

## Graphic Representations of Grammatical Gender in Spanish Language Anarchist Publications

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In the last few decades, particularly after social movements in the 1970s, new ways to mark grammatical gender in the Spanish language have emerged to challenge the normative ones. This essay is an initial effort to describe and analyze the ways anarchists subvert the grammatical norms of standard Spanish in written language in their publications. Anarchists eliminate the common morphemes that mark grammatical gender (*-a* and *-o*) in Spanish and substitute them with what I, for now, call Graphic Alternatives to Grammatical Gender (GAGG), the graphic symbols: @, /, = and the letters *-x* and *-e*, turning words like *compañeras* (fem) and *compañeros* (masc) into *compañerxs*, *compañer@s*, etc., creating expressions with neutral or ambiguous grammatical-gender markers that are used with the purpose of eliminating the binary gender morphology. Examples of the GAGG were drawn from articles in the anarchist contemporary self-published (Do It Yourself) journals *Acción Directa* (Perú), *Organización Obrera* (Argentina) and *El Amanecer* (Chile).

This kind of linguistic practice has been penetrating mainstream discourses for many years now. One may see nowadays in various kinds of texts, and in different registers, the use of the @ symbol and the *-x*, in writings by other radicals (LGBTQI), social justice activists, in mainstream media and institutions, and even by individuals not affiliated with a political group. For example, you may see the spelling *Latin@* in Latin American/Latino Studies departments and programs in several universities across the country, as well as in advertisements, signs, banners, and other mediums of written Spanish language. Given the apparent normalization of many of the GAGG (particular @ and *-x*) I am particularly interested in analyzing their use in anarchist publications, the context in which they occur in a text, and their rhetorical and stylistic use.

This paper offers a descriptive analysis of these graphic alternatives. I will begin by discussing the grammatical rules of expressing gender in Spanish, and will briefly summarize ongoing debates concerning “linguistic sexism” in Spanish. Then I will present some examples of the GAGG drawn from articles found in 3 “Do It Yourself” journals published online by three anarchist collectives in Latin America.

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Cover of *Acción Directa* (Perú). Grupo Acción Directa (2011). *Acción Directa*, vol 1 no.1: pp. 1-9.

Finally, I will explain how the GAGG have other rhetorical purposes, beyond extending solidarity to non-binary people. In some contexts, the GAGG allow the speaker or writer to align themselves or establish solidarity with others. This becomes evident in nouns such as “workers,” “comrades,” “friends,” and “neighbours,” as well as in pronouns like *nosotrxs* (“us”) and *totrxs* (“we,”) as in picture 1. Simultaneously, the GAGG allows the author to establish a separation from or a relation of opposition toward enemy entities (such as police, guards, and lawyers) for whom the masculine grammatical gender is maintained.

The phrase in this cover (*Acción Directa: Totrxs llevamos un policía dentro. Acáballo!* [We all have a cop inside. Finish him!]) is similar to ‘kill your inner fascist’ and ‘kill your inner cop’. The phrase alludes to the Foucauldian notion of panopticism: how people have been conditioned to police themselves and others and how the prison system extends beyond prison walls, penetrates our minds and pits us against each other. The phrase *Totrxs-GAGG-PL llevamos*, in which the *-x* is used as alternative, contrasts with *un-MASC policía-NEUT Acáballo-MASC*, which maintains the masculine grammatical gender marker *-o*. This idea will be further developed in the last section of this paper.

### Anarchist Publications in Latin America

In most Latin American countries where anarchist ideas and people have had a presence, the press has been one of the main platforms for the dissemination of ideas and information – both at the local level and internationally – since the XIX century. The DIY production and distribution of journals, newspapers, zines and other kinds of periodicals is a part of anarchist economic practice, as they are non-commercial and (relatively) small circulation texts. These publications are produced horizontally by a collective and without a motive to make a profit. As Portwood-Stacer puts it, buying or exchanging DIY-produced media (as well as other products) is an anti-consumption practice, which “[signifies] an opposition to the kinds of lifestyles encouraged by the bourgeois consumer culture” (2013: 27). In fact, the journals analyzed in this paper are distributed for free on the websites of the collectives that produce them and are available in print by donation or at cost price. In its covers *Acción Directa* indicates that the suggested contribution for the newspaper is 50 cents of Nuevo Sol (Peruvian currency equivalent to \$0.15 USD), *Organización Obrera* costs 2 Argentinean pesos (about \$0.20 USD) and *El Amanecer* charges by donation. These publications are also distributed at anarchist book fairs, concerts, talks and other events, as well as in radical bookstores, independent distros and infoshops.

The publications I focused on for this research are just three of over a hundred DIY newspapers and journals in Spanish that are currently published both in print and digital format by anarchist collectives in Latin America, Spain and the US. In a 2014 article “Prensa (A) en América Latina,” an updated version of the 2012 article “El retorno de la prensa (A) en América Latina,” in the Venezuelan anarchist newspaper

<b>Title</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Vol. Num. (Year)</b>	<b>Length</b>
<i>El Amanecer</i> by <i>Grupo el Amanecer Anarquista</i>	Chile	1.1 (2011) 2.7 (2012) 3.23 (2013)	8 pp. 8 pp. 8 pp.
<i>Acción Directa</i> by <i>Grupo Acción Directa</i>	Perú	1.1 (2011) 2.4 (2012) 3.5 (2013)	9 pp. 9 pp. 9 pp.
<i>Organización Obrera</i> by <i>Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (F.O.R.A)</i>	Argentina	8.23 (2009) 10.33 (2011) 12.40 (2013-2014)	12 pp. 12 pp. 12 pp.

**Table 1.** List of analyzed publications.

*El Libertario*, indicates that by 2014 there were 100 active anarchist publications, an increase from the 66 they accounted for in their earlier (2012) research. These numbers include Brazilian publications but do not include publications from Spain or the US. Our own update of those numbers indicates that as of 2015, there are currently 106 active anarchist publications in print and online that circulate in Latin America. The newspapers and journals in *El Libertario*'s list publish articles covering a range of topics, including animal liberation, eco-activism, feminist and queer issues, labor movements, indigenous resistance, and anarchist histories from the US, Europe, and Latin American. They also include opinion-based articles and contributions by readers.

This paper examines written discourse data drawn from 21 articles published in three journals. The first, *El Amanecer* from Chile, is currently not editing new issues. However, the website is still maintained and articles and updates continue to be published. The second, *Organización Obrera*, has circulated since 2001 and is published by the Federación Obrera Regional de Argentina (F.O.R.A.) [Argentine's Regional Workers' Federation] founded over a century ago in 1901. And lastly, *Acción Directa* from Perú, was first published in 2011 after the "rebirth" of the collective of the same name. These publications contain articles where some of the GAGG are used in various contexts. The author(s) of most of the articles in these publications are either not identified, identified as "anonymous," or identified with pseudonyms that serve to conceal the person's identity.

An analysis of Latin American anarchists' media, whether fanzines, newspapers, journals, magazines, or any form of online publication, provides insight into their discourses and actions. These texts serve to disseminate ideas, histories, events, and chronicles of actions and confrontations with the police and/or military, as well as other state entities. These non-uniform and anti-authoritarian "guerilla" texts combat normalized anti-authoritarian systems of textual production that are often compromised by capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative, racist, etc. values (Jeppesen, 2010: 473). These texts provide alternative or "parallel discursive arenas" where, as Fraser asserts, members of subordinate social groups create and circulate discourses [...] that allow them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" as an alternative to bourgeois hegemonic domination of the public sphere (as quoted in Petra, 2001: 16).

### Spanish Language Rules for Expressing Grammatical Gender

Grammatical gender is one of the many systems used to classify nouns and can vary from language to language. In most cases, grammatical gender in Spanish is a morphosyntactic category. Nouns, determiners (incl. quantifiers, possessives, articles, and demonstratives), adjectives, pronouns and passive participles belong to either feminine or masculine grammatical gender classes (Bengoechea 2011: 37) and elements that form sentences and phrases generally agree in gender.

When we study the gender morphemes in Spanish, we distinguish between “natural gender,” which marks nouns with animate referents (human or animals) based on their perceived sex (masculine/feminine), and “artificial gender,” which marks the grammatical gender of inanimate referents (Wheatley, 2006: 76). I will only focus on the natural gender category with human referents. Kathleen Wheatley (2005: 76-78) identifies five basic patterns in standard Spanish to express grammatical gender (see Table 2).

At the lexical level, grammatical gender is defined by the binary opposition of lexical items:

- (1) in pairs of different words, such as, *padre* / *madre*, ‘father / mother;’ *yerno* / *nuera*, ‘son-in-law / daughter-in-law’

At the morphosyntactic level the distinction of gender is based on:

- (2) the use of same radical with different masculine or feminine gender morpheme: *heroe*/*heroína*, ‘hero/heroine.’ In some pairs of words, the feminine forms are more often a derogatory term as compared to the masculine: *zorro* ‘fox’ and *zorra* (synonymous with slurs such as slut or prostitute, similar to the connotation of ‘bitch’ in English).
- (3) the morpheme *-o* for masculine and *-a* for the feminine: *hijo* / *hija* ‘son / daughter’
- (4) the consonant ending for the masculine noun or adjective: *-n*, *-s* and *-r* and that is feminized by adding the *-a* morpheme: *señor* / *señora* ‘mister / miss,’ *portugués* / *portuguesa* ‘Portuguese’ and *peatón* / *peatona* ‘pedestrian’

In this last category, it is evident that the masculine grammatical gender marker is the ‘unmarked’ element of the pair, which makes it the ‘default’ gender (Bengoechea, 2011: 37).

In standard Spanish, grammatical gender is not always marked in the morphological structure of given nouns. In such cases, gender is marked by other parts of the constituent: the determiner or the adjectives. In these cases, gender is indicated at the syntactic level:

- (5) *el atleta cubano* / *la atleta cubana*  
‘The-MASC Cuban-MASC athlete’ / ‘The-FEM Cuban-FEM athlete’

This example further illustrates grammatical gender agreement or concord between the parts of speech.

	Lexical	Morphosyntactic
Binary opposites	<i>padre / madre</i>	
Masculine form as generic	<i>el hombre</i>	<i>los alumnos buenos</i>
Common noun / Gender in determiners and modifiers		<i>el atleta cubano / la atleta cubana</i>
Gender-marked morphemes		
-o (m) / -a (f)		<i>hijo / hija</i>
-e (m) / -a (f)		<i>héroe / heroína   jefe / jefa</i>
-n, -s, -r (m) / -a (f)		<i>peatón / peatona</i>
		<i>portugués / portuguesa</i>
		<i>señor / señora</i>

**Table 2.** Prepared by the author based on: Bengoechea, Mercedes (2011). “Non-sexist Spanish Policies: an attempt bound to fail?” *Current Issues in Language Planning*. Vol. 12, no.1: pp. 37; Wheatley, Kathleen (2006). *Sintaxis y morfología de la lengua española*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp. 76-78.

A sixth category that should be added to Wheatley's model is the use of the masculine form as epicene, unmarked or generic form, such as *hombre* 'man' to refer to a collective regardless of the gender identities of its members. The masculine form as generic is used to encapsulate both the feminine and masculine gender categories. According to the norms of use of grammatical gender in Spanish, regardless of the position of enunciation of the speaker (either masculine, feminine or non-binary) and the referents, the group or collective should be expressed in the masculine grammatical form; this form, according to Bengoechea, alienates women (2015: 4): and it alienates and 'erases' non-binary identifying people.

### Mainstream Challenges to Linguistic Sexism in Spanish Language

The norms that prescribe grammatical gender in Spanish reflect the androcentric use of language. Other linguists name this form of discrimination "linguistic sexism," which consists of the unequal "distribution of linguistic practices centered on the predominance of the [masculine] grammatical gender based on ideological motivations of the cultural and traditional kind" (Cabeza Pereiro y Rodríguez Barcia, 2013: 8). As mentioned before, in standard Spanish the masculine form (either lexical or morphological) is the unmarked form imposed by prescriptive grammar. This rule is safeguarded and enforced by the *Real Academia de la Lengua Española* (RAE) [Royal Academy of Spanish Language], founded in the XVII Century. The RAE has affiliate institutions and branches in most Spanish-speaking countries around the world, including the Philippines and the United States, and publishes dictionaries, manuals, and orthographies that prescribe the grammatical rules of the language. In fact, the RAE even condemns the use of doublets, such as *profesor y profesora* in a sentence and suggests the use of the masculine form is generic/inclusive.

In the last four decades, the rejection to linguistic sexism and the demand for the "visibility of women" (Bengoechea, 2011: 37; Cabeza Pereiro and Rodríguez Barcia, 2013: 8) in language has risen and the sexist features of standard Spanish have been widely contested in various spheres such as government institutions (places of employment, ministries and institutes) and civil society (academia, NGOs, job places, syndicates etc) in Spain and in Latin America. Institutions and organizations have published manuals that address androcentrism in language, women's erasure from language, instructional discrimination based on gender, patriarchy, sexism, and other issues. Generally, the aim of these institutions is to educate the public and promote the inclusion of women within discourse in mainstream spaces.

This resource of making language inclusive for women is known as "feminization of language" (Pauwels, 1998, 2003; Abbou, 2011, 2013; Scott, 1986, 2010). However, this "language planning initiative" (Bengoechea, 2011: 37-8) still maintains the grammaticality of Spanish and the masculine/feminine binary morphology. Most, if not all, of the suggestions involve the introduction of the feminine morphological marker, *-a* in otherwise "masculine" words, such as names or occupation like *abogada* or *presidenta* that would otherwise be used in the masculine (Bengoechea, n.d: 16-17); the use of doublets, such as *compañeros* (m) *y compañeras* (f); or the use of epicenes,



such as “people” instead of “men” or “man” for a collective. The feminization of language does not satisfy the discursive needs of all speakers, particularly LGBT or gender-queer identifying people; it excludes those who do not identify with either one of the binary gendered forms of address. As opposed to these mainstream institutions and organizations, anarchists do not seek validation or recognition from the state or its state institutions. They do not seek to uphold the conventions of language and grammar. Anarchists look to explore and expand the possibilities of expression that language provides, rather than to propose or conform to liberal reforms of language.

### Anarchist Prefigurative Politics and Language Planning

In this broader debate concerning sex and gender discrimination in Spanish, anarchists’ antisexist linguistic practices and language planning initiatives emerge. Anarchists’ use of GAGG constitutes a micro-level language planning practice which in Liddicoat and Baldauf’s sense is “located in the work of individuals or small groups of individuals” (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008: 5). Anarchist models are implemented by social justice groups, communities, and like-minded people, etc., as opposed to being implemented by institutions and states. Anarchists have also advanced discourses on using GAGG, emphasizing GAGG’s importance and political implications. In the case of anarchist individuals and collectives, these micro-level language planning practices materialize when: (1) there is an understanding of the relation of unequal social gender relations and other forms of oppression and their manifestation in language, which leads to (2) meta-pragmatic discourses on sexism in language that circulate in blogs, articles, and statements published to explain their understanding of sexism in language, and (3) changing binary and the masculine-centered linguistic forms in publications.

The deliberate alteration of language for political purposes is an aspect anarchists’ “prefigurative politics” (Cohn, 2015; Breton et al., 2012; Heckert, 2006): that is, the practice of enacting (in the present) the society envisioned in the future, thus making ‘utopia’ real (Peggy Kornegger, 1996: 166). Through their overall praxis of challenging and transforming traditional gender roles and relations, anarchists prefigure a more egalitarian society, and with the use of GAGG they seek to reflect this possibility in language. And, as Jesse Cohn states, through a prefigurative form of organization anarchist resistance culture seeks to “embody the idea in the act, the principle in the practice, the end in the means” (2015: 16-17). In other words, anarchists’ prefigurative politics mirrors their desired future through present actions.

Similarly, the challenging and transformation of language for political purposes also relates to the social relations and relations of production that anarchism seeks to destroy and negate; the urge to end domination, smash power over others and destroy the means through which workers are robbed and exploited. And it also relates to anarchists’ generative politics reflected in their creative urge (Daring et al., 2012: 7-8), which means that within destruction there is also the possibility for building. Anarchists’ urge to destroy manifests in anarchists’ treatment of language

when they work to dismantle the way the binary categories of sex and gender are maintained and used. They achieve this by adopting forms already in use (the @ symbol, -x, \*) or by coming up with new ways of expressing non-binary gender identities (–e, the slash symbol or the equal sign). This dialectical dynamic between destruction and creation destabilizes linguistic and social normativity as we know it and gives way to new ways of expressing erased and oppressed identities. In effect, GAGG formations index the ideologies of anarchists who use them in their publications: as linguistic (and non-linguistic) forms, they represent the users' sociocultural and political conceptions of gender within language.

## Anarchists' graphic alternatives to the gender-marking morphemes in Spanish (the @ Symbol and the X)

### 1. the @ symbol

The @ symbol began to be used in Spain in the 1970s in the writings of radical left groups and in alternative magazines like *Ajoblanco* (Bengoechea, 2009: 33). Its use has expanded beyond informal texts and alternative press publications, both in print and in online communications/publications. Several institutional manuals and guides, present use of the @ symbol as an alternative; however, they maintain the traditional boundaries of grammatical norms and suggest the use of the @ symbol should go beyond informal interpersonal communications. This contrasts well-produced manuals and guides published by anarcho-syndicalist unions, which identify the use of @ as a GAGG.

Once the use of @ as a GAGG began permeating mainstream spaces and discourses, the RAE intervened against it. In the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas*, RAE indicates that to avoid “tricky” repetitions that the “recent and unnecessary” custom of alluding to both sexes (in doublets like *los niños y las niñas*) has produced, “[...] the @ symbol has begun to be used in signs and flyer as a graphic resource to integrate in one word the masculine and feminine forms of a noun, given that this sign seems to include in its structure the vowels *a* and *o*: *l@s niñ@s*” (n.p.). The explanation continues with the assertion that because the @ is not a linguistic symbol it should not be used as such, given that it would produce non-viable expressions from a normative point of view. Besides, according to RAE, in phrases like *Día del niñ@*, where the contraction *del* (de + el) is only valid for the masculine, the @ produces a “grave inconsistency” or a lack of agreement in the gender-marking morphemes. Here it becomes clear that the Academy not only condemns the use of non-linguistic symbols like the @ but also condemns the practice of feminizing the language because it affects the economy of the language and the masculine form serves the function of encompassing everyone.



**Picture 2.** Poster in solidarity with two political prisoners in Chile where the @ symbol is used in *compañe@s* 'comrades' and *pres@s* 'prisoners.' El Amanecer (2012). *Libertad a l@s compañe@s pres@s*. Chile: Grupo El Amanecer.

Of the three newspapers analyzed, *Organización Obrera* deployed the least linguistic alternatives and the @ was most frequently used. The @ is used in phrases such as *comité de ciudadan@s* ('citizen's committee'); *l@s trabajador@s* ('the workers'); and *sus trabajador@s* ('their workers'). The following example is from an article by *Duvrobsky* about Bulgarian women's labor migration to Greece and the forms of discrimination that they face. The article also describes an attack perpetrated against the president of the domestic workers' syndicate: "[...] los derechos de sus trabajador@s, **mayoritariamente mujeres**...la mayoría de **ellas** inmigrantes," "[...] the rights of their workers-GAGG, mostly women [...] most of them-FEM immigrants-NEUT" (March-April 2009: 7). Here the author uses the @ in *trabajador@s* but needs to clarify that the majority of them are *women*, and reiterates it with the third person deictic pronoun *ellas*, which is in gender agreement with the antecedent. The point of this example is to highlight the author's strategies of using the @ symbol to express the gender neutrality of the collective *trabajadora@s* ('workers') while using the pronoun *ellas* ('them') when there is a need to specify the gender of a part of the group. Examples from *Acción Directa* include: "*micrófono abierto* [...] *usado por tod@s*" ('open mic [...] used by everyone-GAGG-PL'), "[...] *dedicado para l@s rebeldes que se encuentran sol@s*;" ('[...] dedicated to the-GAGG-PL rebels that are alone-GAAG-PL'). As mentioned above, this alternative is also widely used in mainstream forms of communication, most likely due to its similarity to a juxtaposed *-a* and *-o*. However, even if its form seems to only allude to male and female referents simultaneously, there is no consensus as to that meaning; therefore the @ is arguably a symbol used to express ambiguity. In terms of its pronunciation, since the @ symbol is not a linguistic sign and there is no vowel or consonant sound associated with it, suggested pronunciations for it include *-oa* / *-oas*, *compañeroas*.

## 2. The X

*-x* is another GAGG, in this instance used to substitute for the gender morphemes *-a* and *-o*. *X* has also been used to extend solidarity with LGBTQI collectives and individuals, because it clearly expresses neither a masculine nor a feminine form (Bengoechea, 2015: 7). The use of the *-x* adds more ambiguity to the identity of the referent, especially compared to @. This alternative expands the possibilities of identification to those whose identities don't fit the feminine and masculine binary and allows writers to not undesired gender identities to anyone.



**Picture 3.** Banner reads: Libertad a lxs anarquistas secuestradxs por el estado. Presos – presas a la calle. “Freedom to the anarchists kidnapped by the state. Prisoners to the street!” Lxs Solidarixs (2011). “ACCIONES. Crónica de una acción libertaria” *El Amanecer* vol. 1 no.1: p. 3

*Organización Obrera:*

“¡Ningún cargo a lxs detenidxs, huelga general!”

“No charges to the-GAGG-PL detained-GAGG-PL, general strike!”

*El Amanecer:*

“nosotrxs somos lxs unixxs”

“we-GAGG-PL are the-GAGG-PL only ones-GAGG-PL”

“[...] todxs lxs ciudadanxs [...]”

“[...] all-GAGG-PL the-GAGG-PL citizens-GAGG-PL”

*Acción Directa:*

“[...] libertad a lxs compañerxs en \$hile [...]”

“freedom to the-GAGG-PL comrades-GAGG-PL in \$hile”

“[...] lxs 14 compañerxs anarquistas detenidxs”

“The-GAGG-PL 14 detained-GAGG-PL anarchist comrades-GAGG-PL”

3. The use of the slash /

The slash is used to separate the root, or unmarked masculine form, from the feminine morpheme in indefinite articles or nouns. It is used in the same sentence with the –x as we can see in this example from *Acción Directa*:

“Escrito por un/a anónimx”

“Written by an-MASC/FEM anonymous-GAGG”

We also found it in other phrases such as “Seré **un/a** encapuchad**x** de este 2012” (April 2012: 3) from an article submitted to *El Amanecer* anonymously via email. For the sake of anonymity, the person who wrote this statement used the slash to add the feminine morpheme to the unmarked/masculine indefinite pronoun “un” (some people would do *unx*) and paired it with the use of *-x* in the noun, *encapuchad**x***; making the position of enunciation, the “P”, ambiguous or non-binary. The use of the GAGG together with the slash that marks both grammatical genders makes these phrases more heterogeneous. Even if a GAGG is accompanied by semi-normalized or more accepted forms (like the slash) these sentences are also transgressive. The use of the slash is not standardized yet: therefore it is not seen as grammatical. The use of a GAGG also asserts inclusiveness and adds to the many possibilities of expressing inclusive gender forms.

### A Brief Note on the GAGG’s Verbal Articulation

The GAGGs pose a challenge in their verbal articulation, as some are non-linguistic symbols and others are consonants that are substituting a vowel: @, \*, x, =, etc. What manner of pronunciation do GAGG’s proponents and users suggest? Given that I focus on the analysis of written data, a brief discussion of non-orthographic symbols and pronunciation is pertinent. The X, orthographic symbol with a consonant sound forms various combinations of consonant clusters when being added as a suffix to form *-xs*, *-rxs*, *-nxs*, *-gxs*, as opposed to forming syllables (combinations of vowel and consonant sounds). In Spanish, the pronunciation of the letter X in some words is ‘ks’, as in *conexión* (or words like *axe* in English); therefore, the first kind of combination would be harder to articulate. Spanish has a certain number of consonant sound sequences, but neither include the ones mentioned above.

Some suggest pronouncing *-x* with utilizing the phonetic value of the Spanish letter J (the velar voiceless fricative /x/) in words like *ojo* (and *Bach* and *loch* in English). Others have suggested pronouncing *-x* in accord with its phonetic value in Mayan languages: /ʃ/ or ‘sh’, as in Xicanx (pronounced *Sbi-kan-sh*). When the x only appears at the end of a word, as in Chicax, it could alternatively be pronounced *Chi-kan-ex* (Ramirez, 2008: 5). The fact that Nahuatl and the Mayan languages do not have grammatical gender classes has also influenced the deployment of gender neutral forms among Latinx and Chicax activists. The use of *-x* reveals the intersection of race/ethnicity and (grammatical) gender politics: it ‘symbolizes’ efforts to decolonize language. Adopting and using gender neutral nouns and pronouns reclaims Mesoamerican activists’ Indigenous languages, as their linguistic systems do not conform with grammatical gender as codified in Spanish. Another gender-neutral form has been proposed by Pirexia, an anarchist affinity group formed in 2010 in Spain, which released publications until 2011. In their article “Notas al uso del lenguaje” [“Notes on the Use of Language”], Pirexia reflects on patriarchy, sexism, gender discrimination, and how these forms of discrimination impact on language. The author(s) also examine different GAGGs (including examples I have discussed) and, after explaining various difficulties they pose, suggest the use of *-e*, as in: “**Les** **trabajadores** aquí **reunides**, queremos manifestar que no vamos a tolerar la explotación

a la que estamos *sometides*” (2011: 34). The letter ‘e’ is used in all their texts to substitute for masculine and feminine grammatical gender markers because of its ease in articulation (given that it already represents a vowel sound in Spanish). In this way the collective deploys a gender-neutral form that is easily pronounced and avoids any issues that pronunciation of @, X, and other graphic symbols may present.

#### Use of GAGG in Solidarity vs. use of Masculine Gender as in Conflict

These graphic alternatives may seem disorganized or anti-systematic from a normative grammatical perspective. But these changes to the structure of the language are not meant to follow the rules of Spanish grammar: GAGG usage constitutes a political action with specific purposes. Furthermore, in context, these graphic alternatives are a rhetorical weapon allocating positive values to referents such as ‘comrades,’ ‘workers,’ ‘neighbours,’ etc., and, at the same time, introduce negative values to referents such as ‘police,’ ‘guards,’ ‘lawyers,’ etc. Thus, they reinforce separation and opposition between social forces.

In some contexts, particularly in texts about confrontations with police and other contentious entities, anarchists may align in solidarity or affinity by constructing gender neutral expressions referring to one person (*compañerxs*) or a collective (*lx:s compañerxs*) when the referents are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural. The gender-neutral forms with GAGG are also constructed when the writer/author includes themselves, using self-referential pronouns (*nosotrxs*, *todxs*).

In addition to Acción Directa’s “*Todxs* llevamos **un** policía adentro. Acáballo!” (‘We-GAGG have a cop-MASC inside. Finish **him!**’), there are other examples in *El Amanecer* that illustrate how normative forms of marking gender embody negative values associated with contending or enemy forces, which, in all cases, utilized the masculine morpheme *-o*:

- a. “[...] ni **nosotrxs** **mismxs** entendemos [...] no podemos ni guardaremos silencio por Nelson Vildósola, el joven de 19 años asesinado en manos de Carabineros tras un ‘confuso’ incidente [...]”
- b. “La mejor forma de recordar a **todxs** **lx:s** **asesinadxs** por el Estado, es con lucha contra ese mismo [...]”

Examples **a** and **b** are **taken** from an article in *El Amanecer* by Ayelén de la Revuelta (2012: 4) on the killing of a young man by the police in Chillán, Chile. ‘A’ states: “*nosotrxs* *mismxs* we-GAGG can’t and will not remain silent in the face of the murder of Nelson Vildósola by the *carabineros* police in a ‘confusing incident.’” The positioning of enunciation, ‘we’ combined with GAGG *-xs* establishes an interrelationship between author and reader while alienation from the police is emphasized through the masculine gender marker *-o*, as in *carabineros*, *los pacos* and *los esbirros* (the last two are synonyms of ‘police officer’ or ‘cop’). Example **b** expands solidarity with those murdered by the state: *todxs* *lx:s* *asesinadxs*.

- c. “[...] constantes intervenciones de **serenos** expulsando a ‘no vecinxs’ de parques”
- d. “**los actores** no son más que caras y nombres que resultan ridículos al lado de lo que los medios tratan de expresar”

In examples **c** and **d** the masculine gender marker is used in contrast to *-xs*. In example **c** it refers to *serenos* (‘security guards’) and, in example **d**, to actors: both are portrayed as puppets of larger oppressive entities. In **c**, the guards are accused of harassing people for loitering in parks in neighborhoods that they allegedly do not belong to. Here “guards” is marked with the masculine grammatical gender form and “non-neighbors” (loiterers) with the GAGG *-xs*. In example **d**, the word “actors,” denoting those who participate in hostile commercial propaganda in the media, is also marked with the masculine gender. Here, standard grammatical form suggests a negative identity value associated with cops and actors, as the normative form indexes the regulatory (cultural, linguistic, social and economic) system to which anarchists are opposed.

- e. “[...] con ella [la capucha] me igualo a mis *compañerxs* mientras insultamos a *los esbirros* del poder”

Similarly, example **e** expresses affinity and solidarity with comrades using a hood to mask their face (*compañerxs*) and opposition toward the repressive forces (henchmen) of the state (*los esbirros del poder*). The author observes that a hood or mask is a powerful tool of evasion and protest, “[...] because with it I’m protected, because with it I show my hatred, my anger to this violent system.” The caption accompanying a related illustration declares: “[t]he hood doesn’t hide, it shows!” (2012: 2). Echoing the use of author-pseudonyms and GAGG’s gender neutral formations, the hood conceals one’s identity in the streets. Here we see how non-verbal style practices complement on-the-ground activism and are a means of ‘indexing’ identity/ies, affinities, and solidarities.



## Una breve reflexión sobre la capucha

*recibido al mail,  
Escrito por un/a anonimx.*

**F**ui, soy y seré un encapuchadx, taparé mi rostro con esa sudada y ardiente polera, porque con ella estoy protegídx, porque con ella muestro mi odio, mi rabia a este violento sistema, con ella me igualo a mis compañerxs mientras insultamos a los esbirros del poder, ella es mi cómplice cuando rompemos las estructuras capitalistas que nos oprimen y prendemos neumáticos y basura al fuego en medio de la calle, seré un/a encapuchadx de este 2012 y seré el temor de la autoridad y el tema en la mesa de cada familia autoritaria, en la boca de todxs lxs ciudadanxs moralistas que ejercen una pega muy similar a la del paco.



LA CAPUCHA es el  
BOSTRO DEL PUEB  
EN LA LUCHA

¡LA CAPUCHA NO ESCONDE, MUESTRA!

**Picture 4.** From the article “Una breve reflexión sobre la capucha” by Un/a anonimx (2012). *El Amanecer* vol. 2 no.7 (April 2012, p.3)

Just as covering one's face to protect oneself simultaneously 'exposes' a person's resistance, so the use of *-x* and the other gender-neutral alternatives expands the possibilities of enunciation in a given discourse.

### Final Thoughts

Using graphic alternatives in language contributes to discussions on discrimination based on sex and gender. These forms radicalize discourses concerning language usage among mainstream and reformist critics of linguistic sexism, who tend to focus, exclusively on the situation of women. These graphic alternatives allow speakers to learn, recognize and acknowledge the multiple possibilities of expression that the Spanish language has had and could possibly have. This is particularly important for non-binary individuals who do not actively signify queerness in their bodies and may be mis-gendered.

Many have criticized the alteration of language as a futile strategy that does not address the issues of gender inequality and discrimination directly and they are mere cosmetic alterations of the language. These critics argue that the focus instead should be on tackling inequality and discrimination that affect people's material conditions and having conversations on heteropatriarchy and gender discrimination. However, if those material changes involve having conversations about these issues, there needs to be a language for engaging in those conversations and the alternative gender categories that have been created by LGBTQI people should not be ignored.

Linguists Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King posit that even if gender-based language reform may not be immediately or completely successful, it "sensitize[s] individuals to ways in which language is discriminatory towards women [and non-binary identifying people]," and therefore demonstrates that "language becomes one of the many arenas where social inequalities are elucidated" (1998: 170). Similarly, as Trevor Pateman points out, "outer changes" such as non-sexist language can affect inner attitudes and, potentially, change the political status quo: "the change in outward practice constitutes a restructuring of at least one aspect of one social relationship [...] every act reproduces or subverts a social institution" (as quoted in Cameron, 1985: 172). Mercedes Bengoechea also observes that while non-binary articulations might not have revolutionized social gender relations at present, they enable the visibility of non-binary and queer identities in discourse, and, very importantly, contribute to questioning and destabilization the Spanish language's patriarchal and androcentric grammar (2015: 21).

While GAGG and other changes to language-usage that seek to dissolve male/female binaries – such as English pronouns (*ey*, *ze*, *xe*, *they*) – have not ended gender discrimination and violence toward transgender and queer people, furthering the discussion of gender discrimination and the linguistic erasure of women and non-binary people contributes to dismantling hegemonic discourses that perpetuate discriminatory ideologies generally, including within anarchist circles.

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