



Guidelines for Gender-Sensitive Language

Visual Analytics in Data-driven Journalism (VALID) is a research project that investigates and develops the field of data-driven journalism. It studies data-journalistic routines and creates tools that will help journalists to better work with heterogenous data sources.

<http://www.validproject.at/>

Deliverable 6.3

1. Introduction

“Language not only reflects the way writers think; it also shapes the thinking of listeners or readers and influences their behaviour. Word choices often carry unconscious assumptions about gender roles. The use of terms only referring to males is not accepted anymore, as excluding women is considered an offence. Language should therefore be used with a high degree of precision.” (Hayek, n.d.)

Women are still underrepresented today in numerous fields of technology. It is argued that in theory gender as well as technology are results of social construction. Gender and technology are argued to be co-constructed and are determined alternately (Paulitz, 2010). They are considered to be cause and consequence of gender ratio (Wolffram, 2006). We observe a similar gender gap also in data-driven journalism (DDJ). The majority of practitioners in DDJ today seem to be men. There are initiatives aiming at closing this gap by teaching women DDJ-skills¹.

With these guidelines on gender-sensitive language we want to emphasize female contribution in the work that is conducted for our project. The following guidelines shall offer ways to handle gender-neutral/gender-sensitive language within the VALiD project.

Note: When considering diversity, Gender is only one aspect. Other factors which have to be taken into account are, for example, age, social background or education. For more information have a look at the [“4 Layers of Diversity”-Model by Gardenswartz and Rowe](#).

¹ E.g. Chicas Poderosas (<http://chicaspoderosas.org/>), a Latin American platform supporting women in newsroom technologies. Rails Girls (<http://railsgirls.com>) offers Ruby courses by women for women.

2. Gender-sensitive language

2.1 For publications in English

Note: The following suggestions are based on guidelines for using gender-sensitive language by Reutlingen University (2012), UNESCO (Desprez-Bouanchaud, Doolaeye & Ruprecht, 1999), United Nations (Hayek, n.d.) and The National Council for Teachers of English (2015).

a. Use the plural to avoid using "his"

Exclusionary example: Each associate should come to the meeting with his assignments completed.

Inclusionary alternative: All associates should come to the meeting with their assignments completed.

b. Omit the pronoun

Exclusionary example: Each professor should send one of his assistants to the conference.

Inclusionary alternative: Each professor should send one assistant to the conference.

c. Use "his or her", "he/she" or "s/he" when you need to stress the involvement of an individual

d. Use the second person (you) instead of the third person (he) when it is possible and appropriate

e. Use "they" + plural form when it is possible

Exclusionary example: A student's beliefs about gender equality may be based on what he has heard in the popular media.

Inclusionary alternative: Students' beliefs about gender equality may be based on what they have heard in the popular media.

f. Use gender-neutral nouns

<i>Exclusionary term</i>	<i>Inclusionary alternative</i>
mankind	humanity
chairman	chair or chairperson
alumni	graduates

Further examples can be found here:

UNESCO: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950mo.pdf>

United Nations: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/conference/1400199.pdf>

g. Use "Ms." instead of "Mrs." and "Miss" when addressing a woman

h. Substitute a participial phrase for a clause

Exclusionary example: Listen to the two-year-old as he uses his short, simple sentences to communicate.

Inclusionary alternative: Listen to the two-year-old using short, simple sentences to communicate.

2.2 Für Publikationen auf Deutsch

Auch für deutschsprachige Publikationen empfiehlt es sich, dem Thema Gender Beachtung zu schenken. Experimente von Stahlenberg & Sczesny (zitiert in Wächter, 2009, S. 69) haben gezeigt, dass Texte, geschrieben im generischen Maskulinum, die RezipientInnen eher an Männer als bezeichnete Personen denken lassen. Neutrale Formulierungen sowie ein ausgewogener Gebrauch von weiblichen und männlichen Versionen, resultieren hingegen in einer Beachtung beider Geschlechter (Wächter, 2009). Deshalb sollte der Fokus in der Formulierung auf inklusiven Formen wie "Studierende" oder "Belegschaft" liegen.

Weitere Vorschläge zur Formulierung basierend auf den Richtlinien der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (Badelt et al, 2009):

a. Geschlechtsneutrale Personenbezeichnung und Pluralform

Beispiel: die Person/die Personen, das Mitglied/die Mitglieder, Belegschaft, Studierende

b. Binnen-I

Wir empfehlen eine moderate Form des "Binnen-I".

Beispiel: ProfessorInnen, MitarbeiterInnen

Aber: kein Binnen-I bei Komposita

Beispiel: "Journalistenkonferenz" nicht "JournalistInnenkonferenz"

c. Kollektiv- und Funktionsbezeichnungen

Beispiel: die Geschäftsführung, das Projektteam

d. Passiv

Beispiel: Die Tools wurden vom Projektteam gemeinsam entwickelt.

Anstatt: Die Mitglieder des Teams haben die Tools gemeinsam entwickelt.

2.3 Visual communication

Gender also plays an important role in visual communication. Stereotypes and clichés should not be encouraged by rash decisions. Aspects which should be taken into account when choosing pictures for publications:

- clothing (business, leisure, etc.)
- position (who is sitting/standing, active/passive)
- arrangement of people (foreground/background)
- picture details (picture size, facial expressions, colour)
- surroundings (men at work, women with family)

On the application side, research suggests that women and men handle interfaces differently (Beckwitt & Burneth, 2004). We deduce that this holds true for DDJ projects as well. Therefore, we take these findings into account in the decision-making process for application scenarios and topics as we want to actively integrate women into DDJ.

3. References and further information

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http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/wist2_sustainable-careers-report_en.pdf

Wolffram, A. (2006). Prozesse sozialer (Un-)Gleichheit durch Ko-Konstruktionen von Technik und Geschlecht. In K.-S. Rehberg (Ed.), *Soziale Ungleichheit, kulturelle Unterschiede: Verhandlungen des 32. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in München. Teilbd. 1 und 2* (pp. 3107–3116). Campus Verl. Retrieved from <http://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/17371>

Further information:

FH JOANNEUM:

https://www.fh-joanneum.at/aw/home/leitbild/gleichbehandlung/Gender_Mainstreaming/~bsoo/Sprache/?lan=de

FH St. Pölten:

[Download Leitfaden - Fachhochschule St. Pölten](#) (direct download)

Universität Wien:

<https://gleichstellung.univie.ac.at/gleichstellung-und-diversitaet/sensibilisierung-veranstaltungen/geschlechtergerechte-sprache/>

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