THE USE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE. BARRIERS AND DETERMINANTS

USO DEL LENGUAJE NEUTRO CON PERSPECTIVA DE DE GENERO. BARRERAS Y DETERMINANTES

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RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de este estudio consiste en examinar las percepciones sobre el nivel de uso del lenguaje neutro con perspectiva de género (LNG) en español, mediante un cuestionario que ha sido aplicado al profesorado universitario de una facultad del campo jurídico-económico. Además, se han identificado las barreras y variables que influyen en este proceso. La mayor importancia otorgada al uso del LNG se encontró en el área de la enseñanza y la investigación. Pero hay un largo camino por recorrer, y aún más, si hablamos de materiales no producidos personalmente, sino recomendados al alumnado. La principal barrera en la sociedad parece ser una falta de conciencia, relacionada con una costumbre machista y social. El profesorado encuestado no ha introducido totalmente un LNG en sus materiales debido a razones más prácticas, como la complejidad de las fórmulas alternativas y con el fin de simplificar o ahorrar tiempo. El género de la persona encuestada no es una variable estadísticamente significativa para el uso de un LNG, mientras que la formación previa sí lo es, lo que puede contribuir a diseñar iniciativas más eficaces para aumentar la conciencia, tanto en la comunidad universitaria como en la profesional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Recursos Humanos; Género; Lenguaje no sexista; Educación superior;

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to examine the perceptions about the level of use of gender-neutral language (GNL) in Spanish. A survey has been designed and used to analyze the opinions of university teachers in a legal and economic field Faculty. In addition, the barriers and variables that influence this process have been identified. The highest importance given to the use of GNL was found in the area of *teaching and research*. But there is a long way to go if we speak of *other materials* not produced by themselves but recommended to students. The principle barrier in society appear to be a lack of awareness, related to a *male chauvinistic* and *social custom*. Lecturers have not totally introduced GNL in materials they prepare due to more practical reasons, such as *complexity of alternative formulas* and *in order to simplify* or save time. *Gender* of the respondent is not a statistically significant variable for use of GNL, whereas *prior training* is, which may contribute to designing more efficacious initiatives to increase awareness in the community, both university and professional.

KEYWORDS: Human Resources; Gender; Non-sexist language; Higher education;

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and the integral respect of women's rights are essential for achieving the *Millennium Development Goals* (OECD 2015). Nevertheless, none of the 145 countries surveyed achieved gender equality based on gender by political, economic, educational, and health standards (WEF 2015). In Spain important efforts have been made to promote gender awareness in education and in areas as advertising and media communication (De los Ríos & Martínez, 1997; García y Martínez, 2009; Navarro, 2013). Notwhistanding additional efforts are still likely needed in legal and economic areas. The legal area is relevant due to the importance of the drafting and implementation of norms and regulations, as well as the field of economics due to the importance of economic activity itself, in the status and development of a society. Companies are protagonists of the natural incorporation of women but there is still a problem of inequality (CEOE, 2016). Even in a case of state-feminism like Sweden the labour market is strongly sex-differentiated (Nyström, 2009). As a consequence, in an organizational context a redesign of labour relations is required, so that women, and the values and behaviors stereotypically associated with the female-gender role, acquire the relevance required by the new global scenario (Amillano et al. 2016).

The gender perspective includes diverse topics such as political empowerment of women, co-responsibility in care tasks, etc. (Rebollo et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013; Lledó, 2016). In the Autonomous Community of Euskadi (Basque Country) the extension of this issue to the institutional sphere was reflected in the creation of *Emakunde* (Basque Institute of Women) in 1988 and after in 1991 in the enactment of the I Positive Action Plan for Women by the Bsaque Autonomous Goverment (1991-1994). Notwithstanding, this article focuses on the specific issue of non-sexist, gender-fair or gender-neutral language (GNL). There are some discursive spaces in which the role that language plays in the life of women makes necessary an intervention, namely the public discourse and the classroom (Bengoechea, 2002). Since in most contexts a person's sex is –or should be- irrelevant, the purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by impling that one sex is superior to the other (EP, 2008).

For Spanish language, many recommendations have been made concerning the use of GNL in last three decades (Ministerio, 1988; EMAKUNDE, 1990; Lledó, 1992; UNESCO, 1996; Bengoechea,

2000; ILO, 2006; Krugova, 2007; Bravo, 2012; Nissen, 2013). But the use of a GNL is not achieved yet in Spain in regulatory drafting (Centenera, 2014). In a company context there also is a bias in the recruiting process that could be reduced using different types of words in job descriptions (Collier & Zhang, 2016). In general woman should be made visible in Spanish and the use of terms such as "directiva" (directive woman) or "empresaria" (business woman) should be promoted (Saitua, 2015, p.14; CEOE, 2016, p.21).

Using gender-neutral language is more than a matter of political correctness (EP, 2008) because language is not a neutral vehicle in the representation of reality as it is necessarily laden with social values. The main argument against GNL is that change is too difficult even if these barriers may change over time (Vergoossen et al. 2016). All in all, introduction of non-sexist terms does not guarantee non-sexist usage: the relative success of attempts at gender-based language reform is dependent on the social context in which the language reform occurs (Ehrlich & King, 1992) so, when talking about gender, linguistic gender and language, we are never talking only about language because the obstacles are ideological (Lledó, 2002). Past research has revealed that GNL has the potential to make significant contributions to the reduction of gender stereotyping and discrimination, but a deliberate effort is required before the use of GNL can become habitual and education and policy-making can facilitate these processes (Sczesny et al., 2016).

In the field of education, largest efforts to date have possibly been made at earlier stages, i.e. primary and secondary education, but the training of the sensitivity of people towards the use of a GNL must culminate at the highest level (Bengoechea, 2002). Notwithstanding the University has not yet achieved full implementation of the recommendations on GNL in English (Benson et al, 2013) or Spanish (Kaufmann & Bohner, 2014) where are even considered unnecessary by the Spanish Royal Academy of Language (Bosque, 2012, p.16) even if European Parliament fully endorses the principle of gender equality and points that the language it uses should reflect this (EP, 2008). Concerning the work of philosophers, Warren (1986) pointed that "as scholars and teachers we pursue truth wherever it leads: to the reform of our ordinary concepts and beliefs and if necessary of our every day language" (Warren, 1986, p.1). Following this argument we believe that it is of interest to collect the perception of the faculty that colaborate to train the people who will be professionals in the future.

Within this context, to the best of our knolwledge this is the first work that gathers perceptions of lecturers about their use of GNL in Spain. The population for this study was comprised of lecturers who teach in the Faculty of Labour Relations and Social Work at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). We expected that the opinions of these lecturers would be particularly sensitive to the issue, first, because of the type of courses taught here which include subjects related to *social justice* in their course contents (protection of labour rights, etc.), and also because this Faculty pioneered the development of a diagnosis and plan of equality (UPV/EHU, 2003), thus leading to greater sensitivity about the issue.

The aim of this paper was twofold; first, we present our findings regarding the perceptions of university lecturers who teach in the legal and economic field, in relation to the language they use in their teaching activity. Second, we analyze some variables or determinant factors which could explain differences in the use of GNL. Following this introduction, section two establishes the theoretical framework within which this subject is placed; the third section describes the methodology and results of this study, and the fourth ends with the conclusions and suggests some future research avenues.

2. GENDER AND LANGUAGE. THE MASCULINE GENERICS ISSUE

The speech act theory focusses on the performative aspects of language, i.e., "doing things with words" (Austin, 1962) which links the socio-cultural with the semiotic tradition (Merkl-Davies & Brennan, 2017, p.446). But does being a man or woman affect the way we are being talked about? Or is it written about us? (Miller & Swift, 1976). The interest in these matters of gender and language goes back to at least the end of the nineteenth century, as shown by the newspaper *The Revolution* published in New York between 1868 and 1871 (West et al., 2000). In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton criticized the use of generic masculine pronouns, but it was only with the rebirth of feminism in 1960-1970 when a socio-conceptual construction of gender was developed in language, first in the United States of America (USA) and later, in several European countries (Michard and Viollet 1991, p.53). These studies dealt generally with how gender stereotypes in language are interpreted by men and women, or with how verbal interactions between women and men take place in different environments such as school, etc. The taking of the word by the woman will affect the language (Calero Vaquera, 2002, p.9) but studies made visible the androcentric language bias, mainly from a psycholinguistic perspective (Kaufmann & Bohner

2014, p.11), arguing that use of language creates, constitutes, promotes, or exploits an unfair and irrelevant dinstinction between the sexes (Vetterling-Braggin, 1981). This would seem to prevent the promotion of the desired equality between men and women.

While *sex* is the organic condition, male or female, of animals and plants and also the group of beings belonging to the same sex, *gender* is the group to which human beings of each sex belong, i.e. gender is defined on a socio-cultural basis, rather than a purely biological one, constituing the identity it is purported to be (Butler, 1990). "Feminine" or "masculine" social constructs of gender are not neutral but linked to institutionalized power relations within societies; power relations are asymmetric so that women's interests are systematically subordinated to the interests of men, and a fundamental domain in which gender is constructed is language (West et al., 2000). In this context, the term "sexism" originally used to refer to practices that discriminated against women, includes any usage -actions or words- that unfairly delimits the aspirations of either sex (NTCE, 1975, p.3).

Language plays a central role in socialization, but it is contextual since it has no existence outside the context, which implies that "meaning is radically indeterminate and variable" (Cameron, 1992, p.334). When related to human rights including the right to employment, language should not promote a single gender as a universal category, nor should it maintain prejudices (ILO 2006, p.86). Eliminating sexist language will not eliminate sexist conduct, but as the language is liberated from sexist usages and assumptions, women and men will begin to share more equal roles (NTCE, 1975, p.3). In this sense many decades ago different recommendations were made in the English language context for different professions (APA, 1977; Warren, 1986; EP, 2008). Some common issues to most languages in the European Community are the names, marital status and titles of women, and also the names of proffesions and functions (EP, 2008). But among the recommendations, the use, impact and change of masculine generics have been the most important theme in the debate for and against a feminist language (Kaufmann and Bohner, 2014) because every ocurrence of the generic use is problematic (Warren, 1986). There are examples in all types of language (e.g. in English, when the word "man" is used to refer to "humans", e.g. "mankind"), but its frequency is higher in languages with grammatical gender (Stahlberg et al. 2007, p.169).

In all language systems, gender is represented in some way. There are some *genderless languages*, where gender is neither present in nouns nor in pronouns, such as Turkish, Finnish or Chinese, so that gender is only expressed by lexical meanings. This is the case in Basque *(Euskera)* where for example, son is "*seme*", daughter is "*alaba*", and the generic word "children" (which also includes daughters) is "*seme-alabak*". In *natural gender* languages such as English and Swedish, there isn't a mark for gender associated with nouns, so most nouns refer to both genders (e.g. in English, *"manager"*). However, pronouns do reflect people's gender *("**his** or **her** manager").* The situation in Sweden is unique because in 2012 a third gender-neutral pronoun *hen* was proposed as an addition to the already existing Swedish pronouns for "she" (*hon*) and "he" (*han*) that actually have reached the broader population of language users (Gustafsson et al., 2015, p.2). In contrast, in *grammatical gender* languages such as Spanish, French, German or Russian, gender is encoded as a grammatical category, so that each noun is masculine, feminine or in some cases neutral, and almost all personal nouns, adjectives and pronouns are gendered (e.g. in Spanish, *"una trabajadora francesa"* with the "a" indicating the female gender).

Asymmetries in relation to gender can be found in the three types of language, but the key question is whether the genders are treated equally linguistically. In Spanish, all nouns have a gender mark which is either masculine (preceded by "*el*" or "*un*") or feminine (preceded by "*la*" or "*una*"). And most nouns are of the same gender and sex they purport to represent, such as "*hijo*" (son) or "*hija*" (daughter). The masculine generic in this case consists of using the word "*niños*" (children) to designate both boys and girls. What happens here is that when the masculine generic form is used, a natural link is being established with the male category, whereas the female category remains hidden (UNESCO, 1996). General recommendations have been the susbstitution of the "masculine generic" that show masculine concordance with their modifiers ("los alumnos") by gender-neutral ("alumnado") o gender-explicit references ("las alumnas y los alumnos") (Nissen, 2013, p.102).

Kaufmann and Bohrer (2014) review studies about other languages, such as French, Dutch and Norwegian, but note the lack of Spanish studies in the databases of the international publications consulted. In their experiment with 195 university students in Chile, they presented several texts starting either by using the generic masculine form, the slash "/" (for male / female) or an "x" mark (e.g. *tres amig**x**s*) and asked them to continue the story with two or three more sentences indicating the names of

the main characters. In view of the gender distribution of the names given in the story, taking this as a measure of the gender associations that participants made while using the Spanish language, the authors recommend the use of the slash "/" instead of using the "x" mark, for it achieves greater success in decreasing the gender bias association, even for masculine participants, and made the feminine form more visible. These results also confirmed that the gender of the participants played an explanatory role in the gender associations carried out, corroborating the feminist thesis that that the generic masculine forms represent a socially dominant masculine norm and that "language matters". Therefore, they strongly recommend the use of a gender conscious and consistent language in every possible context (Kaufmann and Bohrer 2014, p.14). In Spain, Nissen (2013, p.99) also found that the gender fair recommendation to make women more visible in public discourse is best achieved by explicit referring to women, and that this result appear to be stable over time (in 1995 and in 2005).

On the other hand, a perception study by Parks and Roberton (2005) gathered the opinions of 402 students from 5 universities in the USA during 2003, using a 1-5 Likert type scale-21 items questionnaire, was intended to be an "inventory of attitudes toward sexist language". In previous studies the authors had observed that gender was an explanatory factor for sexist language (women were more receptive to inclusive language), whereas in this paper, they found that as the students got older, people were more receptive to inclusive language (although there was a weak correlation) and that age was more significant for men than for women. In Spain, when Jiménez et al. (2011) surveyed university students, they also found that sensitivity to gender in language was influenced by the subjects' gender.

All in all, when employed consistently over a longer period, and especially when supported by well-informed controversies and discussions, GNL will contribute even more to the reduction of gender stereotyping and discrimination and may thus function as another barometer for change (Sczesny et al., 2016, p.8). But as the body of existing evidence is based mainly on experimental paradigms with different kinds of measures, the authors claim that research should take a closer look on people's actual language use in everyday life (e.g., in conversations, in the classroom, in social media or organizational communication). The present article intends to remedy the lack of empirical research in relation to Spanish by providing an anaysis of perceptions about the language use by lecturers in their teaching activity.

3. METHODOLOGY, ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

3.1 Objectives, hypotheses and methodology

The main objectives of the present study are: a) to explore university lecturers' perceptions about the use of sexist language in different contexts around their teaching. Our specific objectives were: i) to assess the importance given to the use of GNL; ii) to establish the extent of its usage in the materials they personally produced for teaching, and iii) to identify the difficulties or obstacles lecturers face in this process. To this end, a questionnaire was designed based on Jiménez et al. (2011); b) to verify if there are significant differences in lecturers' use of GNL depending on certain determinant factors or characteristics (*gender* and *previous training*) of the lecturers involved.

Even if there are mixed results (Sczesny et al., 2016) previous studies have demonstrated that the surveyed female students are more receptive to GNL than the male students (Parks and Roberton 2005; Jiménez et al. 2011) and that the gender of participants is an explanatory factor for gender associations (Kaufmann and Bohrer 2014). Therefore we propose the following hypothesis: **H1** *Female lecturers tend to use more a GNL in personally prepared materials for teaching than male lecturers*.

On the other hand, a deliberate effort is required before the use of GNL can become habitual and education and policy-making can facilitate these processes (Sczesny et al., 2016). In Sweden, when the third gender-neutral pronoun *hen* was proposed as an addition to the already existing Swedish pronouns for "she" and "he", Gustafsson et al (2015) conclude that although the first responses may be negative, attitudes can normalize and that it is hoping to motivate language amendments and initiatives for GNL. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that: **H2** *Lecturers who have received prior training regarding non-sexist language include more a GNL when preparing materials for teaching*.

Similar to García et al. (2009), the questionnaire contains 29 multiple choice items with a Likert style gradient (quantitative scale interval) with a 1 ("nothing") to 5 ("very much") scale, including 6 items to collect data regarding the socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, etc.) of the participants.

The population for this study was comprised of lecturers who teach in the Faculty of Labour Relations and Social Work at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), either at a degree level, or/and in official postgraduate courses (official Masters in *Management of Human Resources and*

Employment and official Masters in *Occupational Safety and Health*), including lecturers from outside the UPV/EHU. We expected that the opinions of these lecturers would be particularly sensitive to the issue, first, because of the type of courses taught here (Degree in *Labour Relations and Human Resources*, and Degree in *Social Work*) which include subjects related to *social justice* in their course contents (protection of labour rights, etc.), and also because the former School of Labour Relations (nowadays a part of the Faculty analysed) pioneered the development of a diagnosis and plan of equality (UPV/EHU, 2003), thus leading to greater sensitivity about the issue. By surveying the entire population, no sampling technique was required.

The survey was disseminated via e-mail in April 2016 to a total of 167 people: 94 women (56.3%) and 73 men (43.7%). Data was collected online using *encuestafacil.com[1]*.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Socio-demographic data

The survey began with a total of 70 people (41.9% response rate). However, 20% of participants who had started the survey did not complete it. Among the people who completed the survey, the majority (62.5%) were women, compared with 37.5% men (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender of people who responded to the survey.

	Frequency	Percent
Men	21	37.5
Women	35	62.5
Total	56	100.0

The majority of people (55.4%) were in the 45 to 54 years old interval, and in the over 55 years old interval (23.2%) (Table 2).

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[1] A polling service provided by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), in collaboration with Universia.

Table 2. Age of people who responded to the survey

	Frequency	Percent
Under 35	4	7.1
35 to 44 years	8	14.3
45 to 54 years	31	55.4
Over 55	13	23.2
Total	56	100.0

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3.2.2 Perceived importance of the use of gender neutral language

First of all we analyzed the perceived relevance of gender in language in various areas. When asked about the importance of GNL in *family relationships and friendships*, the majority (63.8%) answered "much" or "very much", although 22.4% responded "little" or "nothing" (Table 3A). The importance given to GNL in *informal academic interactions* with students and other staff increased, since the responses "much" or "very much" reached 75.4%, with 12.3% answering "little" or "nothing" (Table 3B).

Table 3. Importance given to GNL in **(A)** family relationships and friendships and in **(B)** informal academic interactions.

	(A) Family and Friends			**(B)** Informal Academics		
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Not at all	7	12.1		5	8.8	
Little	6	10.3		2	3.5	
Medium	8	13.8		7	12.3	
Much	12	20.7		10	17.5	
Very much	25	43.1		33	57.9	
Total	58	100.0	3.72	57	100.0	4.12

This is even greater in the area of *management and administration of the university*, since the responses "much" or "very much" reached 82.4%, whereas 14% answered "little" or "nothing" (Table 4A). Finally, the importance of GNL in the area of *teaching and research* was similar to that found for *management and administration of the university* (Table 4B).

Table 4. Importance given to GNL in **(A)** the management and administration of the University and **(B)** teaching and research.

	(A) Management and administration of the University			**(B)** Teaching and research		
	Frequenc	Percentag	Mean	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Not at all	4	7.0		6	10.5	
Little	4	7.0				
Medium	2	3.5		4	7.0	
Much	10	17.5		11	19.3	
Very much	37	64.9		36	63.2	
Total	57	100.0	4.26	57	100.0	4.24

When asked about the difficulties that hinder the use of GNL in academic and professional interactions, the following appeared as the top three criteria: *social custom*, *male chauvinistic culture*, and *lack of awareness*, and to a lesser extent, lack of *awareness within the university community*, lack of public *awareness campaigns,* and lack of *resources on the matter* (Table 5).

Table 5. Ranking of barriers to use a GNL in the academic / professional areas.

	Mean	Standard dev.
Social custom in the use of the masculine as generic	4.68	0.51
Influence of a male chauvinistic / **male-centred culture**	4.39	1.06
Lack of awareness of the problem	4.15	0.92
Lack of knowledge about gender-neutral alternative formulas	3.79	0.93
Thinking that GNL is confusing and complicated	3.69	1.04
Economic simplification (saving time)	3.58	1.17
Lack of **awareness within the university community**	3.52	0.99
Lack of awareness **campaigns in society**	3.44	0.96
Lack of **documentation and resources on the matter**	3.41	0.96

3.2.3 Actual use of gender neutral language in teaching materials

Despite the importance each lecturer attached to the use of a GNL in own teaching (84.2% answering "much" or "very much"; Table 6A), only 67.8% answered "much" or "very much" (Table 6B) when questioned about their real level of use of GNL in the materials they produced personally (theoretical notes, practical cases, etc.). This points to 16.4% a gap between their attitude and their real use of GNL. The percentage of lecturers who recognized the use of GNL in other types of materials (norms, regulations and consultative bibliography, etc.) was considerably lower, because only 31.5% answered "much" or "very much", while another 35.2% responded with "nothing" or "little" (Table 6C).

Table 6. (A) Importance given in their teaching work in the Faculty of Labour Relations and Social Work (UPV/EHU), and level of use (B) in the materials produced and (C) in other used or recommended materials.

	(A)Importance given to GNL in own teaching work			(B)Level of use of GNL in the materials produced by lecturers			(C) Level of use of GNL in other used or recommended materials		
	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Frequenc	Percentage	Mean
Not at all	4	7.0		3	5.4		5	9.3	
Little	4	7.0		5	8.9		14	25.9	
Medium	1	1.8		10	17.9		18	33.3	
Much	13	22.8		19	33.9		10	18.5	
Very much	35	61.4		19	33.9		7	13.0	
Total	57	100.0	4.24	56	100.0	3.82	54	100.0	3.00

When producing one's own materials, the three main barriers were reported to be: *social custom*, thinking that GNL is *complicated,* and *saving time*. And the less important impediments were: *lack of awareness* of the problem, lack of *awareness within the university* community and lack of *awareness campaigns* (Table 7).

Table 7. Ranking of barriers to use a GNL in the own materials.

	Mean	Standard dev.
Social custom in the use of the masculine as generic	3.54	1.35
Thinking that GNL is **confusing** and complicated	2.88	1.28
Economic simplification (saving time)	2.88	1.41
Influence of a male chauvinistic / male-centred culture	2.84	1.45
Lack of knowledge about gender-neutral alternative formulas	2.67	1.21
Lack of documentation and resources on the matter	2.65	1.08
Lack of awareness of the problem	2.50	1.34
Lack of **awareness within the university community**	2.44	1.09
Lack of awareness **campaigns in society**	2.35	1.13

3.2.4 How the use of gender neutral language is associated with gender and previous training

Upon analyzing the present results in terms of *gender[2]*, contrary to expectations, the mean results of the importance given to gender perspective in all areas (*family and friendship area*, *informal interactions* with students and other staff, etc.) were higher for men than for women (Table 8).

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[2] The indicator we used to analyze this factor is derived from the survey question "Are you a man or a woman?", so we cannot determine exactly whether the respondent refers to her / his biological sex or psycho-sociological gender, but we refer to it as a "gender" factor, as does the literature we reviewed.

Table 8. Importance given to GNL, by gender of the respondent.

		N	Mean	Standard dev.
Importance of non-sexist language in family and friendships area	Men	21	3.86	1.24
	Women	35	3.69	1.49
	Total	56	3.75	1.39
Importance in informal interactions with students and other staff	Men	20	4.45	0.945
	Women	35	4.00	1.35
	Total	55	4.16	1.23
Importance in the area of the university's management and administration	Men	20	4.60	0.82
	Women	35	4.14	1.33
	Total	55	4.31	1.18
Importance in teaching and research	Men	20	4.45	1.05
	Women	35	4.20	1.30
	Total	55	4.29	1.21
I think it is important to use the gender perspective in the academic language I teach (in Spanish)	Men	20	4.40	094
	Women	35	4.23	1.29
	Total	55	4.29	1.17

However, the level of use of GNL *in one's own materials*, *previous training received*, and the *desire to receive training* in the future was higher for women than for men. Naturally, the level of use of GNL in *all other materials used* was similar for both groups. Although women might more intentionality select GNL, the use of similar teaching materials would be recommended for both groups, following mainly technical and academic criteria (Table 9).

Table 9. Usage and training analyzed in terms of the gender of the respondent.

		Mean	Standard dev.
I use appropriate gender perspective in all the language of the written materials I produce for my own teaching	Men	3.70	1.17
	Women	3.94	1.07
	Total	3.85	1.11
All other material I use for my teaching conveys a language with appropriate gender perspective	Men	3.00	1.11
	Women	3.03	1.19
	Total	3.02	1.15
I have received specific training in order to use the gender perspective in my university teaching	Men	1.67	1.24
	Women	2.17	1.27
	Total	1.98	1.27
I would like to be trained specially to use inclusive language in university teaching	Men	3.19	1.12
	Women	3.44	1.19
	Total	3.34	1.16
If I should receive specific training I think I would make a greater effort to achieve a fully inclusive language with gender perspective in the materials that I produce myself	Men	3.95	0.89
	Women	3.53	1.21
	Total	3.69	1.11

We carried out an ANOVA analysis of variance to test whether there were significant differences in the responses according to the gender of the respondent, but found no significant differences for gender in any of the variables analyzed. Consequently, hypothesis 1 is to be rejected. Secondly, regarding whether they had received specific training for the use of gender-sensitive language in university teaching, more than half (54.3%) of the lecturers answered "no" and only 17.2% answered "much" or "very much" (Table 10).

Table 10. Lecturers who had received specific training for the use of GNL.

	Frequenc	Percentage
Not at all	38	54.3
Little	11	15.7
Medium	9	12.9
Much	9	12.9
Very much	3	4.3
Total	70	100.0

Once we had transformed the *specific training received* variable into a dichotomous variable by gathering the answers "not at all" (as 'No'), and "little", "medium", "much" and "very much" (as 'Yes'), we found that people who had received prior training gave greater importance to the use of GNL, except for *informal interactions* (where there was no difference in response between groups) (Table 11).

Table 11. Importance given to the use of inclusive language by university lecturers having or not having received prior specific training.

I have received training (Yes / No)		Mean	Standard dev.
Importance of GNL in family and friendships	No	3.63	1.50
	Yes	3.84	1.34
	Total	3.72	1.42
Importance in informal interactions with students and other staff	No	4.13	1.34
	Yes	4.12	1.24
	Total	4.12	1.28
Importance in the area of university management and administration	No	4.13	1.41
	Yes	4.44	1.00
	Total	4.26	1.25
Importance in teaching and research	No	4.16	1.39
	Yes	4.36	1.11
	Total	4.25	1.27
I think it is important to use the gender perspective in the academic language I use to teach (in Spanish)	No	3.47	1.19
	Yes	4.29	0.95
	Total	3.82	1.16

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In this case, we found statistically significant relationships between *previous training received* and the dependant variable *usage of GNL in materials developed for one's own teaching*. Consequently, we accept hypothesis 2, in the sense that people who have received prior specific training, use GNL more often when producing materials for university teaching (Table 12).

This is also the case for two barriers identified as major obstacles to the use of GNL in one's own materials (*lack of habit* and *confusing language*) (Table 12).

Table 12. Relationship between "prior specific training" and the dependent variable "usage in my own materials" as well as the identified barriers.

I have received training (Yes / No)		Root mean square	F	Sig.
I use appropriate gender perspective in written materials I produce for my own teaching	Among groups	9.287	7.724	.007**
	Within groups	1.202		
Lack of awareness of the problem, hinders the use of GNL in my own material	Among groups	18.263	12.481	.001**
	Within groups	1.463		
Social custom in the use of the masculine as generic …	Among groups	12.923	8.077	.006**
	Within groups	1.600		
Thinking that GNL is confusing and complicated	Among groups	11.576	8.069	.006**
	Within groups	1.435		
Influence of a male chauvinistic / male-centred culture	Among groups	11.782	6.210	.016*
	Within groups	1.897		
Lack of documentation and resources on the topic	Among groups	5.847	5.421	.024*
	Within groups	1.078		
Lack of awareness campaigns in society	Among groups	4.392	3.632	.063
	Within groups	1.209		
Lack of awareness within the university community	Among groups	3.622	3.178	.081
	Within groups	1.140		
Economic simplification (saving time)	Among groups	2.109	1.063	.308
	Within groups	1.983		
Lack of knowledge about gender-neutral alternative formulas	Among groups	.948	0.645	.426
	Within groups	1.470		

* Significance level < 0.05; ** Significance level < 0.01

According to the highest F values (in which there is a significance level of less than 1%), the barriers *lack of awareness* of the problem, social *custom* and thinking of GNL as *confusing and complicated*, are mostly explained by the variable *prior training received*.

3.3 Discussion

The paper aimed to analyze the attitudes of university lecturers, who teach courses related to law and economics, towards the use of GNL in their teaching, as well as to quantify their real usage of GNL in the materials they prepare. 62.5% of respondents were women, which is accordance with the current higher proportion of women in the university workforce at the UPV/EHU. And the majority of people (55.4%) were in the 45 to 54 years-of-age interval, indicative of an aging workforce due to the shortage of new additions to the university personel in recent years. Encouragingly, most people considered it very important to use GNL in their own teaching and research (63.2%), but there is still a long way to go, considering that 14% gave "not at all" or "little" importance to the use of GNL in management and administrative activities in a Faculty in which the subjects taught can be particularly sensitive to gender issues, and in which the first equality-plan was developed more than 10 years ago (UPV/EHU 2003). Furthermore, the percentage of people who considered the use of GNL in other areas such as family relationships and friendships to be of "little" or "not at all" importance (22.4%) is still relatively high, although it is significantly lower than that reported by Jiménez et al. (2011) in their survey of university students (women, 35.39% and men, 59.74%), which might indicate that lecturers are more sensitive to this matter than students.

The least important barriers to the use of gender-sensitive language in both academic/professional activies and in personally produced teaching materials were *lack of awareness within the university community* and *lack of awareness campaigns*. This finding would suggest that the University maintains an active attitude in its sensitizing function, but this has not yet permeated sufficiently into society. Therefore, in general, it seems that the principle barrier in society may be a lack of awareness, related to a *male chauvinistic* and *social custom*. In particular, lecturers have not yet introduced sufficiently GNL, maybe for more practical reasons, such as *complexity of alternative formulas* and *in order to simplify* or save time.

In order to explain these findings, it can be said that although women have adopted GNL to a greater extent than men, *gender* does not appear to be a statistically significant variable. Instead, *specific prior training received* appeared as significant for usage of GNL in materials developed for one's own teaching, and also for those major barriers identified for such use. The barriers better explained by prior

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training are *lack of awareness* of the problem, social *custom* and thinking that GNL is *confusing and complicated.*

A common limitation in these studies is the response bias due to the desire of respondents, conscious or unconscious, to gain prestige or appear to belong to a different social class. Besides, another issue is the limited size of the population that was analyzed. In any case, in keeping with the findings of Jiménez et al. (2011) who studied the views of university students, the present study of the perceptions of university lecturers who teach students who will become professionals in the field of labour relations, human resources and social work, has revealed some shortcomings or gaps in the use of gender inclusive language. This suggests that there is a need to increase the training offered on issues of gender equality and language. There are still lecturers who have not yet been sensitized to GNL, so it appears to be necessary to influence awareness, first in everyday interactions (since this is where consciousness for subsequent behaviors is developed) and also in all other specific university activities (i.e. teaching, research and management).

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the intimate relationship which exists between language and social attitudes (EP, 2008), this study has analyzed the perceptions of lecturers regarding gender perspective in the language they use in their university teaching in Spanish. In particular, we analyzed the opinions of lecturers of Degrees and official Masters imparted by the Faculty of Labour Relations and Social Work at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). The present findings offer a revealing view of the degree of sensitivity of university lecturers to the use of non-sexist, and therefore non-discriminatory language, and the barriers they face when using GNL. In general, it seems that the principle barrier in society may be a lack of awareness, related to a *male chauvinistic* and *social custom*. In particular, lecturers have not yet introduced sufficiently GNL, maybe for more practical reasons, such as *complexity of alternative formulas* and *in order to simplify* or save time. The results show that *gender* is not a statistically significant variable, whereas *prior training* is. These results may contribute to designing more efficacious initiatives to increase awareness among academics, as well as among students who will be tomorrow's professionals.

Future research should be focused on assessing other relationships among the variables studied here; for example, whether gender affects the interest in the subject and also the prior teaching received, which is related to greater sensitivity to GNL. It may also be desirable to expand the sample analyzed to include other Spanish universities where Labour Relations / Labour Science and Social Work studies are taught, in order to corroborate the results in other geographical communities. Similarly, it will be of interest to examine other legal-economic degrees, such as studies in Law, Economics or Business Administration, in order to analyze if the teaching within the degrees specifically related to social justice, show any explanatory factors for greater gender sensitivity in language.

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women authors.

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