the overview provided by Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2012: 274-276).

To analyse the languages' gender-inclusiveness, every language was examined as to whether the ten job titles normally occur just as a masculine form, as a feminine and masculine form or as an inclusive form addressing all genders (see table 1). The analysis was based on the online dictionaries provided by dict.cc (Hemetsberger 2002–), Langenscheidt (Langenscheidt 1856–), Linguee (Frahling/Fink 2009–), PONS (PONS GmbH 2001–) and Wiktionary (Wikimedia Foundation 2002–).

Drawing on methodology from previous research on kinship terms and societal parameters (cf. Grzega 2017: 32), a linguistic index system was developed here, namely a Lexical Equality Index. Using an adapted procedure, scores were calculated as follows: 0 points for different forms for men and women, 1 point for one (inclusive) term only, and 0.5 points for cases where either the article expresses a gender difference or where the standard variety shows both gender-expressing and gender-inclusive forms in a neutral way. (Stylistically and connotationally marked lexemes were not included). The scoring system was created based on the provided definition claiming a language to be gender-inclusive, if it "does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity" (United Nations 2020). In all languages, it is, of course, possible to create gender-specific expressions through derivations, compounds or additional adjectives.

| Swedish (Sweden) | | Finnish (Finland) | | Russian (Russia) | | Slovenian (Slovenia) | | Italian (Italy) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GGG Index: 0.820 | | GGG Index: 0.832 | | GGG Index: 0.706 | | GGG Index: 0.743 | | GGG Index: 0.707 | |
| spion | 1 | vakooja | 1 | шпион / шпионка | 0 | špijon / špijonka | 0 | lo spione / la spiona | 0 |
| golfspelare | 1 | golfari | 1 | игрок в гольф | 1 | igralec / igralka golfa | 0 | il giocatore / la giocatrice di golf | 0 |
| politiker | 1 | poliitikko | 1 | политик | 1 | politik / političarka | 0 | il politico / la politica | 0 |
| polis | 1 | poliisi | 1 | полицейский | 1 | policist / policistka | 0 | il poliziotto / la poliziotta | 0 |
| statistiker | 1 | tilastotieteilijä | 1 | статистик | 1 | statistik / statističarka | 0 | lo statistico / la statistica | 0 |
| chef | 1 | johtaja | 1 | босс ~ шеф | 1 | vodja~šef / vodja~šefinja | 0.5 | boss ~ capo | 1 |
| informatiker | 1 | informaatikko | 1 | программист | 1 | informatičar / informatičarka | 0 | l'informatico/ l'informatica | 0 |
| kirurg | 1 | kirurgi | 1 | хирург | 1 | kirurg / kirurginja | 0 | il chirurgo / la chirurga | 0 |
| tekniker | 1 | teknikko | 1 | техник | 1 | tehnik / tehničarka | 0 | il tecnico / la tecnica | 0 |
| ingenjör | 1 | insinööri | 1 | инженер | 1 | inženir / inženirka | 0 | l'ingegnere / l'ingegnera | 0 |
| LE Index: | 10 | LE Index: | 10 | LE Index: | 9 | LE Index: | 0.5 | LE Index: | 1 |
| **English (UK)** | | **Spanish (Spain)** | | **French (France)** | | **German (Germany)** | | **Hungarian (Hungary)** | |
| GGG Index: 0.767 | | GGG Index: 0.795 | | GGG Index: 0.781 | | GGG Index: 0.787 | | GGG Index: 0.677 | |
| spy | 1 | el espía / la espía | 0.5 | l'espion / l'espionne | 0 | der Spion / die Spionin | 0 | kém | 1 |
| golfer | 1 | el golfista / la golfista | 0.5 | le golfeur / la golfeuse | 0 | der Golfspieler / die Golfspielerin | 0 | golfjátékos | 1 |
| politician | 1 | el politico / la politica | 0 | le politician / la politicienne | 0 | der Politiker / die Politikerin | 0 | politikus | 1 |
| police officer; policeman / policewoman | 0.5 | el policia / la policia | 0.5 | le policier / la policière | 0 | der Polizist / die Polizistin | 0 | rendőr | 1 |
| statistician | 1 | el estadístico / la estadística | 0 | le statistician / la statisticienne | 0 | der Statistiker / die Statistikerin | 0 | statisztikus | 1 |
| boss | 1 | el patron / la patróna | 0 | le patron / la patronne | 0 | der Chef / die Chefin | 0 | főnök | 1 |
| computer specialist | 1 | el informático / la informática | 0 | le informatician / l'informaticienne | 0 | der Informatiker / die Informatikerin | 0 | informatikus | 1 |
| surgeon | 1 | el cirujano / la cirujana | 0 | le chirurgien / la chirurgienne | 0 | der Chirurg / die Chirurgin | 0 | sebész | 1 |
| technician | 1 | el técnico / la técnica | 0 | le technician / la technicienne | 0 | der Techniker / die Technikerin | 0 | technikus | 1 |
| engineer | 1 | el ingeniero / la ingeniera | 0 | l'ingénieur | 1 | der Ingenieur / die Ingenieurin | 0 | mérnök | 1 |
| LE Index: | 9.5 | LE Index: | 1.5 | LE Index: | 1 | LE Index: | 0 | LE Index: | 10 |

*Table 1: Lexical Equality Index (LE) and Global Gender Gap Index (GGG Index) for 10 job titles in 10 languages*

## 4. Results

Table 2 represents both the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 (cf. Crotti et al. 2020: 9) as well as the Lexical Equality Index for each language examined, starting with the speech community with the highest Global Gender Gap Index and finishing off with the lowest. As can be seen in Table 2, Finland has the highest and Hungary the lowest Global Gender Gap Index. However, they both achieve the same value on the Lexical Equality Index. The table also summarises the descriptive data for the Global Gender Gap Index and the Lexical Equality Index. The Lexical Equality Index among the ten countries examined ranges from 1.0 to 10.0. The average Global Gender Gap Index is 0.766, while the mean Lexical Equality Index lies at 6.45.

| COUNTRY | INDEXES | |
|---|---|---|
| | GGG | LE |
| Sweden | 0.820 | 10 |
| Finland | 0.832 | 10 |
| Russia | 0.706 | 9 |
| Slovenia | 0.743 | 0.5 |
| Italy | 0.707 | 1 |
| UK | 0.767 | 9.5 |
| Spain | 0.795 | 1.5 |
| France | 0.781 | 1 |
| Germany | 0.787 | 0 |
| Hungary | 0.677 | 10 |
| | | |
| DESCRIPTIVES | | |
| N | 10 | 10 |
| mean | 0.762 | 5.25 |
| median | 0.774 | 5.25 |
| minimum | 0.677 | 0 |

*Table 2: GGG, LE and descriptive data*

To examine H1, postulating a positive association between gender equality and gender-inclusive language, a Kendall tau correlation test was carried out. Figure 1 reflects the link between gender equality, as measured by the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, and gender-inclusive language, as measured by the Lexical Equality Index. The data suggests an extremely small positive correlation ($tau = .070$, $p =.8553$) between the two factors, and this correlation is not significant.
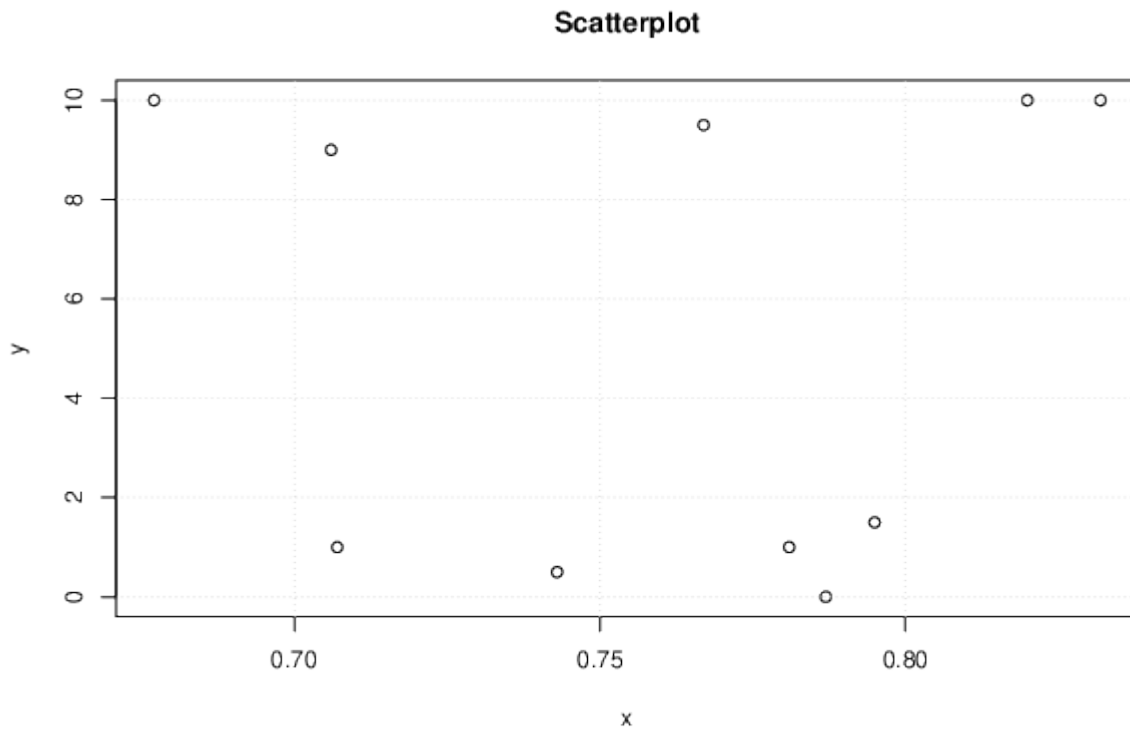
*Fig. 1: Scatterplot for the correlation between the Global Gender Gap Index (=x) and the Lexical Equality Index (= y)*

To test H2, a Welch's *t*-test for independent samples was conducted. For this purpose, the ten countries were divided into two groups on the basis of their Lexical Equality Index by performing a median split. Therefore, countries with a high and a low Lexical Equality Index were compared regarding their Global Gender Gap Index. This is shown in Table 3.

|  |  | N | Mean | Standard Deviation | Standard Error of the Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | **Global Gender Gap Index** |  |  |
| Group 1 | High Lexical Equality Index | 5 | 0.760 | 0.0683 | 0.031 |
| Group 2 | Low Lexical Equality Index | 5 | 0.763 | 0.0369 | 0.017 |

*Table 3: Group statistics regarding the GGG value for countries with a high and a low LE value*

The Welch-*t*-test (with $t = -.0865$) revealed a non-significant difference between the two groups, with $p = .9338$. Therefore, H2, which predicted a significantly higher Global Gender Gap Index in countries with a higher Lexical Equality Index, cannot be confirmed.

## 5. Discussion

The present study examined whether there is a positive association between gender equality and gender-inclusive language based on the analysis of traditionally male job titles, and if so whether there is a significantly higher degree of gender equality in speech communities that use more gender-inclusive language.

The data suggests a small positive correlation between the two factors, meaning that in the investigated sample, the more gender-inclusive a language is, the more equality can be observed in

the respective speech communities. However, due to an insignificant correlation, these findings cannot be generalised for the overall population. The findings for this sample still correspond with previous research showing that languages without a grammatical gender in nouns display a higher degree of gender equality in comparison to gendered languages (cf. Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2011: 268). Furthermore, there are no statistically significant differences in the Global Gender Gap Index (cf. Crotti et al. 2020: 9) of countries with a high and low Lexical Equality Index. Several explanations could provide for these findings. One idea is that gender-inclusive language has less impact on the social relations of men and women than expected. In that case, everyday language would not be as powerful in shaping social stereotypes about gender as suggested by feminist language critics (cf. Stahlberg et al. 2007: 170). What defendants of the generic masculine claim is that the grammatical gender does not equal sex (cf. Burkhardt 1985: 309). This is justified with the fact that there is an arbitrary distribution of feminine, masculine and neuter articles in grammatical gender languages, such as German and French. While the German designation of the moon, for instance, is masculine (*der Mond*), it is female in French (*la lune*). Also, there are examples where not just inanimate but also personal nouns carry neuter articles, such as in German *das Mädchen*. Thus, counterarguments to feminist linguistics state that grammatically masculine forms neither exclude women, nor does the alternation of linguistic customs constitute an adequate means in tackling gender inequalities (cf. Stahlberg et al. 2007: 171).

Other explanations for the lack of significant differences in the Global Gender Gap Index of countries with a high and low Lexical Equality Index can be found on the methodological level. Thus, it is possible that the sample size was not big enough to attest meaningful discrepancies. Future research should not only analyse more languages but also focus on more expressions. When it comes to the words analysed, it must also be considered that the dictionaries came up with divergent results in some cases. We respected the information that was in the majority; but the differences could express an on-going change.

Furthermore, the scoring system can be criticised. Highest scores were awarded for the existence of an inclusive expression, which was mostly the case in natural and genderless languages. However, as research shows, even seemingly gender-neutral terms can carry an implicit male bias (cf. Braun 2000: 194). This is the case, for example, when additional gender-specific morphemes are more commonly added to convey the female gender (cf. Braun 2001: 287-295), suggesting that allegedly gender-neutral expressions are not free of a covert male bias. Furthermore, even though nouns in natural and genderless languages address all genders, research has found that the presence of women in society is most emphasised when applying the feminisation technique to make language gender-inclusive, such as in grammatical gender languages (cf. Gabriel et al. 2018: 844). Thus, the scoring system might have impact on the results.

All in all, the present data suggest only a very small association between gender equality and gender-inclusive language. Still, even though language may have an impact on the societal status of women, it is vital not to neglect that language itself cannot alternate gender imbalances, but must come along with other factors, such as political and social arrangements.

## 6. Conclusion

The study aimed at investigating the association between gender equality and gender-inclusive language and the degree to which gender equality is given in speech communities using more gender-inclusive language in comparison to the ones using less gender-inclusive language. Therefore, ten stereotypically male job titles (cf. Gabriel et al. 2008: Appendix B; cf. Gygax et al. 2008: 473) across ten European languages were analysed regarding their gender-inclusivity in order

to determine a Lexical Equality Index. The Global Gender Gap Index (cf. Crotti et al. 2020: 9) was used as an operationalisation for gender equality (cf. Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2012: 272).

In summary, the quantitative analyses based on the Lexical Equality and the Global Gender Gap Index values revealed a small positive, but no statistically significant correlation between gender equality and gender-inclusive language. Furthermore, even though gender equality was higher in speech communities using more gender-inclusive language, the difference was not statistically significant either. Future studies with a larger sample regarding the languages and words included would be necessary to receive more representative results.

*Hanna Sofie Heizmann*
*DE-85072 Eichstätt*
*hanna.heizmann@stud.ku.de*

*Lisa Marie Frauenknecht*
*DE-85072 Eichstätt*
*lisa.frauenknecht@stud.ku.de*

*Joachim Grzega*
*University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt*
*DE-85072 Eichstätt*
*joachim.grzega@ku.de*

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