

## From Sexism in French grammar to the invention of an impertinent feminist grammar

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### FROM A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GENDER-BASED LINGUISTIC REFORM ACROSS FOUR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES BY ELENA TESO WORK

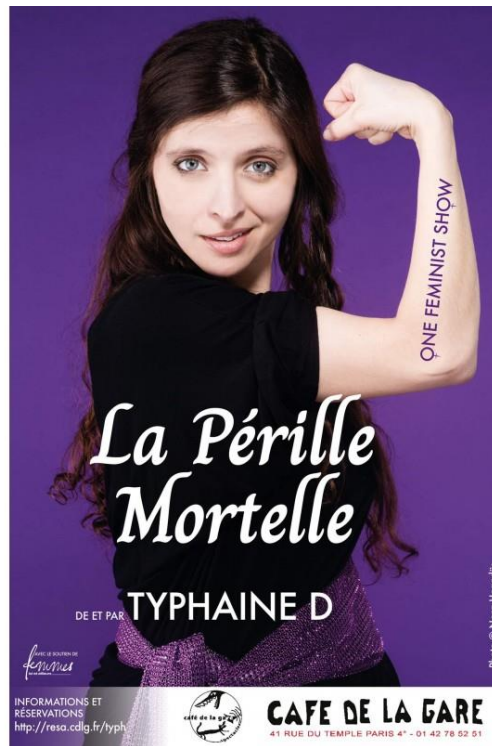
Unlike other Francophone countries, the feminisation of language has encountered a great deal of resistance in France. The move to feminise nouns referring to professions and occupations has proceeded at a "snail's pace" (Fleischman, 1997). In fact, France seems to be quite slow to reflect social changes in language compared to other French-speaking countries. According to Gervais-Le Garff (2002:2) there are three main factors for this: 1) the unwillingness of change which is presented as a morphological obstacle in itself; 2) the social resistance to linguistic change on the part of the language community, and 3) the deliberate obstruction on the part of regulatory bodies like the Académie Française. Two opposing views have emerged regarding the feminisation of job titles in France: one is that changing the language alone cannot lead to equality between men and women; the other is that the feminisation of the language is a necessary means to achieve equality between the sexes.

Two approaches to feminisation have been observed in France: what it is called 'minimal feminisation' which entails the use of the feminine article with a generic masculine form (e.g. une député) and the other is called 'maximal feminisation' which involves the use of feminine suffixes: e.g. une députée. The guidelines or recommendations to avoid linguistic discrimination in France have been the result of specific legislation to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sex in the labour market. The French guidelines have been published mainly by official institutions and are the result of work by institutionalised terminology committees. Another point to take into account is that there has not been any consultation of the public either by the Roudy Commission in the 1980s, the Commission Générale in the 1990s or the Académie Française. Therefore the feminisation of language in France could be seen as a top-down model of linguistic legislation and the question is whether this model of interventionism in linguistic matters can lead to any real change. Gervais-Le Garff (2007) argues that usage ends up prevailing over the norm and that the prescriptivism of organisations such as the Académie Française will fail given the uses attested in the press and in dictionaries.

Unlike France, in the French community of Belgium, the introduction of measures for the feminisation of names of occupation was carried out by means of a decree (1993)<sup>34</sup>. Following from this decree, the Belgian Conseil supérieur de la Langue Française published a set of guidelines to avoid sexist usages in 1994 (*Mettre au féminin: guide de remaniement des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre* [Express in the feminine: guidelines to the feminisation of job titles]) and reedited it in 2005. These guidelines to avoid sexist linguistic usages must be applied in all administrative texts as well as in all publications by official institutions, including job advertisements. The aim of the decree was to ensure the visibility of women in language. Conrick (2002:210) suggests that although in these regions the adoption of the guidelines for non-sexist language may have received criticisms as in France, the general success of feminisation there contrasts sharply with the relative lack of success in France. A possible explanation is that the other French-speaking countries do not think that the Académie Française has the right to tell them the way to achieve linguistic feminisation.

### A CREATIVE ATTEMPT TO MOVE FORWARD

In France, some creative attempt to help changes must however be underlined. Hence *La Féminine Universelle* from Typhaine D consists in the invention of an impertinent feminist grammar, invented words like "Femmage" (which must have existed in the past), or "Noues" "Voues" "Toie" "Moie" to bring together the people of women, "Sœurnières" and "Anniversœurs" to celebrate our sisterhood; the feminization of grammar according to the rule "La Féminine l'emporte sur la masculine"; the addition of E to present participles, adverbs and wherever this harmonious agreement delights us.



In french « la mise à la féminine et la maniement triomphante de la majuscule des mots qui nous appartiennent, nous plaisent ou nous grandissent, tels que LA Clitorisse, LA Vagine, LA Féminisme, LA Matrimoine ; la mise à la masculine et le refus de la majuscule aux noms qui nous détruisent ou nous dégoutent, tels que LE couille, LE covid, LE peste, LE syphilis, darmanin, etc ; la détournement d'expression anciennement misogynes, spécistes, misopédiques, racistes, classistes, validiste ou oppressive de quelque autre manière, telles que « elle n'y a pas morte de femme », « se sentir comme une poissonne dans l'eau sans bicyclette », « J'ai d'autres chattes à caresser », « faut pas jeter l'eau du bain avec pépé » ; et toute autre liberté féministante qui semblera signifiante ou émancipatrice à l'autrice, ou simplement qui lui plaira. En effête, les instigateurs de la masculinisation du langage sous richelieu ne s'étant pas encombrés de logique ou d'objectivité dans leur sinistre tâche, nulle n'y est à son tour tenue dans la riposte.”

Moreover, *La Féminine Universelle*, unbridled, insurgent, insubordinate, is in constant evolution, and is not restricted by strict rules, other than that of always being a bearer of meaning moving towards the interests of Women, therefore in uncompromising radical feminist struggle against any form of violence or masculinist and misogynist scam.

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