Masculinity, Performativity and Stereotypical Communication: Power Relations Reiterated by Language in the Social and Working Context

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Abstract

Feminist reflections have led to a rethinking of many aspects of our contemporary world, such as the concept of masculinity and its power relations. In Western civilisation, in fact, man is the archetype, thus making his supremacy part of the natural order of things. This very naturalness, discursively produced and performed, is what has made man invisible and universal, hence without the need to think - and think oneself - in terms of gender. As a result, man has convinced himself that he is not influenced by his own masculinity and can speak for all *man*kind, becoming the logos through which he declines the rest, prescribing 'consonant' ways of being a man or a woman. Historically, then, different power relations have developed, generating violent forms of communication that, on a daily basis, reiterate a hegemonic and sexist social model. This has led to the production of certain stereotypical attributes that have subsequently flowed into different social dynamics, establishing different roles and work possibilities that have welded structural problems: such as, for example, the 'glass ceiling'. The aim of this analysis, therefore, will be to reason about the concept of masculinity and the consequent hegemonic-linguistic structures, wondering how such reflections can be translated back into the corporate sphere. This is with the aim of producing anti-discriminatory and equal systems that improve workers' conditions, as well as their general outlook on gender issues. The methodology adopted will see the use of philosophical-pragmatic theoretical reflection, in particular around the theory of linguistic performativity, fused with empirical data collection in the corporate sphere as a result of questionnaires, contextual analyses and training courses carried out at an Italian corporation.

Keywords: masculinity, sexism, stereotypes, language, discrimination

1. Introduction

Gender studies have generated several critical analyses around issues such as identity, social 'roles,' and power relations. In this, language plays a central role, especially since the development of the performativity theory produced by the philosopher Judith Butler. According to this theory, in fact, gender is not something pertaining to a stable and immutable

ontological core, but rather to a complex network of power relations, as well as stereotypical attributions, repeated through linguistic acts. In this dimension, the relationship between man and woman, within a necessary *binary structure*, sees unequal dynamics, favouring one of the two 'halves.' In this regard, the philosopher Derrida speaks of *phallocentrism*, namely the tendency to place power - identifiable in the possession of language (Cavarero 1991: 45) - in the *phallus*; hence, in the man. The latter is, in fact, the one who has had the most *presence* in reality, being able in this way not only to develop his hegemony, but also to naturalise it. In time, this hegemonic male – patriarchal – practice has changed form, assuming symbolic traits of domination and penetrating every aspect of reality, including the corporate sphere.

In this analysis, I would therefore like to focus on the present relationship between language and gender relations, particularly masculinity, and then concentrate on the consequences today in the workplace. The challenge of this paper will therefore be to attempt to translate the theoretical philosophical apparatus into concrete paths that can be applied in business contexts, thus attempting to overcome the barriers that often separate the worlds of research and work. Indeed, philosophy can, on the one hand, retrospectively question its conceptual constructs, comparing them with their problematic concrete outcomes. On the other hand, it can have a social impact, proposing interventions that can open up more conscious communicative alternatives, capable of weighing on the social dynamics of those involved. In other words, in my opinion, philosophy can become a useful tool to put under criticism the social paradigm that it has created and enlivened over time, so as to be able to develop something new and equal, even in corporate contexts.

The analysis will therefore focus on an initial theoretical section, in which the specific relationship between the gendered 'male' subject and the logos will be emphasised. Man, in fact, by setting himself up as a social canon, has established and delineated every other aspect of reality, exercising his power and shaping the world through his 'voice'. This shaping does not take place exclusively through the exercise of physical force, but also symbolic-linguistic, acting as a control device within the bodies themselves. A device, therefore, fundamental to maintaining the hierarchy between genders, being internalised and 'naturalised' through a performative form of behavioural education, the outcome of a violent and patriarchal praxis.

In the following section, therefore, we will delve into the patriarchal practice underlying the symbolic exercise of force. We will then discuss how male dominance has penetrated every aspect of reality, developing a model symbolically encapsulated in the figure of the phallus. A model that continues to perpetuate such domination through different forms and voices, being embodied in every person. It has, in fact, produced multiple stereotypical categories that, through language, are daily 'nailed' to the different anatomical bodies, encasing them in pre-established hierarchical scales. This 'compartmentalisation' is what has led to the development of specific gender roles, influencing relationships between people in all social spheres, including the workplace.

Consequently, we will move on to corporate dynamics, delving into the topic from various data obtained with some Italian partner companies. First of all, we will reflect on stereotypical and sexist communication, analysing their mechanisms and internal structures. In this way, it will be possible to comprehend how they work, so that, subsequently, we will be able to reason about possible retranslations in the workplace. Afterwards, we will report on the path I have implemented in the two years of collaboration with companies, accompanying the data obtained with methodological and theoretical reflections. All this, with the aim of creating anti-discriminatory forms of communication capable of laying the foundations for the development of an equal environment.

To give more depth to the analysis, I adopted a methodology that merges two perspectives:

1) Firstly, the philosophical-linguistic one, which will provide useful conceptual tools to critically read social praxis in relation to gender issues. In particular, I will make use of the concept of performativity from both a linguistic (Austin 1962: 7-120) and a gender perspective (Butler 1990: 115-200). The performative perspective, in its double meaning, will be advantageous in this research because it will allow for a fluid view of praxis, emphasising how language plays a central role in continuing to *re-propose* the power positions of the man-*phallus*. However, precisely in relation to performative capacity, altering language could: on one hand, interrupt this *re-proposition* of power. On the other, create something new that not only counteracts the *phallocentric* paradigm, but generates the basis for a new equal and anti-discriminatory praxis. In other words, the performative perspective sheds light on both how to interrupt the overpowering paradigm and how to resignify it.

2) Secondly, I will adopt an empirical approach that will see the use of surveys taken from: 1- the activities of *Fondazione Libellula*, an Italian organisation that raises consciousness on the issue of violence and gender discrimination[1]; 2- analysis of data collected through interviews, questionnaires and training sessions[2] at two Italian companies with which I work directly: *Leader Confcooperative Puglia*, in the field of corporate training, and *Node Roma*, which focuses on digital innovation. The sample includes the entire employee staff of the two companies, numbering about fifty people. In particular, multiple questionnaires were adopted, submitted anonymously, then analysed using intersectional sieves: i.e. separating the results according to different factors, such as: perception of discrimination suffered, gender identification and age. In relation to the data obtained, specific training sessions were then developed that touched on the main theoretical themes, particularly linguistic performativity and stereotypes. These training courses were structured in such a way as to have, in addition to conceptual reflection, moments of open discussion and exercises, thus allowing both debate and immediate feedback. Regarding the analysis of data obtained from interviews and training courses, specific questionnaires were employed, always administered anonymously. These questionnaires primarily focused on the methodology, aiming to assess whether the approach was well received, as well as the participants' understanding of the topics covered. The latter aspect was not evaluated through direct questions about the subjects, but rather by examining their subsequent work experiences, seeking to identify whether an increase in awareness had occurred. In these cases, the results of the questionnaires were then analysed using intersectional filters, distinguishing respondents based on their gender identity, age, and perceived discrimination. After that, statistical calculations were carried out, enabling comparisons to be made.

In summary, the aim of this work is to show how certain aspects of masculinity, invisibilised throughout history, have generated specific power relations, delineating and defining stereotypes and categorising visions. Attributes that have then flowed into the different social dynamics of our society, establishing different roles and work possibilities from the linguistic repetition of those models. Once this dynamic has been highlighted, the aim then becomes that of counteracting this paradigm, reasoning on more conscious forms of communication capable of producing equal systems that overcome stereotypical and hierarchical gender binarism.

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[1] https://www.fondazionelibellula.com/it/
[2] The data reported were collected over a period of time between January 2023 and July 2024

2. The Symbolic Domination of the Masculine through the Performative Reiteration of Language

Delineating a precise history and definition of masculinity is an arduous task, considering the different socio-cultural currents that have developed in different geographical and temporal contexts. In fact, sociologist Connell, especially in *Masculinities* (1995: 58-61), reports on numerous anthropological, sociological and ethnographic studies that indicate how the history of masculinity is traversed by an infinite number of directions; although they tend to be united by specific aspects: aggression, domination, alliances, competition, violence and so on (Ivi: 37). Moreover, it is crucial to consider from the beginning that, as Cavarero (1991: 44) argued, the man-male has founded and shaped himself in and through the *logos*, invalidating and making impossible a real neutrality of any science, including history. This is precisely due to the intricate link between masculinity and language, which sees, particularly in the Western philosophical tradition, a specific centring that can be defined as *phallocentrism* (Derrida 1967: 359-377). This implies that the history of masculinity depends on what men have said about it in the course of time, developing specific positionings, interrogations and power relations.

In Western civilisation, in fact, the man-male is the canon on which the entire social structure rests. Male supremacy, in this way, seems to be part of the natural order of things, in an inevitable biologism that defines power relations. This naturalness, discursively produced and performed daily by language (Butler 1990: 24-25), is what has made man invisible and universal. Given this invisibilisation, over time questions have been asked about the speaking subject's relationship with nature, with God, with other living beings, but it has never been questioned that such analyses were always the result of a world of man produced and universalised by his own language; never considered the result of a gendered being (Irigaray 1991: 279). Thus, the various thinkers throughout history have considered the masculine as transcendental humankind, therefore without the need to think, and think of themselves, in terms of gender. In this way, man has convinced himself that he is not influenced by his own masculinity and can speak for all *man*kind, becoming the *logos* through which he declines the rest (Cavarero 1991: 43): ζῷον λόγον ἔχον. As a result, definitions and categories have developed from hierarchising dichotomisation, which in repetition have found a naturalising and apriorist force upon which reflections, concepts, perspectives such as man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, citizen/foreigner, able/disabled, and so on, have been based. Categories that were created and delineated from those who had the greatest possibility of *exercising* language; hence, man, made universal and neutral [3]. It is in fact the masculine that has produced the different attributions, moving within a binary and, tendentially, essentialist paradigm (Derrida 1972: 29-58). In other words, the Western tradition has not only oriented itself in reality through the perspective of clear and distinct pairs producing stable meanings, such as presence/absence, being/non-being, masculine/feminine etc. (Derrida 1967: 372), seeing in the *logos* the way to unveil and describe them; but it has also posited the masculine as the prince and invisible element, as the gendered holder of the *logos* itself. Therefore, the paradigm of reference, as the French philosopher argues, is not only centred on the *logos* (*logocentric*), but also on man (*phallocentric*), thus becoming *phallogocentric.* A paradigm, therefore, always inclined towards one of the two binary sides: the masculine respect to feminine, the heterosexual respect to homosexual and so on, placing that half as more *present* and *privileged*. A presence, however, that, in order to be maintained, needs specific legitimisation of an overpowering nature, thus necessitating the silencing of other voices: such

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[3] To explore the relationship between masculine and neuter see: A. Grandi, "*Language, Neuter, and Masculinity: The Influence of the Neuter-Male in the Reiteration of Social Models, A Philosophical Analysis Starting with Cavarero, Irigaray, and Butler*", in «Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Gender Studies and Sexuality», Berlin 2024: https://doi.org/10.33422/icgss.v1i1.363

as the feminine ones. An aspect, the latter, that the Italian philosopher Gasparrini has traced in detail, describing many violent rhetorics of inferiorisation and discrimination implemented over time, from the pre-Socratics to contemporary philosophers (Gasparrini 2024: 11-64).

In any case, patriarchal hegemony thus seems to be the outcome of different forms of aggression and supremacy, which have led the male gender to subjugate everything else through always new ways. So, not only through acts of physical force, but also political and *symbolic*:

> Symbolic power is a form of power that is exerted on bodies directly, and as if by magic, in the absence of any physical coercion; but this magic operates only by relying on dispositions that have been instilled, true springs, in the deepest recesses of bodies. [...] Symbolic power finds its conditions of possibility and its economic counterpart in the immense preliminary work necessary to bring about a lasting transformation of bodies and to produce the permanent dispositions that it arouses and awakens (Bourdieu 1998: 48).

Symbolic force operates, therefore, as an internal control device within the bodies themselves. Where the set of norms and categories that serve to support the hierarchy between genders is internalised and 'naturalised' through a form of behavioural and postural education that becomes *habitus*. Thus, habits embodied, repeated and re-actualised in every action, in every context, in every body and between bodies, until they penetrate our skin and insinuate themselves into the *psyché* (Butler 1997b: 50-60).

A process that we will now explore in more detail and which we could define, in accordance with Butler's reflections on gender, as performative.

2.1. John L. Austin's theory of Linguistic Performativity in the Process of Producing and Re-Producing Reality

As we saw in the concluding part of the previous section, the repetition of specific actions is what produces *habitus* in line with the paradigm, thus exerting a phallocentric symbolic force, which penetrates the interiority of each person. This repetition is what we find underlying philosopher Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. However, before delving into Butler's view of performativity, it is essential to introduce the concept of performative language, in order to grasp the theoretical roots used by the American philosopher in greater depth.

The first theorisation of linguistic performativity came from the philosopher John L. Austin in 1962, where he emphasised that language not only *describes* reality, but is an instrument for *acting* on it, in particular with regard to the factual capacity of two of its *effects*: 1- the *perlocutionary* effects, i.e. what the sentence produces, also on an emotional level, with the possibility of modifying the situation and the surrounding reality (Austin 1962: 80-81). In other words, the extra-linguistic effects that lead to orienting perceptions, as well as producing emotional-sentimental reactions. For example, insulting a person might generate fear, sadness and despondency. 2- the *illocutionary* effects. According to Austin (1962: 71-79), they are the force of the statement, hence the possibility of the sentence to accomplish something. For example, the command of a judge in court. Later, Butler (1997a: 61-70) reinterprets this conception and emphasises that it is also what *produces* or *re-produces* social patterns. Thus, the possibility of giving new life, daily, to certain visions through the use of language.

Language, in short, due to its performative capacity is not something that represents an external world without influencing it but, on the contrary, is what constantly produces, consolidates and reiterates social models; thus, constantly *re-proposing* the paradigm of reference. This can

occur not only through verbal or written language but through every possible form of communication. The same mechanism is, in fact, triggered by behaviours, gestures, media products, and even by the way we organise and assign meaning to objects: for example, toys, which are rigidly categorised to guide "boys" and "girls" towards activities aligned with the paradigm. This constant reinforcement of the phallogocentric structure, therefore, also influences the formation of the individual and their "gender identity"

2.2. Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity in the Process of Production and Re-Production of the Person

As previously stated, language, understood in its broadest sense, is the human capacity not only to communicate and describe but also to create, signify, and perpetuate certain models. It is precisely on this *productive* and *re-productive* aspect that, some thirty years later, the philosopher Judith Butler, in Gender Trouble, elaborates the theory of gender performativity (1990: 11-39). According to the Butlerian perspective, in fact, gender is a sequence of repetitive acts within a rigid socio-cultural regulation, which establishes the appropriate way of being 'male' or 'female' (Butler 1990: 45), in relation to a series of *stereotypes* based on multiple *comparatives*. The iteration of these acts creates gender and does so beyond the awareness and intention of the subjects involved in the action. Gender is thus the outcome of a language, a bodily style that is implemented through specific *performances*. This repetition is, on one hand, the re-enactment of a set of socially established meanings, i.e. pre-delineated stereotypical categories; on the other, the ritualised form of their social legitimisation. This means that, through the constant, forced, and rigid behavioural gender education that takes place throughout life, individuals are directed to conform to the paradigm. This conformity has a dual aspect. Firstly, it reproduces phallogocentric social models in the illocutionary sense of the act, leading individuals to engage in a series of gestures, behaviours, and communications that are consistent with and appropriate to the paradigm. Subsequently, as these representations are continuously enacted by multiple individuals, they serve as a rhetorical "confirmation" of the "naturalness" and "normality" of phallogocentric models, thereby justifying and legitimising them. At the same time, alternative possibilities are excluded, stigmatised as "abnormal" or "unnatural."

In other words, this constant repetition of linguistic, verbal and bodily acts sees on one hand, the confirmation of the praxis that created them, welding and stiffening, on a daily basis, this stereotypical vision. While, on the other, the simultaneous reiteration of that same praxis, moving it incessantly, as we will elaborate in the next section, in such a way as to maintain that direction.

3. The Perpetuation of Patriarchal Practice through the Performative Exercise of Masculinity

Patriarchal praxis, as well as the nominalizable categorization as masculinity, are thus the result of the phallogocentric perspective *performed* over millennia of Western history, through the exercise of a force-violence-physical, symbolic and/or political-that nails dichotomized categories to anatomical bodies, shaping those bodies. The category "masculinity," then, will see a series of specific characteristics in relation to time and space, but still in line with this paradigm. However, this does not imply that every subjectivity is completely adherent to the traits of masculinity of its time; although all people are subject to patriarchal praxis. Indeed, masculinity is a complex dynamic that is based on power relations, taking on different facets. Consequently, as pointed out by sociologist Connell, there are intersectionally different masculinities in relation to reference binarisms. For example, one can speak of subordinate

masculinities in the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, pointing to homosexual identities (1995: 78-79), or marginalized masculinities in relation to skin colour (Ivi: 80-81). However, the intersectional perspective complicates the situation, especially by shifting the discourse to personal responsibility. This is because the patriarchal hegemonic exercise will not necessarily come from people who adhere to each of those characterisations. For instance, a homosexual man will be able to move the praxis through misogynistic language. This will happen because the creation of hatred will not stop at the binarism of - in this case - man/woman alone, but will charge the entire referential praxis, i.e. the phallogocentric one. As a consequence, all internal dichotomies will be maintained and moved hierarchically: including the heterosexual/homosexual one. Paradoxically, therefore, the misogynist language of the homosexual person will push to reiterate a model that, indirectly, will also lead the hypothetical person to be discriminated against precisely because he is homosexual. This procedure highlights two interesting aspects of masculinity in relation to the phallogocentric paradigm. First, as Derrida has repeatedly pointed out, that the maintenance of Manichaean views of reality leads to hierarchising categories, fuelling hatred and discrimination even among 'minorities.' This further implies that masculinity is not exclusively about its relation to femininity, but all the categorisations created over time: cisgender/transgender, heterosexual/homosexual, but also able/disabled, rich/poor and so on. Finally, that the various binarisms are all inevitably interconnected in a relation of (hierarchical) difference, creating pyramid scales of privilege.

In short, the power dynamic of hegemonic masculinity, fused in patriarchal praxis, finds its way to movement by tracing a series of more 'privileged' elements that, intersectionally, will generate multiple hierarchies of oppression. From a performative perspective, then, hegemonic masculinity is about a *doing*, rather than a *being*. A *doing* that will consequently create a series of characteristics in line with that dominant exercise, in other words, all those attributes that today can be defined as *agency*: competition, aggression, control, leadership, autonomy and so on. An acting, therefore, concretised in the *exercise* of force, in the various dichotomies, of one half over the other, on a physical, symbolic, and political level. Half, however, which has already been delineated by those holding power, creating a series of attributions then nailed to specific bodies. A procedure similar to what Lévinas describes as the creation of the 'being-nailed' (1996: 209-215). Namely, a 'being-category' which, in patriarchal binary praxis, is retranslated into 'being-male or female,' perceived then as a fatality from which it is impossible to escape, an ontological category. This nailing leads to the incorporation of conditioned possibilities as well as their repeatability; in fact, it is possible to perform that being-category in a 'right or wrong' way where, in the first case, there is a confirmation of the established ontological category, in the second the need for punishment or correction. In this dynamic, therefore, language plays a significant role, both in orienting towards the 'right' way and in aggression in the case of inadequate performance. From this, masculinity has thus 'developed' forms of communication appropriate to its domain. A language that enables the exercise of force-violence, which is fundamental in chaining bodies to the symbolic and political categories sanctioned by him.

4. The Functions of Stereotypes As a symbolic Force of Masculinity: The Language of Force-Violence

Since masculinity rests on the exercise of force-violence, its language, as anticipated, will necessarily embody force-violence, portraying itself in diverse ways in relation to the situation. In this context, stereotypical communication is configured precisely as an everyday modality of this exercise, playing a vital role in the reiteration of phallogocentric praxis and the nailing of pre-delineated categories.

According to psychologist Volpato, stereotypes are mental representations that link specific *social categories* to *particular attributes* through *probabilistic* associations (2013: 28), triggering - consciously or unconsciously - each time they are linguistically reiterated. As mental images, their strength concerns the ability to orient relationships and produce specific expectations, indicating how people act or how they *should* act from two interconnected functions.

1. The *descriptive* function, thus establishing how people *are* in relation to the stereotypical view itself: in the field of gender, for example, through the characteristics of man-*agency* and woman-*communality*. These characteristics are always in binary complementarity with each other and, specifically, those of masculinity follow the need for the exercise of force-violence as a creative act of masculinity itself. Consequently, all the stereotypical attributes of agency relate to a specific male way of *acting*: competition, aggressiveness, independence, assertiveness and so on. On the contrary, the characteristics of femininity are the outcome of that exercise; in this sense they not only suffer the violent exercise of masculinity, but also the attributions 'appropriate' to their being a woman. In this perspective, stereotypical descriptions are part of a process of linguistic heredity. Indeed, language, as Derrida (1996: 11-17) argues, is always a heredity, as far as it is unformed by us and therefore precedes and *constitutes* us. I consider interesting, despite the theoretical distance, to connect Cavarero's reflection here. She questions, in fact, the unequal relationship of this heredity, arguing that the masculine, adhering to language, recognises himself in it, *is* in it (1991: 45). And because it is there, it is said and thought in a language that is his own. On the contrary, everything that is not man must say itself from a language that has already thought it. In the binary structure, therefore, woman (as well as everything that is not man in the intersectional sense: heterosexual, cisgender and so on), in short, does not self-represent self in language, but receives her representation produced by man through his exercise. She is and is not, simultaneously, the subject of the language of man-logos, in the sense of the Butlerian ambiguity of subjectification-objectification (1997b: 50-55) and the individual. The descriptive function of stereotypes thus leads to the inheritance of a language that has already thought, phallocentrically, of every person as a being-category. As Cavarero argues, the two gendered particulars (man/woman), in a binary logic, are one another's counterpart. But, in truth, the alterity of man is based in man himself, who, by preliminarily positioning himself as the universal, then admits himself as one of the two sexes into which the universal is specified. The alterity of woman, on the other hand, is founded in the negative: the universal man, particularising himself as a gendered 'man', encounters the gendered 'man' in the feminine form and defines her as precisely other than himself (1991: 44). In summary, everything that is not man inherits a series of words, grammatical rules, descriptions, connotative and denotative meanings already outlined within a phallogocentric dynamic, and thus centred on the masculine.

2. The descriptive function is interconnected with the *prescriptive* function, in other words, how people *should be* from descriptions, leading to cases of *self-stereotyping* (Volpato, 2013: 30). It implies, therefore, a 'predetermined path' that conditions every human being, conforming them to previously delineated social roles. This path is linked to the performative process, providing, precisely from the 'descriptions,' a series of consonant elements to be repeated, internalising them down to the unconscious level (bias). Linguistic inheritance leads, therefore, to the tracing of a suitable way that, as a consequence, develops a whole series of disciplining and punitive procedures that influence and delineate the possibilities and permissions of each person.

In sum, stereotypes on one hand say what characteristics are "appropriate" to being-category; on the other hand, they trace the path of doing consistent with that prescription. Their use in language is thus a symbolic but concrete exercise of masculine force-violence, enabling the

movement of praxis through every social dimension. In Derridean terms we might define stereotypes as "traces" (1972: 35) that carry with them a history of meanings and prejudices, but at the same time are incomplete and open to new interpretations. They are in fact the result of binary visions and attempts to simplify and crystallize the complexity of reality, which stand, however, on the process of concatenation of signs from difference. This is why they constantly change over time and are never stable, even if rhetorically defined as that. Indeed, to safeguard this vision of stability despite constant evolution, Volpato pointed out that there is a tendency to develop stereotypical subcategories that not only preserve the stereotype but, paradoxically, reinforce it (2013: 29). Thus, by seeing infinite men in the world who do not completely adhere to the stereotype, other intertwined categories will be created. For example, "weak" men (defined as complicit masculinities (Connell 1995: 79) or beta males), in their existence will confirm - negatively - that the man is strong, putting the person under judgment instead of the stereotypical structure of reference. In other words, discriminating the person as "weak" and therefore not a "real" man, rather than critically revising the stereotypical.

Stereotypes are, therefore, a tool with which hegemonic masculinity reiterates its power and positioning, welding together perspectives that orient every social dimension. Communication in the workplace, for example, is dense with this dynamic, seeing in the terms agency and communality, which we will now explore, a way in which gender roles are framed.

5. Stereotypical Communication in the Work Environment: Agency/Communality

Moving now to the labour field, the symbolic exercise of stereotypical force-violence is identifiable, as demonstrated (Heilman 2012: 113-135), by the clear tendency to describe male workers' performances with attributes afferent to the stereotypical sphere of *agency*, while those of female workers of *communality* (deference, kindness, empathy, cooperation, sociability, etc.). Such linguistic practices will then have profound impacts not only at the level of direct discrimination of the person, but also at the level of social possibilities, for example by obstructing the promotion. The *agency/communality* binarism, in fact, produces a perception of inadequacy caused by the irreconcilability between stereotypical female expectations and *leadership* roles (as well as any other job pertaining to the dimension of "masculine" and vice versa). Career advancement, therefore, is difficult for the female worker not only in reaching top positions, but also in performing the tasks that should be performed in those positions. Indeed, since leadership positions require skills stereotypically associated with masculinity, when a female worker succeeds in achieving them she is often evaluated negatively, perceiving that positioning as a *violation of gender norms* (Heilman 2012: 123). An interesting datum in this regard is provided by a survey of *Fondazione Libellula*: 62% of women say they are considered aggressive if they show themselves to be ambitious or assertive (2022: 27) and, from this, follows an increase of hate speech cases, as shown by data from the EIGE (*European Istitute for Gender Equality*)[4].

The latter datum underscores another dangerous dynamic of stereotypical language, namely its retranslation into violent communication; although not necessarily evident or intentional. Stereotypical language can, in fact, take on different modes of application, from hate language to paternalism, as well as different directions, turning into communication that is homophobic, racist, and so on. In the case discussed here it takes the form of sexism. In the communicative field, in fact, sexism is something that is done through expressions in line with gender stereotypes previously delineated by socio-historical praxis. Without stereotypes, it would be

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[4] https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs

impossible to produce sexist phrases, as there would not be the categorizations that give meaning to the phrase itself. Reflection around the *agency/communality* dualism falls within the sexist dimension, diffusing it into the work environment. Data collected by *Fondazione Libellula*, in fact, report that one in two (53%) women in Italy have directly or indirectly dealt with explicit sexist expressions at work (2022: 21), but they also report that 68% of women feel "the idea is circulating that a career woman has used the leverage of seduction" (Ivi: 19).

The exercise of sexism in the male hegemonic dynamic, however, does not only concern expressions or considerations such as the last reported, but also different perceptual, relational and/or recognition modes of competence and authority. The questionnaire administered to partner companies, for example, shows that 80% of those who identify themselves as *women* feel that their ideas, despite their competence, are not considered. In the survey conducted by the Fondazione Libellula, in addition, we find that 44% of female respondents claim to be interrupted often or listened to less than a male colleague (2022: 21). Both of these active and perceptual dynamics are consequences of a stereotypical view of relationships and fall under what can be defined as discursive injustice: i.e. those cases in which members belonging to a certain, typically disadvantaged, social group face a systemic inability to perform linguistic acts (Kukla 2014: 440-457). In other words, they are silenced or, in any case, see their linguistic illocutionary force halved or completely annihilated, as they belong to the inferiorised or paternalistically infantilised category. Interpreting these data in a linguistic-performative key, it appears that stereotypical communication debases and, phallocentrically, subordinates the figure of the female worker, enlivening the reference praxis and hindering real equality. This aspect also emerged in the interviews conducted within companies. In fact, when asked about equal opportunities and self-realisation possibilities, those who identify as a *woman* indicated 71% *no*; compared to 71% *yes* for *men*. Furthermore, it is important to mention here that even more discriminatory treatment occurs for intersectional dimensions, such as for the LGBTQIA+ community[5].

However, these data are not irrelevant perceptions at the level of social practice. As also reported by Volpato, in fact, due to sexist and stereotypical views present in multiple social contexts, the perception of value and competence between men and women is often very marked; statistically leading women to *desire* or be more attracted towards disciplines or jobs more 'consonant' with their being-category, thus creating a dangerous vicious circle (2013: 102). Thus, the statistical tendency of women towards humanities subjects, for example, is not the outcome of an inevitable presence of *communality* characteristics, but rather a specific movement of the phallogocentric perspective. This implies that the language of masculinity, through stereotypical patterns, not only affects the perception of discrimination and, therefore, on an emotional and subjective level. But it penetrates deep down both at the individual psychological level, orienting people, and their relationships; and at the socio-political level, reiterating those same canons on which and through which praxis moves. However, as argued above, its voice is not embodied by specific subjects, but by every person who adopts that type of communication.

Proposing new reflections and new languages, both in the work and social context, therefore implies a deconstruction and re-signification of the hegemonic aspects of praxis in which each person is immersed. To do so, however, as repeated, one must critically interrogate the whole 'monstrous' paradigm of reference. Derrida wrote:

> Instead of surrendering to normalising and legitimising representations that identify, recognise, and reduce everything too quickly, why not take an interest in 'theoretical'

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[5] https://www.istat.it/comunicato-stampa/discriminazioni-lavorative-nei-confronti-delle-persone-lgbt-in-unione-civile-o-gia-in-unione-anno-2022/

> monsters, in monstrosities that announce themselves in theory, in monsters that pre-emptively render all classifications obsolete and comical? (Derrida 1989: 38)

Before moving on to concrete action, to the creation of new norms, policies or interventions, it becomes necessary, therefore, to deal with the theoretical 'monstrosities' that hide in the social praxis in which we live. However, after trying to shed light on that paradigm, it becomes essential to attempt to do something concrete, producing new languages that alter or reverse the underlying mechanism. In the next section, therefore, we will look at some of the data that emerged as a result of my corporate collaboration, outlining the path and reflecting on the results.

6. The Experience with Partner Companies: Potentialities and Risks

In the preceding paragraphs, we reasoned on how the performative capacity of language, particularly in the form of stereotypical communication, is what enables the reiteration of male domination. However, in my opinion, the main tool for counteracting and re-signifying such domination lies precisely in the theoretical potential of performativity. In particular, in its centrality to the processes of gender creation in a Butlerian key. Indeed, if gender - and the relations between them - is performative, it means that it can be deconstructed and re-performed along different lines. Thus, stereotypes can be eliminated or re-signified through new 'languages', new performances that, over time, can come to resignify social practice itself. These 'languages' can be of any kind and expressed in any social dimension. In the company, as anticipated, such 'languages' can take the form of training courses, linguistic vademecums, specific sensitisation, context and discourse analysis, and even martial arts classes in a transfeminist key. Moreover, working on this perspective in corporations is useful, at least in theory, as an opportunity to re-signify not only male praxis, but also the capitalist one, with which patriarchy has now merged.

Clearly, intervening in companies on these issues always carries *risks*, because their aim is to *capitalise* and, as Connell (1995: 93) argues, *capitalism* is totally entangled in the dimension of male domination. It is crucial, in fact, to try to avoid falling into forms of exploitation of these issues, such as so-called pink-washing or rainbow-washing: i.e. the instrumental use of support for women's rights or LGBTQIA+ people by institutions or companies, with the only purpose of improving their image for advertising and/or economic goals, often masking problematic practices[6]

However, *potentially*, if combined with social, militant, educational revolutions and so on, corporate intervention can make a strong contribution to the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity. Corporations in fact influence, in this discourse, in several ways. First of all, they are perceived as real bodies that perform specific performances on the social horizon. Thus, orienting a corporation towards an equal practice means making it interact in a different way with the society outside. Moreover, they are moments of agglomeration and relations between people. Moments, therefore, where power relations can be confirmed or altered, influencing the perspective of individuals. Working in the corporate dimension implies, in short, acting on two simultaneous dimensions, the macro-social and the individual. It remains fundamental, however, to always have in light the theoretical paradigm one wishes to deconstruct, otherwise one runs the risk of implementing ineffective interventions or policies. Hence, in my opinion, a perspective is needed that is oriented towards becoming aware of the linguistic potential in full, particularly from a pragmatic perspective, as well as deconstructing the binary stereotypical categories.

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[6] https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/pinkwashing-definition-history-examples/

6.1. The path in the company: context analysis and training on performativity

Keeping in mind the risks and potential, in my experience with partner companies this attempt at intervention looks *promising*. Although there is an initial difficulty, in fact, caused by an Italian context that lacks adequate education on the topic of gender studies - objecting with political and instrumental rhetoric, invented by the same right-wingers who use them polemically, such as 'gender indoctrination' or 'gender ideology' (Gasparrini 2020: 34) -, the procedure adopted seems effective.

Table 1

|	Disabled	Women	LGBTQIA+	Foreigners	Young people
Never involved	72,72%	22,73%	72,72%	63,63%	40,91%
Slightly involved	27,28%	13,63%	27,28%	4,55%	18,18%
Very involved	0%	40,91%	0%	27,27%	18,18%
Often involved	0%	22,73%	0%	4,55%	22,73%

Initially, contextual analyses were carried out and questionnaires were administered, trying to identify those who perceived discriminatory acts against them or their colleagues the most. The questionnaires were administered anonymously and digitally to a sample of approximately fifty employees, allowing them to be completed without pressure and freely, with a two-week window provided for completion. Following this, the results were analysed using a series of intersectional filters, ensuring that certain data did not get lost in the multitude. It was particularly important to categorise the results based on gender identity, age, and, notably, the perception of experienced discrimination. Additional filters, such as length of service within the company and role within the organisation, were also applied. Based on these subdivisions, the data emerged, which can be compared in table 1, show that the biggest problems are sexist (women: 63,64% very + often involved), ageist (young people: 40,61%) and to a lesser extent also racist (foreigners: 31,82). As a result of these findings, I was able to develop targeted training courses. The latter were structured in such a way as to encourage the free participation of each employee, creating opportunities for internal dialogue. Finally, a space was provided for feedback and reflections, which could be submitted either directly or through anonymous questionnaires distributed at the conclusion. In any case, the course primarily focused on the performative capacity of language, and subsequently on the relationship between practice and individuals. In this way, the responsibility of every communicative act is highlighted, going beyond the evaluation - or justification - of only the 'intentional' aspect of the linguistic act. In fact, although the intentions may be ironic, humorous or refer to traditionally transmitted and/or shared expressions, some phrases will inevitably reiterate discriminating models, thus producing unequal corporate climates, and perpetuating hegemonic praxis. This factual capacity of language, introduced in the previous paragraph[7], is what Austin in *How to do things with words* (1962: 10) defines as linguistic performativity, i.e. the concrete possibility of language to produce *effects* in reality. Effects that can manifest themselves - in Butlerian reinterpretation of this theory - both at an emotional-individual level (perlocutions), thus extra-linguistic and concerning the person, or the group, receiving the linguistic act (in any form); and at a social level, thus the reiteration of a specific model, for example sexist, that conditions the horizon and (re)establishes certain perspectives. An explanatory example, reported and discussed in training courses specifically on sexism, concerns the expression: 'you are such a sissy' (Gasparrini 2020: 49). This phrase, in fact, makes sense because it is grounded in a very specific view of gender roles that, consequently, establishes characteristics appropriate to one and the other half of the dichotomy. In fact, if it had not been previously established that it is

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[7] See paragraph 2.1.

the woman who is the emotional category allowed to cry (for example), saying such a sentence to a crying man would make no sense at all. Saying that expression, therefore, will not only have an effect on the person receiving it, who may become angry or indifferent and so on; but it will bring to life the whole apparatus hidden behind it. To the phallogocentric stereotypical system that gives meaning to the phrase and orients relationships, nailing attributes to anatomical bodies and enlivening patriarchal praxis. The use of such expressions produces effects, therefore, on two distinct dimensions, that of the personal and subjective-emotional sphere and, simultaneously, that of the social sphere.

Raising consciousness of this mechanism is substantial for reflecting on equal language in working contexts, since it gives the opportunity to become aware of the more invisible and powerful dynamics of language itself, not dwelling only on the grammatical or semantic dimension; an aspect also confirmed by a questionnaire following the training. In fact, it was asked whether after the meeting it had happened to witness discriminatory phrases directed towards the person's sensitivity (*perlocutionary*): *yes* (figure 1) was found to be 12.9% (a very positive figure, moreover, as it was reduced compared to the 69.39% of the first questionnaire administered the previous year).

Figure 1
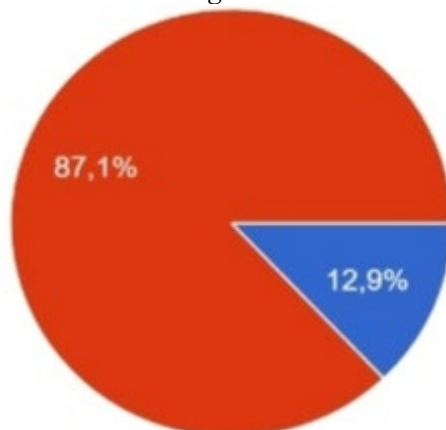
On the other hand, when asked whether this was done with phrases that were not *intentionally* offensive, but which recalled a discriminatory social model (*illocutionary*), *yes* (Figure 2) vote was 25.8%, doubling the figure and confirming an increase in sensitivity with respect to the subject.

Figure 2
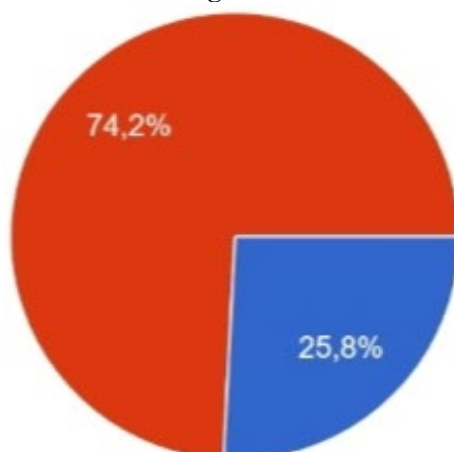
It is also interesting to highlight how the same difference in perception is visible when applying a gender filter to sift through the data. Calculating the percentages among those who identified as *Male*, we find that for the first question, 90% responded *no* and 10% *yes*; whereas for the second question, 75% responded *no* and 15% *yes*. Among those who identify as *Female*, we find that for the first question, 81.81% responded *no* and 18.19% *yes*; whereas for the second question, 72.72% responded *no* and 27.28% *yes*. Therefore, filtering by gender shows that the perception of those who identify as *Female* is generally higher, evidently in relation to the greater discrimination they experience.

In any case, noting a higher perception for the illocutionary dimension is promising for the development of all-round equal communication, as well as an egalitarian corporate climate and image, as it emphasises a greater ability to differentiate subjectivity from the collective-social plane. Therefore, delving into the deep mechanisms of language seems an effective way of intervening in the workplace. Personally, in fact, I think it is not very incisive just to illustrate how to 'use' an inclusive language, without the awareness of why it is necessary and above all of the scope, as well as the responsibility, that communication has. Otherwise, it would risk leading to a trivialisation of the topic - de-responsibilising linguistic acts - and moving hegemonic social practice without being aware of it.

6.2. The path in the company: targeted training and results

Following the first training course, which focused on personal responsibility as a result of the performative capacity of language, reflection moved on to more specific topics. The focus of the subsequent courses, in fact, shifted from reflection on stereotypes to their retranslation into violent communication, specifically sexist and paternalist communication. This did not take place exclusively through direct and unidirectional theoretical education, but also through situational examples, moments of discussion and concrete proposals. Interesting in this regard was also the experience of a martial arts course proposed to the employees, used as a "training act" and an acquisition of self-confidence and self-awareness, aimed at deconstructing the stereotypical female image. Coherently with the performative perspective, in fact, if stereotypes are nailed down - and retroactively assumed to be natural - through 'consonant' and prescribed performances, implementing new ones implies initiating a procedure of re-signification through, in this context, a specific language: body language. In *Gender Trouble*, for example, Butler gives the example of drag practice as theatrical performance against the dominant model (1990: 139). That is, literally dressing up as the opposite gender, turning one's bodies into satirical, politically subversive instruments. The Italian philosopher and martial arts teacher, Alessandra Chiricosta, sees in the martial arts a very similar resignifying possibility; being able to acquire, through it, awareness of one's own body, of the meanings that constitute it; but also of how culture and social relations decline, stereotypically, the perception of being that body: for example, a body-woman (2019: 56-57).

To sum up, the aim was to gain awareness of the scope of linguistic effects and, subsequently, to propose and implement new languages - verbal, medial, corporeal, written and so on - that counteract the reference practice on multiple levels. To this end, I developed, together with some colleagues, a linguistic vademecum[8] dealing with the topic of language from all points of view, from the grammatical and semantic to the pragmatic-performative. Hence, a handbook that could be consulted when communicating, both internally and externally, functional for

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[8] To explore the structure of the vademecum see: Grandi, A., Panaggio, A. (2024). Dalla teoria alla prassi: vulnerabilità e linguaggio nei Gender Equality Plan (GEP). *Post-filosofie,* 17(17), 80-102. https://doi.org/10.15162/1827-5133/2001 and: Introna, C. (2024). I limiti delle strategie di contrasto al sessismo linguistico nelle imprese e nelle istituzioni: Norme professionali di genere e ingiustizie discorsive. *Post-filosofie*, 17(17), 172-192. https://doi.org/10.15162/1827-5133/2005

writing e-mails, drafting documents, holding meetings, but also producing advertisements, images and anti-discriminatory attitudes. This vademecum is, in other words, the concretisation, in the form of a practical and advisory tool, of the various training courses conducted within companies. It provides both practical proposals in the form of specific communication strategies, as well as some considerations, flanked by example tables, of the reflections made during the courses: from sexist stereotypes to different forms of leadership. I consider this tool particularly useful because on the one hand it indicates what type of communication not to use, thus interrupting the phallogocentric reiteration: for example, avoiding using only the masculine grammatical gender in binary languages such as Italian, or, in the semantic and pragmatic dimension, avoiding expressing oneself towards female colleagues with informal expressions and paternalistic phrases. On the other hand, it also proposes advantageous practical alternatives for the re-signification of the paradigm, thus becoming a concrete tool for the purposes of the objectives of this research: such as, for example, the use of specific symbologies to overcome Italian grammatical binarism or producing images and assertions that do not follow the stereotypical phallocentric perspective.

In conclusion, all these interventions aimed to raise awareness and provide useful tools both to produce internal equal environments and to deconstruct patriarchal practices at the bottom. The latest questionnaires administered were encouraging, underlining, and confirming how functional and effective this approach appears to be. Indeed, 100% of those identified as *Female* and 65% *Male* claimed to have increased their awareness on the issue, finding a less discriminatory environment; going from over 80% perceived discrimination in the first questionnaire (dated April 2023), to 13% in the second (dated April 2024).

Clearly, underlying this work is a theoretical framework retranslated into a unique corporate context. Each corporation, in fact, just like each individual, will have internalised the practice in a specific way, producing different performances from the different people working within it. Therefore, a contextual analysis to identify the core issues remains fundamental. However, they will tend to fall into discriminating situations that are the outcome of phallogocentric hegemonic dualisms; reducible in sexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, ageist discrimination and so on, where language will play a central role regardless of the type of discrimination in action. Therefore, I believe, the reflection brought here is potentially applicable in different contexts, not exclusively work contexts, since the underlying social practice is the same.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of masculinity through a philosophical and socio-cultural lens reveals the complexity and depth of a concept that has deep roots in Western history and power structures. Indeed, masculinity, as profoundly highlighted by philosophers such as Butler and Derrida, is not a monolithic and static entity, but rather a dynamic and performative construct, shaped and moulded by social interactions and discursive practices. It therefore plays a crucial role in establishing hierarchies as well as perpetuating forms of violence, both physical and symbolic, thus maintaining its dominance through a continuous reiteration of norms and stereotypes. The latter then flowed, inevitably, into corporations, thus amplifying their reiterating power and nailing, with even greater force and effectiveness, certain attributes to specific bodies, producing discrimination and impartiality. To counter patriarchal discriminatory praxis one must, therefore, question the whole phallogocentric structure with which reality has been categorised. And, to do so, language is central. For language, in view of its performative power, is both that which can daily reiterate the social models on the ground; but, simultaneously, also that which has the capacity to re-signify them or write new ones. Every kind of language,

therefore, from verbal communication to written documents in corporations, can contribute to countering the violent paradigm that sees the centrality of the phallus and, consequently, the domination of man. In my opinion, moreover, as corporations are now substantial parts of our society, being able to intervene in their dimension could have positive impacts, not only on the lives of workers, but on the entire social reality. As anticipated when speaking of the potential[9], companies can be read, in my opinion, as real organisms. As such, they 'communicate' *performatively* in the social horizon in which they are embedded, for instance through external communication, advertising, the products they produce and sell, and so on. Therefore, orienting a company towards an egalitarian praxis, so as to make it '*speak*' through 'performance' in contrast to the phallogocentric paradigm, means making it interact differently with the external society in full. To make this happen, however, one must start from within. Corporations, in fact, are perceived as unitary 'organisms', but they are made up of multiple people who weave bonds and relationships between them. Corporations are, therefore, moments of agglomeration and relationships between individuals of all genders, orientations, ages and so on. Moments, therefore, where power relations can be confirmed or altered, influencing the perspective of individuals. Training courses, contextual analyses, adequate guidelines can, therefore, act as important steps to re-orient internal relations and produce equal environments that, as a consequence, lead the entire company to 'perform' in an equal manner. Working in the corporate dimension implies, in short, acting on two simultaneous dimensions, the macro-social and the individual. Addressing the individual ones could, *potentially*, lead to macro social impacts. Thus to, as Butler says, expropriate the dominant discourse and create a subversive space of social re-signification (1997a: 157).

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[9] Cf paragraph 6.

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