Gender and e-recruitment: a comparative analysis between job advertisements published for the German and the Italian labour markets

CHIARA NARDONE

University of Bologna

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PhD student in Interpreting and Translation
University of Bologna
chiara.nardone2@unibo.it

━━━━━ ABSTRACT ━━━━━

The e-recruitment phenomenon has changed the way companies address job seekers around the world, but, whereas numerous academic studies have focused on e-recruitment and its social, cultural and psychological effects, little is known about its linguistic features and about the related gender issues.

The main purpose of this contribution is to investigate generic masculine forms and gender-fair alternatives used in job advertisements published by German and Italian companies on their websites for the German and Italian labour markets.

The initial hypothesis is that gender-fair language is used more often in German than in Italian both by Italian and German companies. In order to test this hypothesis, a sample of job advertisements has been collected from the career section of the websites of some German and Italian companies and two corpora have been built, one in German and one in Italian.

The results of the analysis indicate that the initial hypothesis is only partially confirmed. Gender-fair strategies do appear more often in German job advertisements, especially concerning the use of the pronoun *Sie,* but, at the same time, due to both linguistic and cultural reasons, generic masculine forms remain the most common alternative both in German and in Italian.

Keywords: e-recruitment, gender and language, corpus linguistics, job advertisements.

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1. Introduction

The e-recruitment phenomenon has changed the way companies address job seekers around the world, but, whereas numerous academic studies (Marschall 2002; Young et al. 2006) have focused on e-recruitment and its social, cultural and psychological effects, little is known about its linguistic features and about the gender issues it calls upon. The subject of gender and language has been deeply investigated in the Anglophone countries, in Germany this issue has gained considerable interest in institutional and academic contexts since the 1980s and, as a matter of fact, the use of gender-fair strategies has gradually increased and the diffusion of generic masculine forms has seen a decrease in the last 30 years. In Italy, the debate around gender and language has received scarce attention both in academic research and by institutions, and, consequently, generic masculine forms are still extremely common and widely accepted.

Even though several psycholinguistic studies (i.e. Gygax et al. 2008; Gabriel et al. 2008) have shown that using masculine generic forms for referring to role names conceals an overall male bias in the readers' and listeners' understanding, very few studies have analysed the way men and women are addressed in job advertisements and which kind of consequences these forms of addressing could have on labour markets.

The main purpose of this contribution is to investigate generic masculine forms and gender-fair alternatives used in job advertisements published by German and Italian companies on their websites for the labour markets of the two countries.

The initial hypothesis is that gender-fair language is used more often in German than in Italian by both Italian and German companies.

In the next sections of this paper, I will firstly introduce the main features of e-recruitment, secondly I will point out how the debate around

gender and language arose and spread in Italy and in Germany, then I will summarize the gender-biased phenomena in Italian and German and the gender-fair strategies that have been proposed by guidelines published in the two countries. Additionally, I will illustrate the findings of psycholinguistic studies that demonstrated that the perception of generic masculine forms may lead to linguistic invisibility of women. I will then describe the methodology, based on Corpus Linguistics, which has been employed in order to test the initial hypothesis.

After that, I will report in detail the results obtained by the analysis on the German and Italian job advertisements and eventually I will draw some conclusions that focus on the cultural and linguistic elements that influence the way German and Italian companies address job applicants in the two countries.

2. E-Recruitment

E-recruitment has substantially changed the way companies address job candidates around the world. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that «e-recruiting reduces cost for recruitment, increases the number of suitable applicants, enables time savings for both organizations and applicants and improves the corporate image» (Lang et al. 2011).

Scholars from different fields of study and professional stakeholders have given different definitions of e-recruitment; in this article the following definition has been chosen: e-recruitment refers to the «practices and activities carried out by the organization with the primary purpose of identifying and attracting potential employees» (Wolfswinkel 2009). In the last years, interest towards e-recruitment has flourished in various disciplines, e.g. Psychology, Marketing, Human Resources Management and has taken different directions. For instance, in Marschall (2002) the ideological discourses of employment-related Web pages have been explored and in Young (2006) the meaning of work, as constructed and represented by companies, has been investigated through the analysis of recruitment websites. Furthermore, a considerable amount of studies on e-recruitment have focused on two aspects of this process, that is, how the navigational usability affects applicants' organizational attraction and how commercial and corporate recruiting websites can be evaluated through different methods (Wolfswinkel 2009). The categorization of the e-recruitment sources has also been studied in detail. In the academia and among professional stakeholders, the most accepted categorization is the

one that recognizes, on the one hand, corporate career websites and, on the other hand, recruiting service providers and job boards[1].

On the grounds of this brief review that summarizes some trends of e-recruitment research, it can be assumed that neither the linguistic aspects nor the gender perspective of e-recruitment have been deeply investigated. It is particularly worth mentioning that the intersection of these two dimensions (language and gender) in job advertisements has been the focus of a very limited number of publications, i.e Askehave (2014).

In this contribution, I will investigate e-recruitment from a perspective that intertwines language and gender, thus analysing the language of German and Italian job advertisements with a particular focus on generic masculine and gender-fair forms used for role names.

In the next sections I will briefly introduce how the debate gender and language originated and developed in Italy and in Germany and I will illustrate the gender-fair alternatives that have been proposed for Italian and German.

3. Gender and Language

3.1 Gender and Language in Italy

Academia and institutions began to show interest towards gender and language in the 1970s. The attention to the issue arose firstly in the U.S., where, in 1973, Lakoff published the seminal work *Language and woman's place* that shed light to «marginality and powerlessness of women [that] is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak and the ways in which women are spoken of» (Lakoff 1973). In the wake of the debate that originated in the U.S., interest on this issue spread across several European countries, especially Germany and France, among others. In Italy, Alma Sabatini was the first one who wrote about sexism in language. In 1987 she published *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*, which contained the first recommendations aimed at avoiding male bias in Italian and at fostering women's linguistic visibility. However, even if the above-mentioned publication was officially supported by the Italian government, her voice remained unheard during the following years. The recommendations she presented were neither applied in the official documents, nor this publication encouraged a vivid debate about sexism in the language, as happened in Germany, for example.

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(1) In recent years the professional networking service LinkedIn has also been a subject of academic interest. It is worth mentioning that Giuliana Garzone presented the contribution "LinkedIn, corporate image construction and employer branding" at the DICOEN VIII conference.

In the 1990s very little was done by institutions[2] to reduce the male bias of Italian language. Even in the academia very few scholars dedicated their research to this issue, one of the few academic initiatives that it is worth mentioning was the conference *Donna & Linguaggio* organized by Gianna Marcato in 1995, where different scholars focused their contributions on gender and language. In recent years, new voices both inside and outside the academia have shed new light to the gender and language debate from multidisciplinary perspectives. In 2012, the *Accademia della Crusca*, the most important institution concerned with the Italian language, alongside the Municipality of Florence (*Comune di Firenze*), published new gender-fair guidelines[3] for the language used by institutions in official documents. These guidelines have been written by the prominent linguist Cecilia Robustelli, who has been one of the leading figures in several projects[4] whose aim is to spread the awareness towards the importance of gender-fair language among institutions and citizens.

Furthermore, Cavagnoli (2013), Formato (2014) and Merkel (2013) are some of the scholars who are dedicating their research to sexism in language, thus contributing to expand the interest towards gender and language in Italy.

Outside academia, it is worth mentioning that Laura Boldrini, the President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy, officially asked deputies to use female nouns when referring to female members of Parliament[5]. Furthermore, the REI (*Rete per l'eccellenza dell'italiano istituzionale*), a network created by the Italian translators of the European Commission, focused its 10th meeting in 2010 on the use of male and female forms for nouns of role and professions.

This renewed interest during the last few years among academia and institutions towards sexism in Italian language could be interpreted as a sign that citizens, especially in some professional areas, are becoming more aware of the importance of using gender-fair language in order to overcome women's discrimination in language which is also strongly associated with

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(2) The only official document that followed Sabatini's guidelines was *Codice di stile delle comunicazioni scritte ad uso delle amministrazioni pubbliche* edited by Sabino Cassese and published by Dipartimento per la Funzione Pubblica della Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri in 1993.

(3) The strategies proposed in these guidelines will be further illustrated in the section: *Generic masculine forms and gender-fair strategies in Italian and in German.*

(4) The most relevant project was *Genere e linguaggio* organized by the Municipality of Florence in collaboration with the Accademia della Crusca. For further information see the following URL: http://www.provincia.fi.it/pari-opportunita/puntiamo-sul-pari/genere-e-linguaggio/.

(5) *La lettera di Laura Boldrini sulla parità di genere linguistica*, in *Il Post* del 5 marzo 2015. http://www.ilpost.it/2015/03/05/boldrini-parita-genere-italiano/.

social discrimination within the labour market, as we shall see in more detail in the following sections.

3.2. Gender and Language in Germany

In the previous section, my focus has been on the debate around gender and language in Italy, from the 1980s to the most recent initiatives, the present section will thus consider how this debate originated and developed in Germany.

In 1978 the German linguist Santa Trömel Plötz published the article *Linguistik und Frauensprache*, she was the first one who introduced the issue of women's discrimination in German language. She pointed out that the invisibility of women in language was strongly associated with the subordinated role they had in the society: in order to achieve social equality, linguistic discriminatory forms should be overcome. Santa Trömel Plötz and Luise F. Pusch, who also played an important role in supporting feminist linguistics in Germany, focused their attention on how the so-called generic masculine did not allow women to be clearly visible in the language. They strongly criticized the use of generic masculine and therefore fostered the introduction of new forms, i.e. feminine pronouns when referring to women only, in order to avoid forms like «Jemand spricht über seine Entbindung» (in English «Someone talks about his delivery») (Trömel-Plötz 1978). Trömel Plötz, Pusch und Grabrucker understood that the need of adopting gender-fair forms was particularly strong in the official language used by institutions. In fact, they were convinced that the language of institutions could turn to be a remarkably powerful tool, even more effective than the every-day language, which could contribute to transform society in a more equal place for both women and men.

The introduction of the gender and language issue in the late 1970s and in the 1980s prompted a vivid debate among scholars and a widespread response by institutions. In fact, since the 1990s federal and local institutions have published guidelines and regulations in order to introduce and to apply gender-fair forms in the institutional language.

Moreover, during the same years several German universities published guidelines for the use of gender-fair language and even in *DUDEN*'s 2001 edition, one of the most relevant dictionaries for German, generic masculine

forms were not considered acceptable anymore, whereas in the 1984 edition[6] the use of generic masculine was recommended, especially for role names.

One last remark about the debate around gender and language in Germany focuses on the fact that recently scholars have committed not only to ensuring women's visibility through the introduction and spread of gender-fair forms, but also to overcoming the binary system constituted by women and men and introducing thus new linguistic strategies that allow people who do not consider themselves either men or women to be represented in language. The most discussed of these strategies are the * and the _ (i.e. *Student*innen*, *Mitarbeiter_innen*). It is worth mentioning that these non-binary strategies have been introduced, among others, in the guidelines published by the University of Cologne[7] and the * has been employed by the German Green Party in all the official documents[8] since November 2015.

From this description about how the debate around gender and language originated and developed in Germany and in Italy, it can be argued that German institutions and academia have shown a stronger interest towards the issue of gender and language than their Italian counterparts have.

The mismatch in the attention and awareness towards this theme between the Italian and German contexts may well mirror the way they use (or don't use) gender-fair language in texts and documents produced and published in these two countries.

3.3 Generic masculine forms and gender-fair strategies in Italian and in German

For the sake of completeness and clarity, this section will consider generic masculine forms in German and Italian and gender-fair strategies that have been proposed for Italian and German.

Italian and German are gender marked languages whereby «the gender of a character in a text is - in general - explicitly given by the form of the determiner and by the morphological form of the noun» (Gygax et al. 2008).

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(6) S. Metz-Göckel, & M. Kamphans, *Zum geschlechterbewussten Sprachgebrauch*, Info-Papier, 2002, 3.

(7) Die Gleichstellungsbeauftragte der Universität zu Köln. *ÜberzeuGENDERe Sprache Leitfaden für eine geschlechtersensible und inklusive Sprache*. Köln: Die Gleichstellungsbeauftragte der Universität zu Köln, 2014. http://www.gb.uni-koeln.de/e2106/e2113/e5726/2014_Leitfaden_UeberzeuGENDEReSprache_11032014.pdf.

(8) M. Kohlmaier, *Gendern in der Sprache. Ein Sternchen für alle*, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* del 22 novembre 201, http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/gendern-in-der-sprache-ein-sternchen-fuer-alle-1.2748572.

Although they are both gender marked languages, the linguistic phenomena that reveal a male bias in the two languages overlap only partially. The so-called generic masculine that refers to both women and men exists both in German and in Italian, but the use of masculine forms to address women, especially in case of prestigious role names (i.e. *ministro Valeria Fedeli* in English *male minister Valeria Fedeli*) appears only in Italian. Both phenomena may turn the understanding of a message more difficult for readers and hearers and, in some cases, they may compromise the correctness of the language (i.e. *il sindaco è incinta*, in English *the male mayor is pregnant*). Furthermore, the generic masculine, which the following analysis will focus on, may lead to an ambiguous interpretation, because masculine forms can be used both specifically, referring only to men and generically, by addressing women and men, the only way readers and hearers can understand the referent of these forms is by processing contextual information.

As already pointed out before, in Germany several guidelines on gender-fair language have been published since the late 1990s, whereas the only Italian publications of this sort are those written by Sabatini in 1987 and by Robustelli in 2012.

In this contribution, Braun's (2000) and Metz-Göckel & Kamphans' (2002) guidelines have been followed as far as the German side is concerned, and those by Robustelli (2012) for the Italian side.

Braun in *Leitfaden zur geschlechtergerechten Formulierung. Mehr Frauen in die Sprache* summarizes that there are two main strategies in order to avoid generic masculine forms: feminization and neutralization. Table 1 shows the gender-fair strategies[9] recommended by Braun and Metz-Göckel & Kamphans.

TABLE 1

Gender-fair strategy	Gender-fair example	English translation
Double formulations	Schülerinnen und Schüler	Female and male students
Slash	Assistent/in	male assistant

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(9) Braun and Metz-Göckel & Kamphans also suggest the use of further strategies. Some of these strategies are not listed in the table for different reasons: in some cases (i.e. Binnen-I), their application goes beyond the scope of this research, in other cases they have been excluded because their analysis (i.e. the changing of the structure of a sentence) with Corpus Linguistics tools is extremely time-consuming.

formulations		+ female suffix
Plural	Stellvertretende	deputies
Neutral suffixes and words	Lehrkraft; Lehrperson	teaching staff; teacher
Collective and institutional names	Präsidium	presidency, committee
Direct form of address	Liebe Benutzerinnen und Benutzer	Dear male and female users

Robustelli in *Linee guida per l'uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo* suggests the use of the strategies listed in table 2.

TABLE 2

Gender-fair strategy	Gender-fair example	English translation
Double formulations, also in the abbreviated forms.	i consiglieri e le consigliere; i/le consiglieri/e	male and female council members
Neutral words and periphrases	persona; essere umano	person; human being
Collective and institutional names	corpo docente; presidenza	teaching staff; presidency, committee
Relative and indefinite pronouns	chi arriva in ritardo	who arrives late

As already mentioned, the analysis of role names will be based on the generic masculine forms and the gender-fair strategies described in this section.

3.3 Generic masculine forms and role names

Generic masculine forms may encourage women's invisibility and subordination in language.

Since language influences our thought and our individual perception of reality (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), women's invisibility and subordination in the language have also consequences in different areas of «the real world», i.e. in the labour market and in the recruitment process. The correlation between generic masculine forms and women's discrimination in the labour market has been investigated for the first time by Bem & Bem in 1973. Their findings demonstrated that «sex bias in the content of a job advertisement does serve to aid and abet discrimination by discouraging both men and women from applying for "opposite-sex" jobs» (Bem & Bem 1973).

Recently several psycholinguistic studies have indeed demonstrated that the use of generic masculine for role names does not lead to a «gender-open» representation (Gabriel et al. 2008), meaning that the use of the masculine plural is more strongly associated with men compared to gender neutral and gender balanced forms (Gygax et al. 2008).

Particularly pertinent for the sake of this paper is the study about the effects of gender-biased language on role names that has been carried out by Gygax et al. in 2008.

They demonstrated that «masculine forms intended as generic are typically not interpreted as such.[...] The use of masculine plural does not lead to a gender-open or gender-spread representation, but to a specifically male representation». As Gygax et al. point out, these «results show that the so-called generic use of the masculine biases gender representations in a way that is discriminatory to women». This kind of linguistic discrimination may have social implications. In the recruitment process, for instance, from an initial observation, the use of generic masculine forms seems indeed to be frequently employed by companies to address job applicants. Bearing these elements in mind, it is important not to underestimate the extent to which generic masculine forms may influence readers' perception towards a male-oriented representation of job applicants.

In these sections an overview on how the debate around gender and language originated and developed in Italy and Germany has been depicted, the most relevant generic masculine forms and gender-fair strategies for

German and Italian have been listed and psycholinguistic studies' results shedding light on the discriminatory effects that generic masculine forms may have on women, have been provided. The following section will present the purpose and the initial hypothesis of this study.

4. Hypothesis

Considering that psycholinguistic studies have provided evidence that generic masculine forms may foster the discrimination of women in language, and consequently in society, the main purpose of this contribution is to investigate generic masculine forms and gender-fair alternatives used in job advertisements published by German and Italian companies on their websites for the German and Italian labour markets.

The initial hypothesis is that gender-fair language is used more often in German job advertisements than in Italian ones, the advertisements being published by both Italian and German companies. This hypothesis is justified on the one hand by the greater attention that academia in Germany has given to the theme gender and language in comparison to the interest shown in Italy since the 1980s; on the other hand, by the fact that Italian and German institutions have answered very differently to the requests of renovating their languages in order to overcome male bias they entailed.

As emphasized before, since the 1980s federal and local institutions in Germany have published gender-fair language recommendations and guidelines and the use of generic masculine has strongly diminished, especially in official documents. In Italy, the requests to reduce and/or eliminate the use of generic masculine forms have been scarce and isolated and the institutions have given an unsatisfactory response. Therefore, although the first recommendations regarding gender-fair language were published almost 30 years ago, the use of masculine forms to refer to both women and men remains in Italy often unquestioned.

5. Method

In order to carry out the analysis and confirm or reject the initial hypothesis, a sample of job advertisements has been collected from the career sections in the websites of 65 German and Italian companies. The companies included in the analysis are either members of the German Italian Chamber of Commerce or they have been included by the Italian Trade Agency in the list of Italian companies with branches in Germany.

Two comparable corpora have been thus built, one in Italian and one in German. Both corpora are composed by 260 job advertisements published by 65 companies. Despite the same amount of job advertisements, the German and the Italian corpora have a different number of types[10] and tokens[11], therefore, in order to compare the results, the frequency of occurrences has been normalized to a common base of 100.000 words. Table 3 summarizes the most relevant quantitative information of the two corpora.

TABLE 3

	Italian Corpus	**German Corpus**
Number of job advertisements	260	260
Number of companies	65	65
Number of tokens	53,866	74,326
Number of types	5,724	10,223

After collecting the job advertisements, masculine generic forms and gender-fair forms in German and in Italian have been analysed with the corpus analysis toolkit *Antconc* and, as already mentioned before, their frequency has been normalized to a base of 100,000 words in order to compare the results in an accurate and rigorous way. As previously suggested, the most relevant linguistic phenomena in terms of gender-fair language have been selected according to the guidelines on gender-fair language written by Robustelli (Italian) and by Braun and Metz-Göckel & Kamphans (German).

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(10) Type: a single particular wordform. Any difference of form (e.g. spelling) makes a word a different type. All tokens comprising the same characters are considered to be examples of the same type. (CASS, Corpus: some key terms, 2013).

(11) Token: any single, particular instance of an individual word in a text or corpus.(CASS, Corpus: some key terms, 2013).
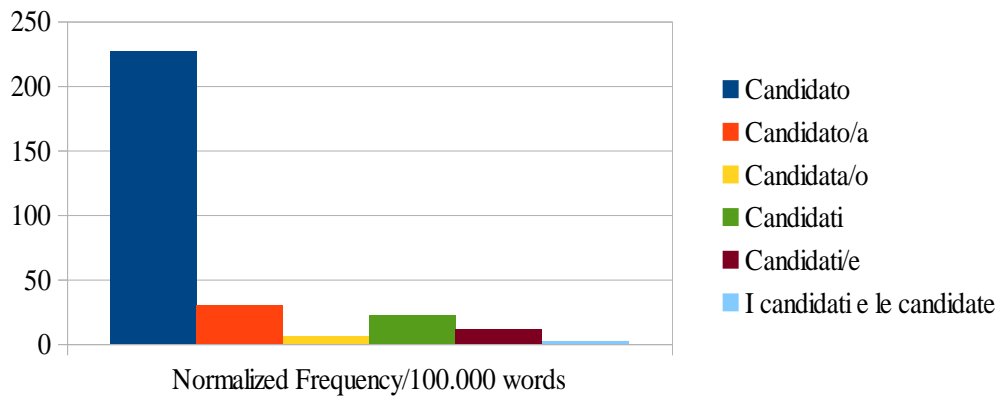
6. Results

In this section the results obtained by the analysis on generic masculine forms and gender-fair forms employed in German and Italian job ads will be reported.
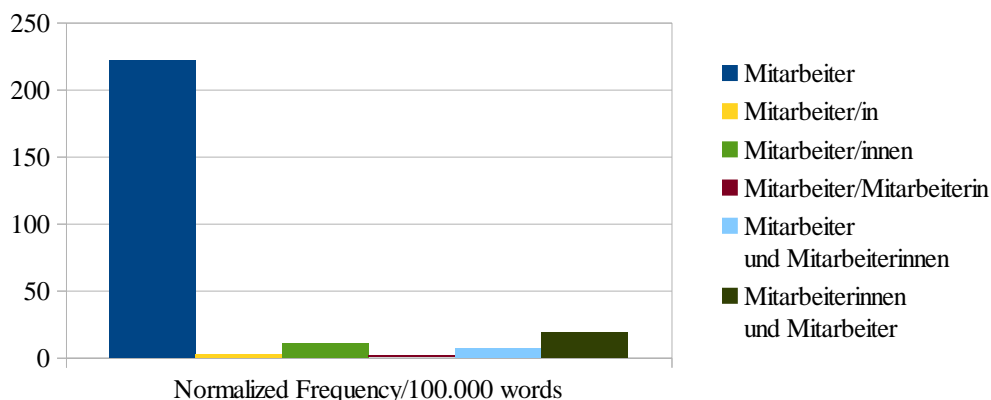
Results show that generic masculine forms are extremely frequent both in Italian and in German job advertisements. The strategies that explicitly refer to both men and women - slash formulations and double formulations - that are thus recommended by the guidelines mentioned above, appear in few job advertisements both in German and in Italian.

Bar chart 1 and bar chart 2 show that the generic masculine forms *candidato* and *candidati* (*male job applicant/s*) in Italian and *Mitarbeiter* (*male employee/s*) in German occur much more frequently than the corresponding gender-fair alternatives, that is, the slash formulations *candidato/a*, *candidata/o* and *candidati/e* in Italian and *Mitarbeiter/in*, *Mitarbeiter/innen* in German and the double formulations *i candidati e le candidate* in Italian and *Mitarbeiter/Mitarbeiterinnen, Mitarbeiter und Mitarbeiterinnen* and *Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter* in German.
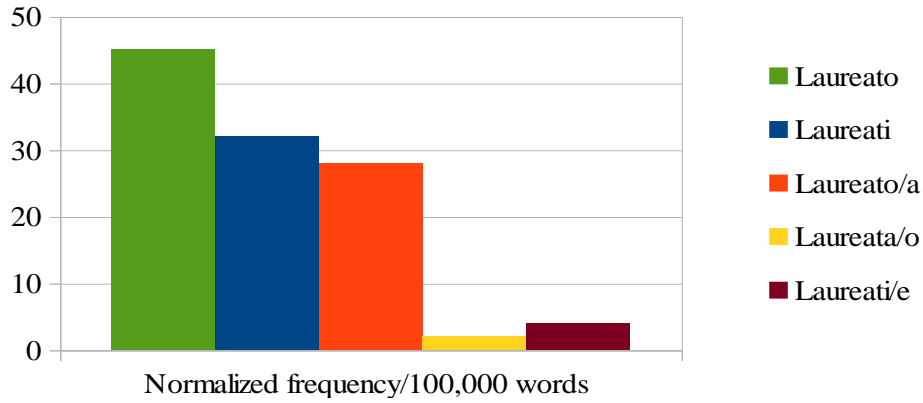
BAR CHART 1

BAR CHART 2

BAR CHART 3
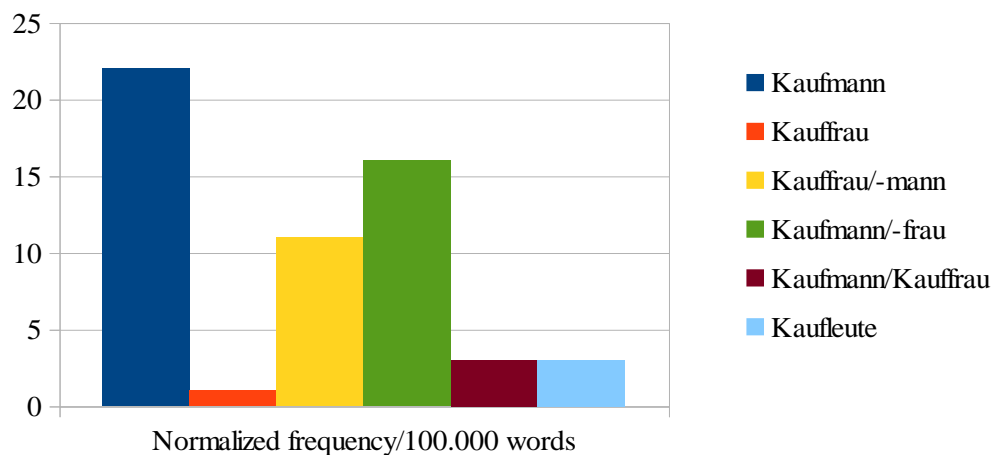

Normalized frequency/100,000 words

Legend:
- Laureato
- Laureati
- Laureato/a
- Laureata/o
- Laureati/e

BAR CHART 4

Normalized frequency/100.000 words

Legend:
- Kaufmann
- Kauffrau
- Kauffrau/-mann
- Kaufmann/-frau
- Kaufmann/Kauffrau
- Kaufleute

TABLE 4

Masculine form	Occurrences	Feminine form	Occurrences
Ingegnere (male engineer)	28	Ingegnera (female engineer)	0
Operatore (male operator)	17	Operatrice (female operator)	0
Traduttore (male translator)	11	Traduttrice (female translator)	0

Programmatore (male programmer)	13	Programmatrice (female programmer)	0

In the German corpus, even though few role names appear only in their masculine form, e.g. Informatiker (male computer scientist), the corresponding gender-fair alternatives of generic masculine forms appear in a very limited number, as table 5 shows.

TABLE 5

Masculine form	Occurrences	Masculine form and feminine suffix	Occurrences
Ingenieur (male engineer)	24	Ingenieur/in (engineer m/f)	1
Leiter (male director)	62	Leiter/in (director m/f)	1
Manager (male manager)	78	Manager/in (manager m/f)	3

In German job ads the abbreviations *m/w* or *w/m* that stand for *männlich/weiblich* and vice-versa (in English *male/female*) are often added to the generic masculine nouns; the two forms occur respectively 363 and 65 times out of 100.000 words. These abbreviations make more explicit that the job advertisements refer to both women and men, though, even in these cases, the visibility of feminine forms is subordinated to the one of masculine nouns.

Similarly, in some Italian job ads the statement *la ricerca si rivolge a candidature di entrambi i sessi* that occurs 82 times out of 100.000 words, specifies that both male and female job applicants are addressed by the company.

So far, gender-fair strategies that make women and men visible have been analysed. As introduced before, the guidelines on gender-fair language recommend not only these strategies but also gender-neutral alternatives, which refer explicitly neither to men nor to women.

Table 6 and table 7 show the frequency of some neutral and epicene[12] words analysed in the Italian and the German corpora.

TABLE 6

Neutral or epicene word	Occurrences
Persona (person)	43
Clientela (customer)	37
Stagista (trainee)	6
Responsabile (person in charge)	22

TABLE 7

Neutral or epicene word	Occurrences
Menschen (people)	66
Aushilfe (temporary worker)	5
Fachkraft (qualified employee)	31

Results reported in table 6 and table 7 show that in both Italian and German job advertisements neutral alternatives are not frequently employed. Even when gender-fair alternatives are easily available, companies seem to prefer the corresponding generic masculine forms.

Similar trends observed both in German and in Italian job advertisements have been so far reported. In the last part of this section a strategy that occurs only in German will be highlighted: in German job advertisements readers are often addressed directly with the formal pronoun *Sie*. This strategy is recommended by guidelines for the use of gender-fair language and is extremely common in the language of job ads, as its frequency shows (1899 out of 100.000 words).

In Italian job advertisements, this strategy is not employed at all; on the contrary, companies address job seekers using impersonal forms, i.e. *si richiede (it is required)*.

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(12) Nouns that may refer to a male or a female, such as teacher as opposed to businessman or shepherd (Collins Dictionary, http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/epicene).

In this section results of the analysis carried out on the role names in German and Italian job ads have been provided. In the last section of this contribution conclusions on the grounds of the results described in this section will be drawn.

7. Conclusion

The results reported in the previous section indicate that the initial hypothesis is only partially confirmed by the analysis. On the grounds that institutions and academia have given more attention to the gender and language issue in Germany than in Italy, we could assume that gender-fair language is used more often in the German corpus than in the Italian one. This is indeed true, as gender-fair strategies do appear more often in German job advertisements, especially in the form of the formal pronoun *Sie*. However, at the same time, generic masculine forms still remain the most common structure both in German and in Italian.

Results also suggest a lack of consistency in the use of gender-fair language and a low degree of awareness about the importance of using gender-fair language in both German and Italian job advertisements.

These results may be influenced by different social and cultural reasons:

On the one hand, as already mentioned above, German institutions and academia have given importance to the gender and language debate and several gender-fair strategies have been introduced and gradually adopted over the past 30 years. By contrast, in Italy very little attention has been given to the gender and language issue, few gender-fair guidelines have been published and their application has been very limited. The different level of attention given in Germany and Italy to the gender and language debate may thus influence why gender-fair forms are more used in German than in Italian job advertisements.

On the other hand, the masculinity of both countries – according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions – may explain why masculine generic forms are still extremely common both in the Italian and in the German job advertisements, regardless of the fact that, as many several psycholinguistic studies have demonstrated, the use of generic masculine forms biases gender representation in a discriminatory way against women.

The study illustrated in this paper and the conclusions drawn from this analysis are only the first step of a wider research that will explore not only the reasons underlying the use of gender-fair language, but also its social and cultural effects for women.

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