

The Ideological Battle Over Gendered Nouns in Contemporary Italian

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ABSTRACT

After decades of feminist advocacy, gender equality in the Italian language has ostensibly been achieved, as academic titles, professional designations, and political roles can now be expressed in both masculine and feminine forms. Nevertheless, many women continue to employ masculine nouns to identify themselves, as they have historically done. This study examines the motivations underlying this choice and its perceived connection to patriarchy. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on press articles, televised debates, and published interviews with those women, including politicians, who prefer to adopt masculine terms when referring to themselves, in order to assess whether the application of masculine nouns for women in professional and political contexts is both linguistically correct and socially accepted. The findings reveal that, in written and spoken Italian, employing the masculine form to designate women is not only grammatically valid but also remains the most widespread practice among speakers. However, women who adopt masculine terms for self-reference are frequently criticized by radical feminist groups, who portray them as misogynistic, patriarchal, or even aligned with fascist traditions. In contrast, this research demonstrates that such linguistic preferences often represent an autonomous and deliberate exercise of personal freedom, rather than submission to external pressures. The study concludes that enforcing the exclusive use of feminine nouns to describe women's professional or political roles reflects an ideological position rather than a linguistic necessity, serving primarily as a tool for political confrontation.

Keywords: Feminism and Language, Gendered Language, Italian Grammar, Language and Ideology, Linguistic Identity

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, radical feminist movements, supported by left-wing political forces, have argued that Italian society remains deeply embedded in patriarchal structures, where women continue to be marginalized and their social roles undervalued. This critique extends to the Italian language, which is often portrayed as failing to adequately recognize women's contributions (Camilli, 2024). A striking example is the predominance of masculine nouns for certain professions and political positions. Historically, Italian has employed masculine forms to denote roles such as *avvocato* (lawyer), *medico* (physician), *sindaco* (mayor), and *ministro* (minister). This linguistic practice persisted even after Italian society underwent profound transformations beginning with the 1968 "sexual revolution". Despite the fact that men and women today share equal rights and responsibilities across economic, social, scientific, legal, and political spheres, masculine forms have largely remained the default (Voltolina, 2024; Bednarek, 2023).

From a grammatical perspective, Italian typically distinguishes masculine nouns ending in "o" from feminine ones ending in "a", notwithstanding certain exceptions. In contemporary society, where women increasingly occupy high-level professions and political offices, feminist activists argue that the continued reliance on

masculine terms is no longer acceptable. They contend that such usage reinforces a form of “linguistic patriarchy” that mirrors and perpetuates broader societal inequalities. For this reason, they advocate for the adoption of feminine equivalents—*avvocata* (female lawyer), *medica* (female physician), *sindaca* (female mayor), and *ministra* (female minister)—as essential steps toward dismantling patriarchal structures. Yet, this claim has been challenged as paradoxical. Recent analyses indicate that men and women already participate in virtually every profession, albeit in differing proportions, which raises doubts about equating linguistic practices with systemic oppression (Cimino, 2024). However, this debate has moved beyond the realm of grammar, fueling political polarization. Radical feminists, supported by progressive parties, often clash with conservative groups and women who themselves prefer the traditional masculine forms. The linguistic question thus becomes a symbolic battleground in Italy’s wider ideological struggle.

The issue is further complicated by structural features of Italian. If, as radical feminists maintain, every masculine noun must have a feminine equivalent to ensure women’s visibility, linguistic scholars highlight counterexamples. Certain nouns, though ending in “a” and appearing feminine, can denote both men and women. These include *elettricista* (electrician), *camionista* (truck driver), *autista* (driver), *poeta* (poet), *pilota* (pilot), and *patriota* (patriot). Such words fall into the category of “ambigender” nouns, with their usage clarified by the definite article—*il pilota* (male pilot) or *la pilota* (female pilot). To impose an ideologically driven consistency, one might be compelled to introduce new masculine forms such as *piloto*, *elettricisto*, or *camionisto*—terms that are nonexistent in contemporary Italian. Thus, describing a male professional with a noun that appears feminine does not diminish his gender identity unless the language is manipulated ideologically, disregarding its inherent grammatical rules (Mondani, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, the issue of gender equality has increasingly extended into the realm of language, where the use of feminine forms for professional titles has become a central concern. In the Italian context, many professions—such as *avvocato* (lawyer) and *medico* (physician)—have historically been expressed in the masculine form, even when referring to women. This practice reflects deeply entrenched cultural and linguistic traditions, but it has also generated a contentious debate. On one side, advocates argue that language should evolve in step with social change, contending that the systematic use of feminine forms disrupts gender stereotypes and enhances the visibility of women in roles traditionally associated with men. On the other side, critics insist that the masculine form functions as a neutral category within Italian grammar and that altering it risks undermining the coherence and fluidity of the language. According to this perspective, the introduction of feminine variants is unnecessary and potentially divisive, given that it does not address broader issues of inclusivity, particularly those concerning non-binary and other marginalized identities (Ghenio, 2020). Supporters of feminization emphasize its symbolic and social significance. By naming professions in the feminine, they argue, language acknowledges and legitimizes women’s presence in spheres historically dominated by men, thereby advancing both equality and representational justice. Conversely, detractors maintain that Italian already possesses a consolidated linguistic structure and that the so-called “extended masculine” should not be interpreted as discriminatory but rather as a grammatically neutral form. For these scholars, the call for feminization risks overstating linguistic reform as a solution to complex social inequalities (Zonta, 2025).

Recent scholarship has challenged the assumption that feminization is a purely contemporary phenomenon. In 2024, Michele Cortellazzo of the University of Florence published a historical study entitled *La femminilizzazione dei nomi di professione e di cariche. Un problema recente?* (The Feminization of Profession and Office Names. A Recent Problem?). In this work, Cortellazzo documented the feminization of professional titles, including prestigious occupations, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He demonstrates that as early as 1851, the Italian language included feminine forms designating professions held by women. His findings undermine two common arguments: first, that professional titles are firmly established as masculine; and second, that the demand for feminization originates from modern feminist ideologies. Instead, Cortellazzo reveals that feminine forms such as *dottoressa* (medical doctor), *scienziata* (scientist), *professoressa*



(professor), and *architetta* (architect) were historically used without significant controversy, suggesting that resistance to them today is less about linguistic norms and more about cultural and ideological opposition.

Similarly, Ilaria Usalla of the University of Cagliari, in her 2023 comparative study *Feminizations dei nomi di professioni e cariche in italiano e spagnolo* (Feminization of Profession and Office Names in Italian and Spanish), highlights the extent to which the debate transcends questions of grammar. Usalla argues that the controversy surrounding feminine nouns has acquired a pronounced political dimension, often disconnected from purely linguistic considerations. In Italy, the issue remains highly contentious and frequently resurfaces in public discourse, with institutions, the media, and linguists adopting polarized positions. Usalla further observes that language is often deployed as an instrument in broader cultural and ideological struggles, reinforcing divisions between conservative and progressive forces. This dynamic situates the linguistic debate within a wider political landscape, where the symbolic value of words is as consequential as their grammatical function.

Further confirmation of this perspective comes from the recent work of Anita Perra (2025), who underscores that the choice between masculine and feminine forms is rarely a matter of linguistic precision alone. Rather, it functions as a vehicle for political and ideological positioning. Perra's findings demonstrate how language becomes a site of contestation where competing visions of society—whether progressive or conservative—assert themselves through seemingly grammatical choices. Her study illustrates how the discussion over professional titles is emblematic of broader ideological struggles in contemporary Italy, where linguistic practices both reflect and shape ongoing debates about gender, power, and identity. Although much of the scholarly debate centers on the Italian case, it is important to recognize that these controversies are not confined to Italy alone. Similar ideological tensions emerge in other Romance languages, such as Spanish and French, which share a grammatical system that distinctly marks nouns and professional titles as masculine and feminine. In these contexts, too, the struggle over feminization reflects more than questions of linguistic accuracy; it is tied to broader disputes about gender equality, cultural identity, and political representation. The Italian debate therefore forms part of a wider pattern in Romance-language societies, where grammar and ideology intersect, and where linguistic choices serve as powerful symbols of social transformation and resistance. Building on these scholarly insights, the present study examines how debates over linguistic feminization unfold within the Italian context, with particular attention to institutional decisions, cultural resistance, and ideological tensions. By situating current controversies within their historical precedents and within the framework of ongoing social and political debates, the research seeks to clarify the extent to which language reform in Italy is shaped not only by grammatical conventions but also by broader political, cultural, and identity-related dynamics.

Research Aims and Questions

This study investigates the extent to which feminine forms of professional titles and high-ranking political positions—already codified in authoritative Italian dictionaries—have been adopted within the broader Italian-speaking community, and whether their usage reflects genuine linguistic integration or primarily ideological positioning.

The study has three main aims:

1. To evaluate whether the continued use of masculine nouns to denote women's professional and political roles can be considered linguistically acceptable and an expression of individual choice.
2. To examine the social and cultural factors contributing to the criticism directed at women who prefer masculine forms when referring to their own professional titles or political positions.
3. To analyze the underlying ideological perspectives that shape debates on gendered language in contemporary Italian society.

To achieve these objectives, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent can the use of masculine forms to identify women's professions and political roles be considered grammatically valid and a legitimate expression of personal preference?
2. How is language currently mobilized in debates on gender and politics, and to what degree is it employed as a tool for advancing specific ideological agendas?
3. What significant developments and points of contention have characterized feminist movements and language-related debates in Italy over the past two years?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader sociopolitical and linguistic debates surrounding gender, identity, and language use in Italy.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a case study methodology, which is particularly appropriate for investigating the use of masculine nouns in Italian when referring to female individuals, their professions, and their political roles. A qualitative case study design was chosen because it allows for a nuanced exploration of language practices within their cultural, political, and ideological contexts. Unlike quantitative or mixed-methods approaches, which emphasize breadth and statistical patterns, a qualitative design captures the subtleties of discourse, identity negotiation, and power relations that are central to understanding the gendered dynamics of the Italian language. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the linguistic, social, and ideological implications of gendered language. The research includes several key components for data collection:

1. **Linguistic Analysis:** A formal analysis of masculine-gendered nouns used for professions and political positions in Italian, focusing on those traditionally applied to both men and women.
2. **Media Review:** An examination of contemporary newspaper articles published between 2023 and 2025, including both progressive outlets (e.g., *Il Manifesto*) and conservative ones (e.g., *Il Giornale*), to assess how feminist ideology may be shaping the use of gendered language and influencing public discourse.
3. **Expert and Affected Voices:** A review of studies by linguists, as well as interviews with women directly impacted by these linguistic changes, providing insights into their perspectives on the adoption of feminine equivalents for traditionally masculine terms.

This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of how language, gender, and ideology intersect in contemporary Italian society.

LIMITATIONS

Despite its strengths, this methodology has several limitations. First, the selection of media sources, while balanced between progressive and conservative outlets, may still introduce interpretive bias, as media discourse inevitably reflects ideological positions. Second, the reliance on publicly available materials and interviews restricts access to confidential policy documents or internal decision-making processes that could provide a fuller account of institutional dynamics. Finally, as this study is framed as a case study within the Italian context, its findings are not universally generalizable. Nonetheless, the insights generated may demonstrate transferability to other Romance languages or societies undergoing comparable debates on gender and linguistic reform.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The *Accademia della Crusca*, Italy's most prestigious institution dedicated to safeguarding the purity and correctness of the Italian language, including its everyday usage, has issued two significant scientific opinions—dated March 9, 2023, and September 9, 2024—affirming that the use of feminine forms to designate

jobs, professions, or political roles held by women is fully legitimate. Accordingly, these feminine forms have been incorporated into all major linguistic dictionaries. However, the choice to employ the feminine form cannot be mandated; it must remain a matter of individual discretion. From a technical linguistic perspective, the use of the masculine form is equally legitimate and correct, as the focus is on the function performed or the office held, rather than the gender of the individual (D'Achille et al., 2024).

Prominent linguists observe that feminine terms for professional and political roles are not yet widely adopted by the Italian-speaking community. The majority of Italians—including journalists, television hosts, writers, and ordinary citizens—continue to prefer the masculine form. In this context, the masculine serves a quasi-neutral function, emphasizing the position or role itself rather than the individual's gender (Vallauri, 2025). Some scholars argue that using masculine nouns universally does not undermine gender equality; for example, referring to a female minister as *ministro* does not diminish her authority or the importance of her office. Linguistic traditions that have developed over centuries cannot be overturned solely by a minority advocating reform. Furthermore, many Italian speakers may avoid forms such as *ministra* because they phonetically resemble other common Italian words—in this case, *minestra* (soup). This close similarity in sound can potentially lead to ambiguity or misunderstanding in spoken communication, which contributes to the continued preference for the traditional masculine form, *ministro*, when referring to female ministers (Beretta, 2024).

Nevertheless, this phonetic objection carries limited linguistic significance. In most communicative contexts, meaning is clarified by syntax and situational cues, making genuine ambiguity highly unlikely. Scholars, therefore, are inclined to regard the alleged awkwardness associated with *ministra* primarily as cultural or psychological resistance to change, rather than as a substantive linguistic impediment. In this sense, the argument functions primarily as a rhetorical device for legitimizing continued reliance on the masculine form rather than as evidence of an actual communicative deficiency. Nevertheless, as the feminine variant may gain wider circulation in political, institutional, and media discourse, such reservations are expected to diminish, mirroring the gradual normalization of other neologisms that were initially contested but later became widely accepted. At the same time, the ultimate decision rests with speakers themselves: the adoption of *ministra*, like other feminized professional titles, should emerge organically through usage rather than through prescriptive imposition, ensuring that linguistic change reflects the preferences of the speech community as a whole (Pollicino & Zanot, 2021).

This broader perspective also aligns with the view of many linguists, who emphasize that language evolves organically and cannot be artificially imposed on the population. Many women, affirming their gender identity, deliberately retain traditional masculine nouns as a formal convention, reflecting longstanding structural patterns in the Italian language (Pili, 2024). For instance, current female ministers Eugenia Maria Roccella and Anna Maria Bernini have expressed a preference for being addressed as *ministro* rather than *ministra*, emphasizing their institutional role and professional competence over gender distinction (Castigliani, 2024).



Figure 1. Minister Eugenia Maria Roccella is addressed as *Ministro* on May 17, 2024, illustrating the use of masculine nouns for female officeholders.

(Source: <https://www.consulentidellavoro.tv/watch.php?vid=e11cfb843>)



Figure 2. Minister Anna Maria Bernini is addressed as *Ministro* on November 27, 2024, showing the continued use of masculine forms for women in high political positions.
(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qSNanT0YRM)

In December 2023, during a televised debate broadcast on *Piazza Pulita*, attorney Annamaria Bernardini De Pace expressed her preference to be referred to using the masculine term *avvocato*. She emphasized that, in her profession, what matters most are legal expertise and technical competence, rather than gender. According to Bernardini De Pace, the role and abilities of a lawyer transcend the distinction between male and female. During the interview, she explicitly stated that she wishes to be recognized as a lawyer based on her professional qualifications, not her gender, and that the masculine term *avvocato* effectively conveys this emphasis (La 7, 2023).



Figure 3: Attorney Annamaria Bernardini De Pace is addressed using the masculine term *avvocato*.

(Source: <https://www.la7.it/piazzapulita/video/bernardini-de-pace-non-amo-farmi-chiamare-avvocata-sono-avvocato-07-12-2023-517734>)

Anna Cisint, the combative mayor of Monfalcone, a town in northeastern Italy, has consistently expressed her preference for the masculine term *sindaco*, arguing that disputes over noun endings (“o” for masculine and “a” for feminine) represent a largely ideological conflict that needlessly complicates political debate between progressive and conservative forces (Garau, 2024).



Figure 4. Mayor Anna Cisint is addressed using the masculine term *sindaco*.

(Source: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/minacce-sindaco-monfalcone-battaglia-contro-degrado-segno-2290530.html>)

Even the Italian Undersecretary of Defense, Isabella Rauti, expresses a preference for the masculine term *Sottosegretario* rather than the feminine *Sottosegretaria*, citing respect for Italian linguistic tradition, as evidenced in her message posted on July 16, 2025.



Isabella Rauti ✓
@isabellarauti

...

Il Sottosegretario di Stato alla Difesa Isabella Rauti a L'Aquila per "La Partita del Cuore 2025 - La Rivincita" - @NazCantanti



nazionalecantanti.it/2025/07/15/il-...

@GuidoCrosetto @MinisteroDifesa @SM_Difesa @Esercito
@ItalianAirForce @ItalianNavy @Carabinieri_ @reportdifesa
@difesa_online @cybernaua @InfoDivise2
#partitadelcuore #stadiogransassoditalia #LAquila #Abruzzo
#NazionaleCantanti #NazionalePolitici #sport #beneficienza
#UnaForzapaese #ForzeArmate #Alserviziodelpaese #difesa

Translate post



**Il Sottosegretario di Stato alla Difesa
Isabella Rauti a L'Aquila per
"La Partita del Cuore 2025 - La Rivincita"**

nazionalecantanti.it

Last edited 3:47 am · 16 Jul 2025 · 217 Views

Figure 5. Isabella Rauti is referred to as Sottosegretario di Stato ally Difesa (Undersecretary of Defense).
Source: <https://x.com/isabellarauti/status/1945208556929610131>)

On August 3, 2023, Senator Antonella Zedda requested that the President of the Senate of the Italian Republic address her using the masculine term *Senatore* rather than the feminine *Senatrice*. In her impassioned statement, she emphasized that all politicians, regardless of gender, are called to serve citizens, and that disputes over masculine and feminine forms of titles risk undermining the credibility of Italian political institutions (Romeo, 2023).



Figure 6. Senator Antonella Zedda is addressed using the masculine term *Senatore*, representing the political party Fratelli d'Italia. (Source: <https://www.lacronaca24.it/2025/05/30/zeddavogliamo-cagliari-completamente-digitalizzata-e-meno-burocrazia/>)

The analysis above highlights that the decision of some women to employ masculine nouns when referring to their professional or political roles is not only linguistically correct, as affirmed by the *Accademia della Crusca*, but also grounded in personal motivations that merit respect, even if contested by others. This underscores the principle that language use, particularly regarding gendered forms, should reflect individual agency rather than external pressure. In choosing masculine terms, many women emphasize the functional role, professional competence, and institutional authority associated with their position, rather than their gender, signaling that their professional identity is not subordinate to linguistic conventions. Conversely, other women holding prominent political positions may prefer the use of feminine forms to describe their roles, as exemplified by the current leader of the Democratic Party, Elly Schlein, who is addressed as *La Segretaria* (the leader). Both practices—using masculine or feminine terms—are legitimate expressions of personal choice, and the right of women to opt for the masculine form, such as *Segretario*, when referring to themselves must be preserved. Respecting this freedom ensures that linguistic norms accommodate diversity in personal preferences and professional identities, rather than imposing a uniform standard, and reinforces the broader principle that women's self-identification in language should remain a matter of autonomous decision-making. Ultimately, honoring these individual choices contributes to a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of gender representation in Italian society, acknowledging that empowerment lies in the ability to decide how one is linguistically recognized, rather than in adhering to externally dictated norms (Mariconda, 2025).



Figure 7. The leader of the Italian Democratic Party, Elly Schlein, is addressed using the strictly feminine term *La Segretaria* (ending in “a”). (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyJI6h2pdF0>)

Il Messaggero
#CONDIVISODAL1878

LE TUE NOTIZIE

PROMO FLASH

Politica

ELLY SCHLEIN

Segui

Elly Schlein, chi è **il nuovo segretario** Pd. Prima donna alla guida del Partito Democratico

Un passato da europarlamentare Pd e di attivismo contro il Pd



Figure 8. Following her election, the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* refers to Elly Schlein using the masculine term *il nuovo segretario* (the new leader).



(Source: https://www.ilmessaggero.it/politica/elly_schlein_chi_e_eta_marito_figli_segretario_pd_primarie_pd-7255099.html)

Nevertheless, the debate over whether professions or political positions held by women should be referred to using masculine or feminine terms, and which form should take precedence, appears to engage only a small segment of the Italian population. Evidence from two surveys conducted in 2024 by *Euromedia Research* and *Termometro Politico*—both prominent polling institutes—indicates that more than 80% of Italians, across genders and aged 18 to 70 from diverse social and educational backgrounds, perceive patriarchy as having been largely eradicated in Italy, as well as in other Western countries. These surveys, carried out using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method and encompassing a sample of approximately four million respondents, confirm the broad consensus on this issue. Consequently, the discourse surrounding the use of feminine nouns is often interpreted as an ideological initiative led by a small, radical-feminist minority, with limited resonance among the general populace (Aiuti, 2024).

Despite this, progressive left-wing political actors and radical feminist advocacy groups have leveraged the linguistic debate for political purposes. They assert that individuals who continue to use masculine nouns when referring to women should be characterized as “fascist” or “reactionary”, allegedly seeking to perpetuate societal patriarchy and undermine women’s rights (Ocone, 2024). In particular, women who adopt masculine nouns to describe their roles or professions are sometimes labeled not only as fascist but also as misogynistic, purportedly demonstrating animosity toward their own gender and allegedly contributing to societal issues such as femicide. This interpretation, however, is fundamentally flawed. First, statistical data indicate that Italy has one of the lowest rates of femicide in the European Union. Second, contemporary research in psychiatry and criminology shows that the causes of gender-based violence are complex and multifactorial, rather than directly attributable to the existence or absence of a patriarchal social structure (Accardi, 2025). Therefore, the ideological framing linking linguistic choices to systemic oppression or increased gender violence lacks empirical support and does not reflect the broader realities of contemporary Italian society (Carlino, 2025).

The intensity of the linguistic and political pressures exerted by radical feminist groups is exemplified in the striking case of an Italian journalist who, during a televised program, referred to Kamala Harris as *un candidato alla presidenza degli Stati Uniti* (a candidate for President of the United States). By using the masculine term *candidato* rather than the feminine *candidata*, he became the target of immediate verbal harassment and was ultimately removed from the studio. The journalist, visibly intimidated by the reaction, attempted to clarify his position, emphasizing that while he fundamentally respects gender differences, he chose to use the masculine form in that specific context to exercise his freedom of speech. He made no ideological claim, merely observing that, in Italian, both the feminine *candidata* and masculine *candidato* are grammatically correct when referring to a female candidate. This linguistic flexibility is reflected in formal contexts such as public competitive examinations, where the masculine *candidato* is routinely employed in a neutral sense to refer to individuals of any gender, and thus its use cannot be considered incorrect (Romano, 2024). A further illustration of linguistic abrupt changes is evident in the contemporary reinterpretation of International Women’s Day, traditionally celebrated on March 8th. Certain progressive factions have attempted to modify Italian for this occasion, changing *Otto* (eight) to *Otta*—a term without conventional meaning—and *Marzo* (March) to *Marza*, a word that in Italian has a completely different meaning, referring to a botanical word denoting a twig or bud used for grafting. This alteration fundamentally distorts the language, rendering the resulting expressions largely incomprehensible to speakers. Proponents argue that cardinal numbers and month names ending in the vowel “o” represent masculine forms and reflect a patriarchal linguistic structure (D’Angelo, 2025). However, this extreme modification demonstrates how ideological interventions can disrupt familiar language conventions, highlighting the tension between symbolic gestures and practical linguistic comprehension.



Figure 9. Former President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, a prominent advocate of radical feminist ideas, alters *Otto Marzo* (March 8th) to the non-existent *Otta Marza*. (Source: <https://x.com/boldrinideclina/status/574648529928454147>)

Feminist ideological extremism has also manifested at the University of Trento. With the approval of the Board of Directors, the institution introduced new regulations implementing the so-called “expanded feminine form”—a linguistic construction absent from standard Italian—for official titles and gender references. Terms such as “the dean”, “the rector”, “the professor”, and “the candidate” are now systematically rendered in the feminine form, even when referring to male officeholders. Students, free from any ideological agenda, opposed this policy, arguing that the extreme feminization of all terms intensifies gender polarization without providing any tangible benefit to the institution. They maintained that such a rigid linguistic reform risks fostering unnecessary conflict between genders rather than promoting inclusivity, and that the choice of masculine or feminine terms should remain a matter of personal preference rather than an imposed standard (Giovenale, 2024).

Radical left-wing feminist groups, however, often expose inconsistencies in their advocacy. While highly focused on the battle over masculine and feminine suffixes in nouns, they frequently remain silent regarding sexual assaults committed by illegal immigrants against young women. Data from the Ministry of the Interior indicate that 70% of crimes involving female victims are perpetrated by individuals who arrived illegally in Italy. This selective silence highlights their alignment with left-wing policies favoring open and largely uncontrolled immigration, prioritizing a political agenda over the safety and rights of women (Canepa, 2024).

At the same time, these groups accuse conservative political forces of perpetuating patriarchy, yet they themselves engage in a form of obscurantist sexism, directing criticism at female professionals based on their appearance rather than their achievements. A prominent example occurred in July 2025 when Professor Gabriella Greison, an accomplished physicist, was invited to speak on quantum physics at the University of

Messina during an outdoor ceremonial event with temperatures reaching 41 degrees Celsius. Rather than highlighting her scholarly contribution, radical feminist commentators focused on her low-cut summer dress, issuing derogatory and sexist remarks. Observers have noted that a genuinely consistent feminist perspective should recognize and celebrate her accomplishments as a leading female scientist, rather than focusing on her attire—a form of scrutiny that feminism itself has long sought to challenge (Damiata, 2025).

Historically, left-wing forces governed Italy uninterruptedly from the post-war period until 2022, successfully establishing a form of cultural hegemony across sectors such as television, publishing, academia, the judiciary, journalism, trade unions, the press, and the intellectual sphere. Following their electoral defeat in September 2022, this cultural influence increasingly appears intertwined with efforts to politically and morally delegitimize opponents. In this context, political assessments frequently assume an ethical or moral dimension that is treated as dogmatic and unquestionable, with dissenters labeled as reactionary, conservative, obscurantist, or, more broadly, “fascist”. Language itself becomes a tool in these conflicts, deployed strategically to reinforce ideological positions and attempt to regain lost political authority (Merlo, 2025). Scholars analyzing current electoral trends have observed that left-wing forces now exist in an ideological bubble, largely detached from broader societal realities, and persistently invoke the specter of fascism, which ceased to exist over eighty years ago, while disregarding contemporary circumstances (Carrazza, 2025). Some liberal commentators have observed that the term “fascist” is now greatly overused (Mascheroni, 2025), giving rise to a new colloquial definition: *Fascismo è tutto ciò che non piace al Pd* (Anything that the left-wing political forces do not appreciate is considered fascist). Examples include: *Tutti quelli che non sono del Pd; pericolo fascismo* (Those who do not align with the Left represent the return of the fascist dictatorship) and *Quando il Pd cala nei consensi; deriva fascista* (When the Left loses electoral consensus, a fascist drift ensues).

Ultimately, women’s rights and professional recognition do not depend on the imposition of specific linguistic forms. The use of masculine or feminine terms to refer to professions or political roles should remain an autonomous, personal choice, respected regardless of ideological pressures. Adopting the masculine form for certain positions, even when referring to women, does not constitute patriarchy but rather affirms the principle of individual freedom in language use (Gravino, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The ideological battle over masculine and feminine suffixes waged by radical feminist groups is unlikely to succeed, as evidenced by surveys conducted in 2024 by *Euromedia Research* and *Termometro Politico*, which indicate that over 80% of Italians, across genders and ages 18–70, consider these debates largely irrelevant. While ideological motivations may play a prominent role in political discourse, they lack a substantive basis in the principles of linguistics. This does not preclude the possibility that newly coined terms could gradually enter common usage; however, such adoption must emerge organically and spontaneously to be linguistically effective. When attempts at change are imposed top-down by an ideologically driven minority, rather than arising naturally within the speech community, they are unlikely to produce meaningful results, as emphasized by the *Accademia della Crusca* (Librandi, 2024).

To date, the convention of using masculine terms for intellectual professions and institutional roles—regardless of the individual’s gender—remains firmly established. Nevertheless, the intensity of the ongoing debate demonstrates that linguistic practices are intertwined with social, cultural, and political dimensions, which merit independent analysis. The findings highlight that this struggle over linguistic forms reflects a broader agenda of political correctness, a hallmark of radical leftist movements, which has constrained freedom of expression in Italy and other Western countries. For decades, left-wing political forces have prioritized the expression of progressive ideas while marginalizing opposing viewpoints, creating a form of mainstream thought reminiscent of authoritarian control. The approach adopted by radical feminist groups mirrors this logic: it seeks to limit individuals’ ability to freely choose, based on their personal cultural, social, and political context, whether to use masculine or feminine terms for women’s professional and political roles (Salvatore, 2025).

Ultimately, women's professional recognition and rights should not depend on imposed linguistic conventions. The choice to use masculine or feminine terms must remain an autonomous, personal decision, reflecting individual freedom rather than ideological pressure. Respecting this freedom is essential for upholding liberal democratic values, ensuring civil coexistence, and safeguarding the principle that every individual retains the right to express themselves without coercion (Del Papa, 2025).

Implications, Limitations And Future Research

This study has focused primarily on the Italian context, where the debate on gendered nouns has become a site of ideological conflict. Yet similar controversies are also present in other European languages, particularly French, Spanish, and German. In these contexts, national linguistic institutions such as the *Académie Française* in France, the *Real Academia Española* in Spain, and the *Institute für Deutsche Sprache* in Germany, have engaged in discussions on the feminization of professional and political titles. These cross-linguistic debates demonstrate that the issue is not uniquely Italian but part of a broader European trend, while at the same time shaped by the particular historical, cultural, and political trajectories of each country (Rossitto, 2024).

In Italy, the debate has acquired distinctive intensity following the September 2022 national elections, when conservative forces won a parliamentary majority and formed the government, abruptly ending decades of continuous left-wing governance (Baccini, 2022). Against this backdrop, feminist groups and left-leaning actors have increasingly mobilized the issue of linguistic feminization as part of their broader opposition to the ruling coalition. By contrast, in countries such as France, Spain, and Germany—where left-leaning parties have persistently wielded greater political influence—the debate has often unfolded with less overt polarization, though it remains deeply tied to questions of cultural identity and gender equality (Parenzo, 2024).

Future research should therefore broaden the comparative perspective, examining how different linguistic traditions, institutional interventions, and political contexts shape the acceptance or resistance of feminized forms. Such inquiry could clarify whether the Italian situation represents an exceptional case or instead reflects one manifestation of a recurring pattern in Western European democracies where language, gender, and politics intersect.

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Conflicts Of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the work reported in this study.

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