

# Masculine, feminist or neutral?

## The language battle that has divided Spain

30th January 2019

### The new government plans to erase gender prejudice in the constitution

An argument is developing between the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) and the newly-elected socialist government about proposals to rewrite the nation's constitution using gender-neutral language.

The RAE language academy, which selects the correct use of Spanish, has been **sitting on** the request for

publication of a year-old report by Carmen Calvo, the deputy prime minister, that calls for the **wording** of the 1978 constitution to be altered by replacing generic masculine nouns. But now, the issue has returned.

In the latest debate between the two sides, the academy said it was "grammatically unacceptable" for Yolanda Díaz and Irene Montero of Unidas Podemos, to refer to the government's **cabinet** (a council of ministers) as a '*consejo de ministras*', instead of the approved '*consejo de ministros*'. It said **the former** would only be applicable if the **cabinet** were all-female; something that has never happened.

Calvo disagrees. "It's time the constitution had a language that respects both genders. It only has masculine language and this isn't appropriate in a modern democracy."

Like many gender-based languages, Spanish uses the generic masculine when it isn't specified whether the subject is male or female. For example, a girl is a '*niña*' and a boy a '*niño*', but collectively children are '*niños*'.

### Before you read the article, find this vocabulary in the text:

**to erase:** to delete or remove  
**to sit on:** to suppress or to hide information  
**wording:** the words used to describe s.t.  
**cabinet:** the committee who controls government policy  
**the former:** the first of two things mentioned  
**to double up:** to repeat so that you clarify s.t.  
**regardless:** without thinking about s.t. or taking s.t into consideration  
**strange:** unusual or surprising  
**precisely:** exactly  
**counterparts:** a (person/thing) similar or equivalent

One proposed solution is to "**double up**" on genders so that "the neighbourhood children" become "the neighbourhood boys and girls", but such innovations can infuriate traditionalists. Montero, the equality minister, was ridiculed when she referred to a spokeswoman (portavoz) as a portavoza because *voz* is a feminine noun, whether it relates to a man or a woman. Rewriting this constitution would involve replacing about 500 words and lots of **doubling up**, starting with "Spanish citizens" (*ciudadanos/ciudadanas* and *españoles/españolas*).

The academy has so far managed to avoid the question but has previously defended the gender neutrality of masculine nouns. "**Doubling up** is artificial and unnecessary from a linguistic perspective," it said in an official statement. "In the case of nouns that describe living beings, it is possible to use the generic masculine to designate the type of being, **regardless** of sex. The explicit use of the feminine is only justified when the opposition of the sexes is relevant."

The language issue may seem **strange** to some British feminists. On the one hand, Spanish activists want to replace the generic masculine by **doubling up**. On the other, they insist on denoting gender in words like *juez/jueza* (judge) and *alcalde/alcaldesa* (mayor); **precisely** the sort of distinction - mayoress, conductress - that their British **counterparts** have opposed as unnecessary.

 Adapted from The [Guardian](#) by ECP coach Kez Kurien



www.englishcoachingprojects.net  
info@englishcoachingprojects.net

l@s niñ@s  
les niñes  
lxs niñxs

### Let's chat about that!

Write your opinions in an email and send them to your ECP coach!

Do you think gender-prejudice exists in the Spanish language? Why (not)?

And does it exist in the English language? How and where?

Is it necessary to make language gender-neutral? Why (not)?

Do you make mistakes in English with he/she/him/her? Why (not)?

Who should decide the language we use? Why?

# Social Events In English

Real-Life English in Vitoria-Gasteiz



# Practical English Stuff

Real Language to Express Yourself Better



**CINEMA NIGHTS!**

*Come and socialise in English!*

## Remote Control

By Derren Brown

If you think you are in control, think again!

**Date:** Friday, 31st January

**Time:** 19:30 to 21:00 at the ECP Hub

## Coffee Saturdays!

**Date:** Saturday, 1st February

**Time:** 11:00 to 12:30

**Place:** Panadería Bertiz, C/Francia 23

**Dates for your diary!**

### Coffee Saturdays:

5th Oct ✓  
2nd Nov ✓  
7th Dec ✓  
11th Jan ✓  
**1st Feb**  
7th Mar  
4th Apr  
2nd May  
6th Jun

### Cinema Nights:

25th Oct ✓  
29th Nov ✓  
20th Dec ✓  
**31st Jan**  
28th Feb  
27th Mar  
24th Apr  
29th May  
26th Jun

**FRED 2020 is here!**

**FRED** talks

*Fun, Relevant, Engaging Discourse*

**Transforming  
the School Yard**

**Igor**

**Mascha**

**Energy and  
the Body**

**From  
Businessman to  
Bluesman**

**Mario**

**Friday 7th February**

*@ ECP's Molineux Lounge*

**19.30-21.30**

*Free entry & refreshments*

## Useful Gender-Neutral Terms

Most languages were created with the gender binary in mind. To solve this problem, gender-neutral terms are appearing that can be used to refer to people without specifying their gender.

**They:** Did you know that "they" has been used to describe a single person when the gender hasn't been identified since the 14th century? In the 21st century we can use it to describe a single person without identifying *their* specific gender.

**Mx:** Mr, Mrs and Ms are all in common use but have you ever used or seen Mx? Use it for non-binary people or simply not to identify any gender. "Mx Jones will be visiting the office today."

**Artificial:** This is an alternative for "man-made". Not everything is made by men! You can also use "synthetic".

**Humankind:** This is similar to the previous word. Use it instead of "mankind". Not everyone on the planet is a man!

**Sibling, parent and child:** These words can replace sister, brother, mom, dad, son and daughter if you don't want to identify specific genders when talking about family.

**Partner:** This is a useful word that you can use instead of boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife.