

# **GENDER-INCLUSIVE TEXTISMS: HOW SPANISH-SPEAKING EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITIES PROMOTE LINGUISTIC INNOVATIONS ON TWITTER**

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## **Abstract**

Any linguistic reform aimed at gender equality benefits from teacher's capacity as spreaders, and literature has shown that Twitter can be used as an excellent channel for the dissemination of good practice in language use. In a mixed-methods study based on public data mining and semantic content analysis, we examine how teachers use gender-fair language (GIL) in their digital communications on Twitter, what GIL procedures they use and, if Spanish *digitalk* incorporates specific textisms for GIL. Results confirmed that teachers make a widespread use of GIL procedures, prefer the use of collective nouns as a GIL mechanism, and intentionally incorporate GIL into *digitalk* through specific textisms, what we have named *gender-inclusive textisms (GIT)*. The findings indicate that teachers are at the forefront of gender-inclusive language activism in educational virtual communities, and that, although Twitter may contain messages that infringe upon individuals' dignity, it is also a privileged space for linguistic innovations oriented towards gender equality.

## **Keywords**

Twitter, gender-inclusive language, textisms, linguistics innovation, educational communities, teachers

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## **Introduction**

### ***Twitter, gender equality and language***

Social networks have become a modern public square where many debate, discuss, and share their experiences and opinions (Wojcik and Hughes, 2019). Twitter enjoys a unique position among the most popular social networks as it has more than 436 million users a day (Tankovska, 2022), which makes it one of the favourite spaces for public dissemination of opinion. Twitter is a platform where different opinions and points of view are expressed, and where gender roles are portrayed; it perpetuates inequality, and fosters sexism and homophobia (Fox et al., 2015; Frenda et al., 2019; Ging and Siapera, 2019; Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Roldán, 2021). Still, Twitter can also be a space for feminist activism and, further, for promoting gender equality (Baer, 2016; Baker-Plummer and Baker-Plummer, 2017; Mendes et al., 2019). One example is for ‘hashtag feminism’ (Clark, 2016), used strategically for identity-claiming, and to call for solidarity and awareness in social media communities (Alingasa and Ofreneo, 2020). In this regard, the impact of movements such as #MeToo (Clark-Parsons, 2021) or #TimesUp (Garrido and Zaptsi, 2021) has proved the efficacy of hashtag feminism. For instance, the #MeToo movement has developed a new approach towards sexual violence un media and society (Eckert et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Noetzel et al., 2022), as it has ‘helped build communities capable of political mobilisation, shaping memories, and leaving their mark in the context of collective struggles for women’s rights’ (Loney-Howes et al., 2021, p. 10). Simultaneously, it has raised awareness among young adults: ‘the more awareness of the movement that individuals have, the more willing they are to be involved in such actions’ (Armstrong and Mahone, 2021).

Along with the hashtag feminism, it is possible to promote gender awareness on Twitter through the use of language. As Zimman states, ‘language is one of the primary fonts on which gender is negotiated’ (Zimman, 2017, p. 90). From this point of view, previous research defined the use of Gender-Inclusive Language (GIL) as an efficient tool against gender discrimination, since linguistic change can function to support social change (Gabriel et al., 2018; Horvath et al., 2016; Koeser et al., 2015; Stout and Dasgupta, 2011). Starting from Butler’s poststructuralist feminism notion of performativity (Butler, 1990), we understand GIL as the ‘use of language -verbal and written- in social, work and educational spaces that aims to represent and make visible groups and communities that have generally been excluded, marginalized or discriminated against throughout history’ (Parra and Serafini, 2021, p. 145), such as women, members of LGBTIQ+ communities, people with disabilities or communities of color. The use of GIL is considered one of the main acts of feminist activism, nevertheless on Twitter the ‘conservative dimension of language, which comes over as being sexist and promoting stereotypes’ (Iranzo-Cabrera and Gozávez-Pérez, 2021, p. 13), is still a great challenge to be overcome if gender equality is to be achieved.

### ***Gender-Inclusive Language***

Language policies encouraging GIL have furthered a more egalitarian view of society (Bengoechea, 2011; Lomotey, 2015; Nissen, 2013; Winter and Pauwels, 2006), despite the challenges and obstacles that still need to be overcome (Formanowicz and Hansen, 2022; Lomotey, 2018; Maldonado García, 2015; Nissen, 2002). For example, Lomotey (2018) points out the difficulties encountered by GIL when trying to implement it in non-official contexts such as ordinary texts (books, newspapers) in contrast to official documents (forms and letters from the public administration), due to beliefs linked to language and how it should be used. Jiménez Rodrigo et al. (2011) underline the influence of habit in the use of

generic linguistic forms and the dominance of androcentric culture as the main factors that hinder the dissemination of GIL among young university students. In this regard, Formanowicz and Hansen (2022) warn of a rejection caused by the introduction of new linguistic forms, which ‘might lead to hasty conclusions about the effects of language reform’ (2022, p. 139).

Despite traditions associated with grammar, a progressive openness towards more inclusive linguistic mechanisms has been observed in some languages. For example, in the Swedish language, a new neutral pronoun (*hen*) with generic and transgender value has been introduced (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015, 2021; Lindqvist et al., 2019). In English, the use of the traditionally plural pronoun *they* to refer to one person is increasingly prevalent among speakers with more experience of non-binary people (Bradley, 2020). Despite a certain degree of opposition due to sexist motives often packaged up as grammatical concerns about clarity of communication, the use of *they* in certain contexts ‘could advance the goals of the gender-inclusive language movement’ (Saguy and Williams, 2022, p. 26). Similar examples can be found in other languages, such as Portuguese (Auxland, 2020), where the use of the *-e* morpheme is encouraged as a gender-neutral marker instead of the *-o/-a* dichotomy; French (Knisely, 2020; Kosnick, 2019), where there is a consistent and tenacious boost for the use of new non-binary pronominal forms such as the pronoun *iel* or the direct object pronoun *lae*; and German (Körner et al., 2022), with the inclusion of the gender star form (*Die Apotheker\*innen*) which consist of the masculine form, followed by an asterisk, followed by the feminine ending. These linguistic innovations lead the way in making the realities of those societies visible.

In the case of Spanish, a language used as a first or second language by more than 600 million around the world, texts published by the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE) and by the Associations of Spanish Language Academies (ASELE) were considered to offer a sexist

view of the academic norm due to ideological motivations (Cárdenas Sánchez, 2015; Medina Guerra, 2016; Peris Vidal, 2013). Some of these GIL mechanisms, such as pair forms or the use of *-@* as inclusive morpheme, are considered redundant, unnecessary, contrived, ridiculous or even dangerous by Spanish linguistic authorities (Toche, 2019). They have even been labeled as impositions coming from some social and governmental sectors (Real Academia Española, 2020). As a counterpoint to this patriarchal and conservative view of language, a great deal of GIL material has been created (Guerrero Salazar, 2007, 2013), of an openly innovative character and including mechanisms to combat linguistic sexism. Table 1 lists the GIL procedures in Spanish classified according to their acceptance or non-acceptance by the academic authorities in Spanish (Gómez-Camacho et al., 2022):

**Table 1: GIL procedures in Spanish**

	<i>Normative procedures</i>	<i>Non normative procedures</i>
<i>Graphical level</i>	Slash <i>Estimados/as compañeros/as.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues”	Use of <i>-@</i> <i>*Estimad@s compañer@s.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues”  Use of <i>-x</i> <i>*Estimadx@s compañerxs.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues”  Use of <i>-e</i> <i>*Estimades compañeres.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues”
<i>Grammatical level</i>	Pair forms <i>Las chicas y los chicos esperaban al equipo a las puertas del hotel.</i> “The girls and boys were waiting for the team at the hotel entrance.”  <i>Muchas y muchos congresistas mostraron su desacuerdo con las propuestas de la oposición.</i> “Many [female and male] members of Congress disagreed with the Opposition's proposals.”  Syntactic change	Double article <i>*Las y los ciudadanos deben saber cuáles son sus derechos.</i> “[Female and male] Citizens must know what their rights are.”  Abbreviations in fixed expressions <i>*Médicos y Médicas sin Fronteras</i> “[Male and Female Doctors without Borders]”.  Mixed groups with explicit components <i>Marta Alberola y Antonio Brizna son el coordinador y la coordinadora de los cursos del Instituto Cervantes de Roma.</i>

<p><i>Lexical level</i></p>	<p><i>Durante diez días [los candidatos tienen la opción a] es posible adjuntar la documentación.</i>  “For ten days [male candidates have the option to] it is possible to attach the documentation.”</p> <p>Colective nouns  <i>el público [los espectadores], la gente, el personal, las personas, etc.</i>  “the audience [viewers], the people, the staff, the persons, etc.”</p> <p>Abstract nouns  <i>la abogacía [el abogado], la judicatura [los jueces], la adolescencia [los adolescentes], el electorado.</i>  “the advocacy [the male lawyer], the judiciary [the male judges], the adolescence [the male adolescents], the electorate.”</p> <p>Metonymy  <i>la dirección [el director], la clase política [los políticos].</i>  “the administration [the male director], the political class [the male politicians].”</p>	<p>“Marta Alberola and Antonio Brizna are the [male] coordinator and the [female] coordinator of the courses at the Cervantes Institute in Rome.”</p> <p>References to unespecific persons  <i>El nuevo administrador o la nueva administradora se incorporará al centro la próxima semana.</i>  “The new [male] administrator or the new [female] administrator will join the center next week.”</p> <p>References to representative persons  <i>No se invitó a ningún actor ni ninguna actriz al estreno de la película.</i>  “No actors or actresses were invited to the film's premiere.”</p>
	<hr/> <p><b><i>Gender-inclusive language and digital talk</i></b></p> <p>From a linguistic perspective, <i>digital talk</i> (Turner, 2010) holds a prominent position on Twitter. <i>Digital talk</i> can be defined as a written code that appears in online communications and is characterized by uses that differ from the standard writing code. Textisms are one of its main resources. Textisms are ‘contractions and nonstandard spellings specifically developed</p>	

to reduce the length of words for fast and cost-effective text messaging' (De Jonge and Kemp, 2012, pp. 49-50). In Spanish, the main textisms consist of the omission of graphemes or syllables (*toy* instead of *estoy*), the simplification of digraphs (*k* instead of *qu*, *w* instead of *gu*), and the use of numbers or symbols with a homophone function regarding certain phonemes (*x* instead of *por/para*, *+* instead of *más*, *to2* instead of *todos*) (Gómez-Camacho et al., 2018). Other innovative procedures that can be classified as *digitalk*-representative textisms and which are used as GIL mechanisms are *-@* or *-x* as a mark of gender-inclusiveness.

These textisms, especially the ones using *-@* or *-x* as a mark of inclusive gender, have been emphatically rejected by advocates of standard writing procedure (Real Academia Española-Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, 2009). However, online communication in Spanish seems to share a broader vision of the linguistic procedures. For example, Bengoechea and Simón (2014) report the acceptance of *-@* as an inclusive mark in the communities of students. This trend is also confirmed by Lomotey (2020), who examines the use of the *@* symbol among teachers and students of Spanish as a second language and concludes that it was not only accepted but also frequently used in their communication. More recently, Salinas (2020) analyzes the use of the *-x* mark to indicate inclusive gender in a group of university students of central or southern American origin in the United States, where the use of the term *Latinxs* has spread as an indicator of inclusiveness. Also, Bonnin and Coronel (2021) highlight a positive attitude toward new non-binary forms among Spanish speakers, especially the use of the *-e* morpheme as a mark of inclusive gender. These results have been corroborated by other studies, for example, Kalinowski (2020), which shows a positive perception among Spanish speakers as regards more innovative GIL procedures. Likewise, Gómez-Camacho et al. (2022) and Núñez-Román et al. (2021) also evidence that Spanish speakers displayed a greater degree of tolerance of textisms related to GIL

procedures in their online communications than in their non online ones, since some GIL mechanisms contrary to the Spanish normative grammar and orthography are widely accepted, ‘such as using the at symbol as a gender morpheme including masculine and feminine forms’ (Gómez-Camacho et al, 2022, p. 519).

### ***Gender-inclusive language and teachers’ online communications***

Several studies conducted in different languages and educational contexts examine the role of teachers in the dissemination of GIL as a tool for fighting gender discrimination, as students look to them as linguistic models (Garnham et al., 2012; Sarrasin et al., 2012). Works such as those by Pauwels and Winter (2006) or Valiente (2002) highlight the crucial role of teachers when adopting GIL procedures in their classes, since it promotes positive attitudes among students regarding inclusion and diversity. Pauwels and Winters’s study (2006, p. 138) confirms the teachers’ role ‘as *linguistic reformers* or at least as *implementers* or *spreaders*’ of linguistic reform’ (italics by the authors). Therefore, teachers’ use of GIL in educational spaces becomes a key asset in the fight against homophobic language (Poteat et al., 2019) in a gentle and unspoken manner (Sczesny et al., 2016). Similarly, Dessel et al. (2017) confirm that the language used by teachers determines the perception of the LGBTQ+ community, together with the terms students use when addressing or referring to the latter. As Poteat et al. (2019, p. 32) state ‘having conversations about homophobic language use could provide opportunities for teachers to establish norms in their class about this [homophobic] behaviour’. Lomotey (2018) highlights the role of young people as key agents in the dissemination of linguistic innovations, since ‘GIL recommendations that might presently be considered as novelties will have a higher potential of being adopted once they ‘catch on’ with this group of language users [young people] and become a habit, or, in linguistic terms, a language practice’ (2018, p. 395). Other studies, such as those of Tordoff et al. (2021) or



Patev et al. (2019), establish that using GIL in different educational contexts helps to overcome negative attitudes towards gender inclusivity. Tordoff et al. (2021), for example, emphasize that ‘transgender-inclusive language is critically important’ to describe “TNB [transgender and non-binary] bodies, experiences, and identities’ (2021, p. 163), because its use helps reducing the negative impact of non-inclusive language and favoring LGBTQ autonomy in relation to their decisions about their bodies and sexual health.

To date, several studies have explored face to face teaching spaces as GIL disseminators (Castillo et al., 2014; Jiménez Rodrigo et al., 2011; Parra and Serafini, 2021; Mitton et al., 2021; Vervecken et al., 2015). However, much less is known about teachers’ use of GIL in virtual communities such as social networks. Modern technologies have created more opportunities for ‘learning, affiliation, and identity’ (Gee, 2004, p. 81) in the context of Gee’s ‘affinity spaces’, understood as spaces —physical, virtual, or blended— in which people interact on the basis of a common interest, regardless of ethnicity, social class, gender, age or level of expertise, in order to gain individual knowledge and contribute to distribute knowledge. Among these virtual affinity spaces, Twitter plays a key role among teachers, who consider it a powerful channel for collaborating, sharing experiences, and acquiring knowledge and new professional contacts (Donelan, 2016; Carpenter and Krutka, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2016). In effect, Twitter ‘plays an important role in engaging educators in informal, just-in-time professional learning’ (Xing and Gao, 2018, p. 388). Staudt Willet (2019) examines why teachers used Twitter and he reaches the conclusion that they wanted to explore new ideas and offer tips and advice. Other studies highlight the technological benefits of the platform (Rehm and Notten, 2016), and its flexibility for professional development (Brit and Paulus, 2016). Also, there is the possibility of sharing educational resources and avoiding loneliness (Macià and García, 2016) and the sense of belonging to a community (Carpenter and Krutka, 2014). Additionally, Twitter offers emotional support (Luo and

Clifton, 2017; Noble et al., 2016) and allows teachers to develop their identity as educators (Carpenter et al., 2016).

Apart from all these advantages offered to teachers, Nagel (2018) portrays Twitter as a space containing cyberviolence against women and LGBTQIA communities and warns about the danger of transforming Twitter into a racially and identity-unitary cyberutopia, perpetuating the exclusion and marginalization of, among others, the LGTBQIA communities. Consequently, future teachers should ‘scaffold and model ways of using social networks as a pedagogical tool’ (Nagel, 2018, p. 93), overcoming these barriers.

In summary, teachers play a central role in the success of any linguistic reform aimed at gender equality, and social networks can be used as an excellent channel for the dissemination of good practice. Therefore, firstly, the generalized use of GIL procedures on Twitter in a teachers’ virtual community can be considered a clear indicator of the commitment towards gender equality and the dissemination of such GIL practices among fellow teachers in this highly influential social group. Second, it seems logical to assume that the digital writing associated with Twitter would facilitate the inclusion of GIL procedures that are specific of *digitalk*, which would turn Twitter into a space more open to linguistic innovations favouring gender equality.

Responding to this, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Spanish-speaking teachers use GIL in their communication in educational communities on Twitter?
2. Do Spanish-speaking teachers participating in these online educational communities incorporate specific textisms for GIL?

## **Methods and Data**

An exploratory study of teachers' use of GIL proceedings in Spanish was undertaken in virtual communities on Twitter. The sample was taken from Twitter because it is the most-used social network among teaching communities (Marcelo and Marcelo, 2021; Luo et al., 2020). This study utilised a mixed methodology based on public data mining (Kimmons & Veletsianos 2018) and semantic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017). This methodology implies the use of digital tracking to pull, organise, and analyse data most efficiently in samples drawn from large populations that represent people in virtual communities (Kimmons and Veletsianos, 2018).

The API Twitter v2 search tool was used to retrieve tweets in Spain which contained the key words *educación* [education], *primaria* [primary] and *secundaria* [secondary], together with following hashtags *#claustrvirtual* and *#soymaestro*, as it is content widely used in teacher educative communities (Xing and Gao, 2018). Similar hashtags were added to the sample (*#eduhora*, *#claustrvirtual*, *#SerProfeMola*, *#otraeducaciónesposible*, *#profesquemolan*, and *#orgullodocente*). The criteria applied for the selection of the hashtags were that they were written in Spanish and located preferably in Spain, along with longevity, activity and asynchrony of the conversations, and the number of participants. Data collection started in January 2018 and ended in July 2021. A total of 25,570 tweets were retrieved.

Using the software Sketch Engine (SE), a total of 540 words and n-grams referring to women were extracted, both in the form of generic masculine, which does not render women visible, and the explicit use of GIL procedures. From this list, seven categories (Table 1) were created from the comparison between the inclusive language procedures used in Spanish (Núñez-Román et al., 2020) and those textisms specific for Spanish *digitalk*.

**Table 1: Categories**

<i>Linguistic mechanism</i>	<i>Example</i>
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<i>Digitaltalk</i>	Use of @  Use of -x	<i>Estimad@s compañer@s.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues” <i>Estimadxs compañerxs</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues”
<i>Standard writing</i>	Slash  Use of -e as non-binary morpheme  Double article     Pair forms        Collective nouns	<i>Estimados/as compañeros/as.</i> “Dear [male and female] colleagues” <i>Les chiques.</i> “Boys and girls” <i>Las y los ciudadanos deben saber cuáles son sus derechos.</i> “[Female and male] Citizens must know what their rights are.”  <i>Las chicas y los chicos esperaban al equipo a las puertas del hotel.</i> “The girls and boys were waiting for the team at the hotel entrance.”  <i>El público le dedicó [los espectadores le dedicaron] una larga ovación.</i> “The audience gave him [the male spectators gave him] a standing ovation.”

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A Python 3.0 script performed a content analysis and automatically assigned those categories as Boolean variables to 9322 tweets, which correspond to the sample of the study. Only those tweets where it was possible to observe sexist language and which, consequently, could or could not use GIL procedures were analysed. SE was also used to measure the relevance of keywords with the *keyness* index, which indicates ‘statistical significance’ in the frequency with which a word, a multi-word expression or an n-gram appears in the studied sample in relation to a 16-billion-word Sketch Engine “Spanish Web 2018” reference corpus (Gabrielatos, 2018; Firoozeh et al., 2020; Pérez-Paredes, 2021). Those words, or n-grams that reached the higher *keyness* index show the ‘representation of socially important concepts’ in the sample (Scott, 1997, p. 223). A statistical descriptive analysis was performed using the SPSS Statistics Version 26 software.

## Results

Results show that 48.6% ( $n = 4,526$ ) of the written tweets by teachers use GIL procedures when representing women, and 51.4% ( $n = 4,796$ ) do not include them. Among those GIL procedures, 76.6% ( $n = 3,472$ ) correspond to standard writing procedures, whereas 23.4% ( $n = 1,054$ ) are textisms (Table 2).

**Table 2: GIL Mechanisms**

	<i>Linguistic mechanism</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Digitalk</i>	Use of @	559	12.4
	Use of -x	495	11.0
<i>Standard writing</i>	Slash	228	5
	Use of -e as non-binary morpheme	8	0.2
	Double article	61	1.3
	Pair forms	376	8.3
	Collective nouns	2,799	61.8
<b><i>Total</i></b>		<b>4,526</b>	<b>100%</b>

The GIL procedure most favoured by teachers in their virtual interactions is the use of collective nouns, which appears in 61.8% ( $n = 2,799$ ) of the messages. Their second and third preferences are both textisms, specifically the use of -@ (14.4%,  $n = 559$ ) and -x (11%,  $n = 495$ ).

The use of textisms as a GIL procedure clearly outweighs those mechanisms characteristic of standard writing, such as pair forms (8.3%,  $n = 376$ ) and the use of the

double article (1.3%,  $n = 61$ ). Anecdotally, the use of -e as a non-binary grammatical morpheme also appears in the corpus (0.2%,  $n = 8$ ).

Table 3 shows the *keyness* index of words and n-grams that contain GIL procedures. Even though the most used procedure was the use of collective nouns, textisms offered a much higher *keyness* index, specifically for those words which include the -x grapheme as a gender mark in words (*todxs*, *alumnxs*, *lxs*, *niñxs*, *maestrxs*), multi-word terms and n-grams (*lxs niñxs*, *todxs lxs*, *lxs chicxs*, *nuestrxs alumnxs*). The *keyness* index of these textisms is higher than that of the average of the keywords ( $\bar{x} = 39.589$ ), which denotes the social relevance of these words in the analysed sample. In this regard, it is particularly revealing that, when referring to students, the textism *alumxs* shows a higher *keyness* index ( $\bar{x} = 44.59$ ) than the standard *alumnos* ( $\bar{x} = 31.89$ ), which indicates a higher statistical significance in the sample.

**Table 3: *Keyness* of words and n-grams with GIL procedures**

	<i>Normalized frequency</i>	<i>Keyness</i>
<i>alumnado</i> “student body”	1975.71	147.958
<i>todxs</i> “everyone”	119.21	75.686
<i>alumnxs</i> “[male and female] students”	44.70	44.59
<i>lxs</i> “the -masculine/feminine plural-”	109.28	38.646
<i>niñxs</i> “[male and female] children”	34.77	32.099
<i>maestrxs</i> “[male and female] teachers”	22.35	23.11
<i>profesorado</i> “teaching staff”	265,75	21.443
<i>lxs docente</i> “[male and female] teachers”	17.38	18.004
<i>lxs niñxs</i> “[male and female] children”	12.41	13.024
<i>todxs lxs</i> “[male and female] all the”	12.41	12.08
<i>lxs chicxs</i> “boys and girls”	9.93	10.84

<i>nuestrxs alumnxs</i> “our [male and female] students”	4.96	5.961
<i>lxs maestrxs</i> “[male and female] teachers”	4.96	5.946

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## Discussion

The results show that users of the teachers’ virtual communities that were studied: (1) make widespread use of GIL procedures; (2) prefer the use of collective nouns as a GIL procedure; and (3) intentionally incorporate GIL into *digitalk* through specific textisms. Therefore, results seem to indicate that teachers participating in online educational communities on Twitter show a high responsiveness in the dissemination of GIL on Twitter and they intentionally use of innovative GIL procedures.

Firstly, the results show that teachers regularly use GIL resources when communicating on Twitter, as they are in almost half the sample messages. These data prove, in a context of real usage, the progressive dissemination of GIL, which has already been observed by Nissen (2013), Bengoechea and Simón (2014) and Lomotey (2020). Additionally, those data referring to the use of GIL in the sample are notably higher than those obtained by Núñez-Román et al. (2020) regarding preservice teachers’ written texts, in which only 23.4% used GIL. Likewise, the high percentage of GIL use in this study indicates an evolution from the results obtained by Jiménez Rodrigo et al. (2011) or Patev et al. (2019), which acknowledged language economy or low exposure to GIL as some of the factors hampering its dissemination.

Secondly, the use of collective nouns (61.8%) is a preferred GIL procedure, as it is the teachers’ favoured GIL procedure for their interactions in virtual communities on Twitter. It must be noted that this procedure has been considered inadequate in the fight against linguistic sexism, as it is deemed that collective nouns ‘might result in contributing to reducing the visibility of gender biases, but not in correcting or mitigating them’ (Gabriel et al., 2018, p. 851). These data are consistent with those of Núñez-Román et al. (2020) and

Gómez-Camacho et al. (2022), which show that the use of collective nouns reached a higher degree of use and acceptance among the study participants. Other distinctive writing standard procedures appearing in the sample are pair forms (8.3%), double article (1.3%), or the *-e* morpheme as a non-binary mark (0.2%). Despite the positive effect of pair forms on women's visibility (Gabriel et al., 2018), the Real Academia Española-Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (2009) still consider them unnecessary and redundant. However, the results indicate that teachers prefer to use this procedure. In this regard, Sarrasin et al (2012), Nissen (2013) and Núñez-Román et al. (2020) obtained similar results. It is interesting to note that the data revealed the limited propagation of *e-* as a non-binary morpheme (0.2%), despite being an innovation with a deep social influence in terms of representation of the non-binary gender as shown in the works of Kalinowski (2020) and Bonnin and Coronel (2021).

Concerning the second research question, the presence of textisms characteristic of *digitalk*, such as *-@* or *-x*, is relevant. These textisms represent 23.4% of the GIL procedures in the sample. This is a substantial percentage given that the Spanish linguistic academic institutions emphatically advise against the use of such textisms. Results indicate that they are readily accepted as elements included in *digitalk*, and, what is more, they are intentionally used as they are highly efficient in GIL. Thus, these two procedures are widespread in the digital context, as argued by previous studies (Parra and Serafini, 2021). Furthermore, these findings not only broadly support but also widen the conclusions reached by Bengoechea and Simón (2014), Lomotey (2020) and Gómez-Camacho et al. (2022), whose studies established that the *-@* was generally accepted by preservice teachers as an inclusive mark if that entailed a more equitable use of language. These results place Spanish in a situation similar to that of other languages (Bradley, 2020; Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015, 2021; Lindqvist et al., 2019) regarding the creation of more innovative and inclusive GIL procedures.



Ultimately, results offered by the *keyness* index confirm the social relevance of those textisms used as GIL procedures in Spanish *digitalk*, explicitly the expressions *lxs*, *todxs*, *nuestrxs*, *niñxs*, *maestrxs*, *chicxs*, *alumnxs* and *nuestrxs alumnxs*. These data are in line with those collected by Kalinowski (2020), who reduces the occurrence of textisms with GIL function to a restricted set of terms coinciding with those obtained in our corpus. These data seem to confirm that this GIL procedure starts with particular ‘emblematic intervention-receiving words’, with a high frequency of use that function as ‘neological discourse markers’ (Kalinowski, 2020, p. 254), and then moves on to other terms that are less frequent or that appear syntactically related to those words.

## **Conclusion**

The current study found that there is an ongoing use of Gender-Inclusive Language among teachers participating in online educational communities on Twitter. GIL is intentionally incorporated in their digital communication through specific textisms. Twitter, therefore, seems to be a privileged space for gender-oriented linguistic innovations, as it appears to be less constrained by academic restrictions.

Data show that teachers widely use GIL in their interactions in virtual communities on Twitter. This makes teachers an essential group for GIL dissemination, and not only in the classroom but also in intraprofessional contexts involving other teachers. Thus, the repeated and intentional use of GIL by teachers on Twitter normalises GIL and can trigger a positive perception of it in other users, even though it might be argued that it could provoke a backlash from other users who are against such inclusive language procedures. As Sczesny et al. (2016, p. 7) put it: ‘a subtle and implicit way of promoting the use of GIL’.

When using GIL, teachers use collective nouns as the main procedure so as not to refer to or represent women in the masculine form on Twitter. The main conclusion to

emerge from this study is the identification of what we have named *gender-inclusive textisms (GIT)*, with a social relevance indisputably confirmed through the SE keywords' *keyness* index. It was not possible to assess the social relevance of the use of -@ as a GIT, since -@ is not a letter of the Spanish alphabet and does not appear in the SE reference corpus. Even though further research is still to prove whether the use of -@ as a GIT is of higher social relevance than that of the -x, as a mere speculation, it is reasonable to suppose so.

In summary, the *digitalk* used in educational communities, especially when dealing with GIT, indicates that Twitter is a privileged space for linguistic innovations oriented toward gender equality.

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