

“You are a TERF”: Discursive-semantic analysis of the use of the acronyms TERF and TRA in the trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary radical feminism conflict

“Eres una TERF”: Análisis discursivo-semántico del uso de los acrónimos TERF y TRA en el conflicto entre el feminismo radical trans-inclusivo y trans-excluyente

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Abstract: *The present study investigates the motives and intricacies of the conflict between the trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary communities from a linguistic perspective. The purpose of the study is to analyse the use and the connotations of the acronyms TERF and TRA across the two groups, as well as examining the representation of participants in USA-based forums regarding this matter. In order to tackle this issue, this paper uses WordSmith Tools to carry out a discursive-semantic analysis of the conflict and the acronyms TERF and TRA. Employing a mixed-method approach, quantitative analysis revealed that the use of these acronyms is higher in trans-exclusionary forums. Moreover, findings from the qualitative analysis shed light on the conceptualization of the conflict as a war through metaphors, and the representation of participants as enemies in the two groups. In summary, different discursive and linguistic strategies are employed in trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary forums that perpetuate and enhance the online conflict.*

Keywords: TERF, TRA, trans, forums, discourse

Resumen: *El objetivo de la investigación es analizar el uso y las connotaciones de los acrónimos TERF y TRA en el conflicto entre las comunidades trans-inclusivas y trans-excluyentes, además de examinar la representación de los participantes en diferentes foros estadounidenses con relación al conflicto. Con el propósito de llevar a cabo la investigación, se utilizó WordSmith Tools para desarrollar un análisis discursivo-semántico del conflicto sobre los acrónimos TERF y TRA. La metodología del estudio utiliza un enfoque mixto: el análisis cuantitativo revela que el uso de estos acrónimos es mayor en foros trans-excluyentes, mientras que los resultados obtenidos del análisis cualitativo exponen la conceptualización del conflicto como una guerra. Entre las estrategias discursivas utilizadas se encuentran el uso de metáforas y la representación de los participantes como enemigos violentos. En resumen, las estrategias lingüísticas y discursivas que se utilizan en foros trans-inclusivos y trans-excluyentes tienen como resultado la perpetuación del conflicto virtual.*

Palabras clave: TERF, TRA, trans, foros, discurso

1. Introduction

The LGBT and the feminist movements have been growing intensively for the past decades. The two movements deal with different aspects of the social relationships between genders. As a consequence of the importance of these movements in society, gender studies and feminism are two areas widely studied

nowadays in the academic environment, especially in the areas of psychology, sociology, and linguistics, due to the impact that the movements have on language (see Bucholtz, 2014; Speer, 2005). In general terms, feminism is constructed by a series of movements that advocate for women's rights in order to achieve equality between genders. Similarly, the LGBT movement consists of different branches that deal with the diversity of sexual orientations and genders, always fighting for the rights of these minority groups. The two movements are rooted in society and they inevitably intertwine, leading, in some cases, to discrepancies and difficulties.

A clear and relatively new example of this is the current conflict around the notion of *Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism* (henceforth *TERF*). This conflict arises from the discrepancies between trans-exclusionary radical feminists, who defend that radical feminism should only focus on the female sex, and the trans-inclusive community, who rejects that statement and includes transgender women in radical feminism. The trans-inclusive community is also referred to as *Trans Right Activists* (henceforth *TRA*). Some works have addressed this conflict from the sociological and historical point of view (Pearce et al., 2020; Williams, 2014; Williams, 2016) but few have focused on the linguistic analysis of the terms and their users. Therefore, the present study intends to fill this gap and shed light on the motives and intricacies of the conflict from a linguistic perspective, which can provide a new approach acknowledging the verbal component of the conflict.

This way, the purpose of the research is to analyse the use and the connotations of the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* by its users in the trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive radical feminism conflict. In order to focus the research and guide the investigation, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How are the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* used in both trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary forums? What concepts and connotations are associated with the terms?
2. How do forum participants identify and position themselves towards the terms?

In order to answer these research questions, the methodological approach of the paper will combine corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis applied to the data gathered from different forums (see Section 3). The analysis tries to verify the following hypothesis:

1. Given that the conflict between the trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive communities is very candescent and taking into consideration the anonymous nature of social media platforms, it is expected that the acronym *TERF* will be associated with negative and derogatory connotations in the trans-inclusive forums. As for trans-exclusionary forums, a higher use of *TRA* is expected, as well with rather negative connotations.

2. On the basis of conflictive interactions, it is expected that forum participants of both trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusionary communities position themselves contrarily to the other, while identifying with the terms *TERF* and *TRA* respectively.

The structure of the paper will continue as follows: first, in the theoretical background section, the history and use of the term *TERF* will be described, as well as the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the data, both corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis. Second, in the methodology section, the corpus, the data gathering tools and procedure followed will be addressed. Next, the results will be shown and, finally, the conclusions presented.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism

The acronym *TERF*, which stands for *Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminism*, was first used by the cisgender feminist Viv Smythe (TigTog in social media) in 2008. It was first introduced in colloquial chats as a neutral and descriptive term to differentiate between trans-exclusionary and trans-inclusive radical feminist groups (Williams, 2014). The use of the term rapidly escalated, it was spread mainly through social media. It is commonly used in platforms such as Twitter, as well as in debate forums. With the expansion of the term, different connotations have been attributed to the acronym, resulting in different attitudes towards the term and its users. Nowadays, *TERF* is mostly employed by the trans-inclusive community, while it is discarded by the trans-exclusionary collectives (Pearce et al., 2020, p. 683).

The acronym *TERF* is currently used in diverse ways. On the one hand, there is a tendency to employ the term with its original meaning. For example, Williams explicitly chooses to use the acronym as means to differentiate the two branches of radical feminism: a) trans-inclusive and b) gender critical, or “biology-based” (2016, p. 254). However, although Williams claims neutrality in the use of *TERF*, her study deals with trans-inclusive radical feminism history and, therefore, it criticises the trans-exclusionary community, referring to them as “violent *TERF* activists” (2016, p. 256), which could be considered as non-neutral.

On the other hand, the term is also employed to attack, insult, or criticise the ideological principles of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (Pearce et al., 2020, pp. 683-684). This latter use has been foregrounded in the past years, resulting in various consequences. First, the rejection of the term by trans-exclusionary radical feminists, who tend to refer to their ideology as “gender critical”. Second, a phenomenon of lexical expansion has happened and *TERF* is used to criticise not only that specific trend of radical feminism but also to any kind of transphobia. In the present study this derogatory use and connotations resulting from it will be analysed, taking instances from online forums.

2.2. CDA and CL as tools for text analysis

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) and corpus linguistics (henceforth CL) are two different approaches to text analysis that can be successfully combined to obtain a mixed-methods analysis of quantitative and qualitative data (Baker et al., 2008; Cheng, 2012; Orpin, 2005). In this section the two perspectives will be examined separately to then combine them in the analysis.

2.2.1. Corpus linguistics

Corpus linguistics could be defined as an area of linguistics that deals with the analysis of large collections of natural, computer-stored texts. Reppen and Simpson state that “by using a variety of computer-based tools, corpus linguists can explore different questions about language use” (2002, p. 92). Corpus linguistics is extremely useful for the identification of patterns in speech or to measure the frequency of specific words. A corpus linguistics analysis can provide both quantitative and qualitative data. Regarding the types of corpora, Reppen and Simpson (2002) distinguish between two: general (eg. Corpus of Contemporary American English¹, COCA) and specific corpora. This last type is, in most occasions, gathered by the researcher for a specific purpose or research goals. For the present research a specialized corpus was created (see Section 3).

Considering all the characteristics mentioned and due to the technical advances in linguistics for the past decades, corpus linguistics has gained importance to become an essential tool in many fields of linguistic studies nowadays. As will be developed in the methodology section, the main software used for text analysis in the present study is *WordSmith Tools 6.0*, which is a corpus analysis tool.

2.2.2. CDA and the feminist perspective

Critical discourse analysis could be defined as an interdisciplinary technique for the analysis of texts with a variety of approaches. Fairclough argues that “what unites all approaches is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, and political-economic, social, or cultural change in society” (2013, p. 302). For the present paper the focus will be on the feminist perspective of CDA. Feminist CDA or FCDA is put forward by Lazar as a combination of CDA and feminist studies with the purpose of contributing to the understanding of how gender functions in society through power and ideology in discourse (2007, p. 141). This perspective, then, is aimed to shed light on the discursive complexities of the ideological structure of gender (i.e. the hegemonic power relationship).

¹ COCA: <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>.

Moreover, Lazar (2007) emphasizes the recognition by FCDA of the existing variance and diversity among women and men. Following this line, while citing Butler (1993), Lazar argues that feminists have denounced the mapping of biological sex onto gender in society (2014, p. 186). Even if this is true in the case of the trans-inclusive community, it is not the case of trans-exclusionary radical feminism. Furthermore, it could be argued that the complexity of the situation created between these two groups resides precisely in their asymmetrical relationship regarding gender ideology.

There are studies such as Koller’s (2013) whose focus is specifically on non-normative representations. In this case, the interest lies on how the gender relations of power and ideology are produced and negotiated between the trans-exclusionary radical feminist community and the trans-inclusive community. To sum up, the present paper will apply FCDA theory to analyse the relationship between the two minority groups. As Koller (2013) suggests, it is interesting to examine text production from a minority position and see the patterns of self and other-representations. This will be carried out by analysing pronouns and generating wordclouds around the concepts (see Section 3.2).

3. Methodology

3.1. The corpus: data collection

In order to carry out the analysis, a corpus was collected from the commentaries of participants in five posts of trans-inclusive forums and five posts of trans-exclusionary forums. Thus, the corpus is subdivided into two sub-corpora: the trans-inclusive subcorpus and the trans-exclusionary subcorpus. The data from the trans-inclusive subcorpus was collected from the social media platform Reddit, which in June 2020 updated their content policy to ban hate speech. Among others, the TERF subreddit² platform was erased for promoting hate (Browning, 2020). As a consequence, the TERF community created a new equivalent platform to share their content: Ovarit (Tiffany, 2020), from which the data for the trans-exclusionary sub-corpus was retrieved. Both forums are based in the USA, Reddit statistics show that the platform is predominantly used by young people (18-29) and that the majority of users are from the USA (48.93%), followed by other English-speaking countries (UK 7.73%, Canada 7.52%, and Australia 3.85%) (Statista Research Dept, 2021³). These platforms were selected due to the similarity between them and the fact that they provide text-based personal interactions of the specific topic of interest, being ideal for a symmetrical analysis. No other platforms with the same conditions were found.

In order to have a balanced amount of data, two areas or subreddits dealing with the conflict under study were selected from both platforms (see

² Subreddits are areas created by users meant to treat a specific topic. Every post in the platform must belong to one of these areas, and users can subscribe to one or more subreddits in order to follow the posts or be able to post. Ovarit is organized following the same structure.

³ Statista Research Dept. (2021, February 25): <https://www.statista.com/topics/5672/reddit/>.

Figure 1). Inside each of them, the five sections of comments were copied and converted into TXT format separately to be able to analyse them with the corpora analysis software *WordSmith Tools 6.0*, as will be explained in the following section. The total number of words in the corpus amounts to 22,539, of which 10,187 belong to the first sub-corpus (trans-inclusive) and 12,352 to the second sub-corpus (trans-exclusionary).

Reddit	r/GenderCynical ⁴	“Satire and mock-subreddit of /r/GenderCritical and its affiliates. Our purpose is to highlight content from trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) and gender critical (GC) individuals who hate trans people.”
	r/TerflsntASLur ⁵	“We make fun of terfs here.”
Ovarit	o/GenderCritical ⁶	“This is a women-centered, radical feminism oriented circle to discuss gender from a critical, feminist perspective. This circle is especially for discussions about gender and transgender ideology/politics.”
	o/TerflsASLur ⁷	“What is a TERF? "TERF" supposedly stands for "trans exclusionary radical feminist" but the term is used as a slur against anyone who disagrees with a proponent of transgender ideology.”

Fig. 1: Selected subreddits and its descriptions

3.2. Tools and procedures

The methodological procedures can be subdivided into qualitative and quantitative. The software *WordSmith Tools 6.0* was used for both of them. This software contains three different applications which can be used for different purposes (Scott, 2015): Concord, KeyWords, and WordList. The Concord function serves to search for a specific word and its concordance display, KeyWords is used to identify “key” words in the text whose frequency is unusually high in comparison to a reference corpus selected by the researcher, and WordList generates lists of words from the text in both alphabetical and frequency order.

The quantitative analysis is based on the frequency listings. Therefore, quantitative data was obtained using the WordList function over the two sub-corpora to compare the most frequent content words in the texts. Moreover, the significant words obtained from the WordLists were run through the Concord function to pin down common word clusters.

Quantitative findings were complemented by a qualitative analysis of the data. First, the Concord function was used to identify common word clusters and patterns which serve to analyse the words that are associated with the terms and the connotations they convey. Moreover, using as well those results and combining them with the practices from critical discourse analysis discussed in section 2.2.2 of the theoretical background, semantic wordclouds were

⁴ r/GenderCynical, retrieved on January 14 2021: <https://www.reddit.com/r/GenderCynical/>.

⁵ r/TerflsntASLur, retrieved on January 14 2021: <https://www.reddit.com/r/TerflsntASLur/>.

⁶ o/GenderCritical, retrieved on January 14 2021: <https://ovarit.com/o/GenderCritical/hot>.

⁷ o/TerflsASLur, retrieved on January 14 2021: <https://ovarit.com/o/TerflsASLur/top>.

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constructed in order to get a broader understanding on the meaning, use, and connotations, and representation of the concepts under study.

This mixed-methods approach to the analysis allowed for a thorough examination of how the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* function in social media forums; thus, answering research questions 1 and 2.

4. Results and discussion

This section aims to present the findings obtained from the analysis. For a better understanding of the data, the results will be presented following the three different functions of *WordSmith Tools 6.0*. The quantitative findings from each analysis will be presented in figures, followed by the corresponding qualitative interpretations.

4.1. WordList

The WordList function was used upon the two sub-corpora to identify the content words with a higher frequency of use (Figure 2). As it can be observed, in both sub-corpora the most frequent content words are related to gender, trans-related items, and trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

Trans-inclusive WordList				Trans-exclusionary WordList			
Position	Word	Frequency	%	Position	Word	Frequency	%
11	Trans	122	1,19	14	Women	102	0,82
16	People	83	0,81	23	People	77	0,62
30	TERFs	51	0,50	35	Trans	53	0,43
38	TERF	43	0,42	48	Men	40	0,32
47	Women	36	0,35	68	Female	29	0,23
50	Gender	34	0,33	71	TERFs	29	0,23
71	Woman	25	0,24	78	Woman	27	0,22
72	Chest	23	0,22	79	TERF	26	0,21
73	Cis	22	0,21	98	Sex	19	0,15
76	Surgery	21	0,21	99	Twitter	19	0,15

Fig. 1: 10 most frequent content words in the two sub-corpora

Furthermore, to have a broader understanding and to extend the qualitative results in this respect, it was decided to make a direct comparison between the significant terms for the present study. By looking at the numerical data on Figure 3, we can see that terms such as *TERF*, *trans*, and *gender*, as well as their derivatives, were notably more frequent in trans-inclusive forums. In contrast, the word with a higher frequency in trans-exclusionary forums is *TRA*.

Word	Trans-inclusive (10,187)	Trans-exclusionary (12,352)
Gender	34 [3,33]	12 [0,97]
TERF*	101 [9,94]	59 [4,77]
TRA*	0 [0]	18 [1,45]
Trans*	159 [15,60]	86 [6,96]

Fig. 2: Comparison of the selected items

However, in order to find out the reliability of these quantitative findings, it is necessary to determine the significance of the data results. To this end, a T-Test was performed using Excel, concluding that, despite the apparent frequency variation of these linguistic items across the two sub-corpora, these differences have proved not to be statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, being higher: $p=0.2725$. Nevertheless, a qualitative analysis will be performed in order to have a deeper understanding on the difference between the items in Figure 3.

Regarding the semantic entailment of the most frequent items in trans-inclusive forums, it can be observed that there is a focus on the TERF community and that the gender approach seems to be led by the trans community. In contrast, in the trans-exclusionary forums, the gender focus tends to be female, and there are instances of both *TERF* and *TRA*. This is a remarkable feature regarding the representation of the self and the other that will be dealt with in depth with the Concord function, but which *a priori* verifies the first and second hypotheses.

4.2. Keywords

The KeyWords function was used to identify “key” words in the two sub-corpora whose frequency is unusually high in comparison to the other sub-corpora. The only result obtained is the one shown in Figure 4. As it can be observed, the word *trans* has a higher frequency in the trans-inclusive sub-corpus than in the trans-exclusionary sub-corpus. This supports the findings from the previous section showing the higher representation of the trans community in trans-inclusive forums.

N	Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	RC. %	Keyness	P	Lemmas	Set
1	TRANS	122	1,19	2	53	0,43	43,13	0,0000		

Fig. 4: Keywords of the anti-TERF sub-corpus

4.3. Concordance

The Concord function was used to identify the concordance display and the patterns around the items in Figure 3 in order to analyse the associated terms and the connotations behind them. Moreover, those results will be combined with the critical discourse analysis models from Section 2.2.2, and semantic “wordclouds” will be constructed to structure the data and have a broader understanding on the linguistic expressions under study. First, the concept of gender will be analysed through the words *gender* and *trans*, to then study the specific acronyms of *TERF* and *TRA*.

4.3.1. Gender

Gender is the central matter in the trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary conflict. By looking at Figures 5 and 6 it can be observed that in trans-inclusive

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forums the focus is on gender identity and, as examples 1 and 2 illustrate, on opposing the idea of abolishing gender defended by the TERF community.

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	TO	NOT	OF	THE	OR	GENDER	IDENTITY	YOU	THEY	YOU	CHOICE
2	WHO	TO	TERFS	OF	SAME		IDENTITIES	AND	IS	TO	SO
3	HOWEVER	YOU			THE		AS				OF
4		PEOPLE			YOUR		OR				BE
5		THAT			ABOLISH		CLINICS				
6					AND						
7					ABOLISHING						

Fig. 5: Trans-inclusive patterns for gender

N	Concordance
1	THREATENING VIOLENCE AGAINST GENDER CRITICAL FEMINISTS, and
2	on behalf of your argument AGAINST gender critical feminists? I mean, it's
3	I've seen self-proclaimed radfems and gender-critical feminists on Tumblr
4	AFAB meant assigned the feminine gender at birth as opposed to
5	been so confused over a sentence nor gender identity (?) in my life. It's too
6	in the article to supposed examples of gender critical feminists doxing and
7	are crossdressing men. Get rid of "gender", get rid of the useless "trans"
8	: girls and women" featuring photos of gender non conforming women. The
9	at birth' meant 'assigned the oppressive gender of man at birth'. I literally had to
10	. Your point, I believe is arguing that gender critical people are leftists
11	know what they're arguing for, nor the gender critical points they are arguing
12	on the main page. While this whole gender/trans BS and "TERFs" etc.

Fig. 6: Trans-exclusionary concordances for gender

- (1) “It sucks that terfs have coined gender abolitionism (or however you write it) and gender non conformity.” (trans-inclusive subcorpus).
- (2) “Abolishing gender is a pretty interesting idea, but the fact that TERFs "appropriated" the concept makes it dirty to me.” (trans-inclusive subcorpus).
- (3) “In fact, transwomen are crossdressing men. Get rid of "gender", get rid of the useless "trans" identity.” (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).

Both statements 1 and 2 exemplify the rejection of the notion of gender abolitionism, especially due to the fact that it is part of the TERF discourse. Consequently, in trans-exclusionary forums the emphasis is on the notion of gender critical feminism (i.e. trans exclusionary radical feminism) which defends the idea of “getting rid” of gender and of the transgender identity. This idea is portrayed in example 3, in which the author conceptualized transgender identity as *useless* and states that trans women are crossdressing men, denying this way their identity.

Furthermore, to go deeper into the conceptualization of gender and the trans community, the patterns of *trans* and its derivatives are shown in Figures 7 and 8.

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	THE	TRANS	OF	OF	AND	TRANS	PEOPLE	AND	TO	TO	PEOPLE
2	THEY	THE	PEOPLE	THAT	FOR	TRANSITION	WOMEN	ARE	THE	TRANS	IT
3	STOP	TO	THAT	PEOPLE	OF	TRANSPHOBES	WOMAN	THEY	IT	IS	THAT
4	TO	PEOPLE	IS	FOR	OVER	TRANSPHOBIC	MEN	IN	AND	JUST	THE
5	TRANS	THAT	NOT	TO	THE	TRANSPHOBIA	YOUTH	IS	LIKE	THE	TO
6	WOMEN	WOMEN	TRANS	TRANS	BE	TRANSGENDER	MAN	TO	TRANS	AND	TRANS
7	PEOPLE	THEY	ARE	THEY	ALL	TRANSFORM	MASC	CAN	WOMEN	IT	TERFS
8	MY	GAY	THEY	OUT	MY	TRANSITIONED	IDENTIFIED	WHO	THEY	OF	YOUR
9	THINK	IS	THE	TERFS	THAT	TRANSMASC	IS	THE	IS	FOR	WHITE
10	THIS	AND	THEIR	TERF	MEN		AND	TRANS	AFAB	THIS	WHEN
11	TER	IT	WANT	SLAVERY	OR		TWITTER	THAT'S	DONT	BE	THEIR
12	BIOLOGICAL	TERFS	YOU	HAS	OTHER		RIGHTS	SOMETHING	GENERALLY	TERFS	THEY
13	BLACK	YOU	TO	WITH	WHO		TEENS	WHAT	SO	WOULD	GONNA
14	AT	CASUAL	ABOUT	AND	WITH		YOU	TRANSITION	WOMAN	YOU	IS
15	99	IF	JUST	IS	TO		COMMUNITY	THEN	ARE	DO	GO
16	AMAB	SEX	CREEPY	LOT	SAYING		DONT	HAS	CIS	ABOUT	AND
17	CIS	OF	IDENTIFIED	IM	STYLE		PERSON	HAVING	IM	RE	BECAUSE
18	JUST	OVER	MISGENDERING	WAS	MAGICALLY		KIDS	FEMALE	JUST	GO	SEE
19	ME	MY	AM	THEM	AS		ISNT	AREN	IN	CIS	TERF
20	IS	NOT	AND	BUT	BECAUSE		INTO	DATING	LIMITED	IN	MOST
21	IF	PRETENDING	BOTH	ANY	BEING		IDENTIFYING	ON	SEE	CHILDREN	LIKE
22	IN	SAME		GONNA	AFAB		GIRL	REGRET	REALLY	PEOPLE	MEN
23		IT'S		ON	AGAINST		NOT	NOT	NEED	NONBINARY	
24		PERCENT		MORE	ANY		GUY	IT		MENTION	
25					BLACK			MALE			
26					HATE						

Fig. 7: Trans-inclusive patterns for trans

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	TO	THE	THE	IS	OF	TRANS	WOMEN	ARE	WOMEN	GRADE	THEM
2	THAT	BE	KNOW	OF	THE	TRANSWOMEN	ACTIVISM	IS	TO	OF	MISOGYNY
3	OF	IS	THIS	TERFS	THAT	TRANSWOMAN	PEOPLE	AND	THE	BE	NOT
4	WAS	TO	TO	TO	TO	TRANSITION	WOMAN	IN	BE	AS	ARE
5	THE	ARE	WITH	ABOUT	NON	TRANSACTIVIST	TO	THEY	WEAPONS	THEY'RE	THIS
6	WOULD	FOR	THEY	RIGHTS	HER	TRANSGENDER	ARE	THIS	THEY	PEOPLE	TO
7	HOW	HER	PEOPLE	THAT			FRIENDS	THAT	THOSE	THE	LIKE
8	ACTUALLY		AND	BECAUSE			ACTIVISTS	WOMEN	HAVE	AND	IN
9	REALLY		ACCEPTED	AS			ALLIES	TO	AND	HAVE	THAT
10	IN		JK	FOR			RIGHTS	BE	IS	MOST	
11			OF	ME				AREN'T	TERFS		
12			NOW	AND				BUT	PRISON		
13								OF			
14								NOT			

Fig. 8: Trans-exclusionary patterns for trans

On the one hand, Figure 7 illustrates that in trans-inclusive forums the word *trans* is preceded by the third person neutral pronouns *they* and *them*, and by the personal pronouns *my*, *me*, *I* accompanied by the verb *to be* in the form of *am*. Additionally, the verb *to identify* (*identified*, *identifying*) and the noun *community* are commonly associated with *trans*. The combination of these elements suggests the identification of the non-normative trans community in these forums as such. Moreover, some words such as *slavery*, *against*, and *rights*, which belong to the semantic field of social fight, imply the conflictive situation in which the trans community feels in relation to trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

On the other hand, the patterns for the item *trans* in Figure 8 show that in trans-exclusionary forums the trans community is treated as conflictive. In this case, the word *trans* is again linked with items from the semantic field of social fight (*activism*, *rights*) but, furthermore, the conflict is conceptualised as warfare (*allies*, *prison*, *weapons*). This metaphorical association (example 4) could be interpreted as a discursive strategy to enhance power dynamics, implying that the trans community is violent and adding to it that connotation. This representation of the trans community, as well as the analysis of Figure 7, closely verify the second hypothesis. However, the analysis will be complemented by the Concordance results of the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA*.

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- (4) "Trans activism is weapons-grade misogyny." (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).

In summary, the results obtained from the concordances of *gender* and *trans* could be translated into the following schematic wordcloud (Figure 9):

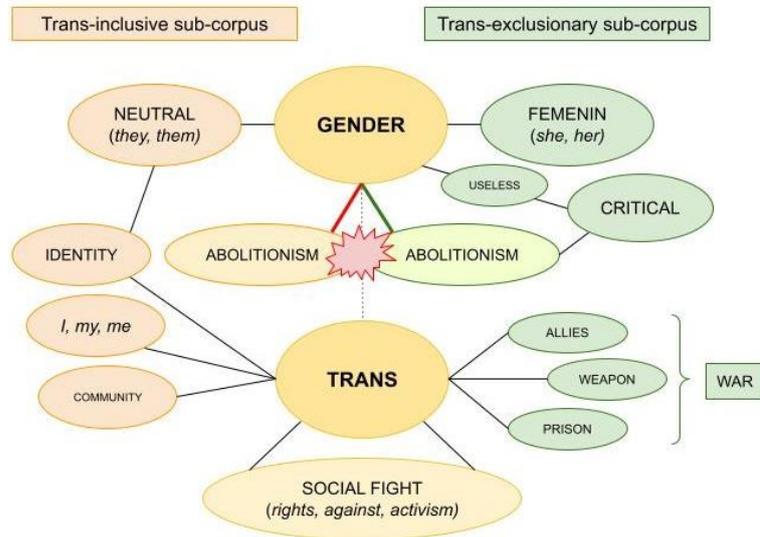


Fig. 9: Schematic wordcloud of the concepts of gender and trans across the sub-corpora

4.3.2. TERF and TRAs

Furthermore, the acronym *TERF* is one of the main items under study of the present paper. Figure 10 collects the patterns of use of the term *TERF* in trans-inclusive forums.

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	AND	OF	OF	IS	THAT	TERFS	ARE	TRANS	IS	AND	OF
2	TO	OR	THE	BEING	THE	TERF	TERF	IT	WOMEN	IS	TO
3	THE	REALLY	IS	THE	OF	TERFISM	IS	THAT	SLUR	NOT	SO
4	YOUR	THE	IM	TERF	TERF		BUT	THE	TO	THEY	THAT
5	TRANS	AND	TO	REALLY	ALSO		AND	TRANSPHOBIA	YES	THE	THEM
6	FOR	TRANS	THAT	WITH	WHEN		YOU	YOU	VIOLENCE	SOMETHING	THE
7	CAN	THIS	IT	WHAT	WHY		STYLE	BE	THAT	THINGS	BIG
8	SHOULD	MY	STOP	TO	BY		TO	ACTUALLY	BECAUSE	TRANS	AFRAID
9	HAVE	ME		OF	PUNCH		TRANS	CAN	ARE	USING	PEOPLE
10		BE		NOT			AS	TERF	ALSO	IF	LIMITED
11		IT		INSTEAD			ACTUALLY	JUST	OF	HOW	
12				PUNCH			HAVE		GENDER	AGAINST	
13				PRETTY			ISNT		FOR	PEOPLE	
14				PRETENDING			IN			OUR	
15										OF	

Fig. 10: Trans-inclusive patterns of TERF

As it can be observed, it is associated with the concepts of *transphobia*, *women*, *gender*, and *violence*, and, moreover, an extensive use of the bundle *punch a TERF* or *punch TERFs* is found, as shown in examples 5 and 7. This bundle⁸ can be interpreted as a violent or aggressive expression to show anger towards TERF

⁸ *Punch a TERF*: The expression “punch a TERF” or “punch TERFs” is derived from the expression “punch a Nazi”, which arised in January 2017 as a result of an aggression to Richard B. Spencer (Stack, 2017). It rapidly spread through the internet as a meme and its use is popular in internet fights.

ideology (5), not exclusively regarding feminism but also general transphobia (6). However, as argued by Stack (2017) and expressed by a forum participant on example 7, it is not usually said in literal terms but rather as a meme.

- (5) “Punch terfs and terf apologists.” (trans-inclusive subcorpus).
- (6) “We should really stop pretending that TERF-style transphobia is something limited to white women.” (trans-inclusive subcorpus).
- (7) “I know it would surely feel great to punch a terf, but that is just a feeling, in our minds we know how little that would accomplish. [...] The anger is real but most likely we wouldn't be punching the murderous terf we imagine, but a confused and deceived individual caught up in identity politics, who isn't the real enemy.” (trans-inclusive subcorpus).

The patterns of *TERF* from trans-exclusionary forums (Figure 11) show that the word is mostly used to exemplify and criticise the use of *TERF* by other (trans-inclusive) collectives. There is an emphasis on *they calling TERFs evil* or criticising *TERF rhetoric*.

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	IT	PEOPLE	TO	THEY	THAT	TERFS	ARE	THEY	TO	THE	THE
2	WOMEN	WOMEN	AND	THE	THE	TERF	RHETORIC	NO	THAT	WHAT	SO
3	THAT	EVEN	WHO	WITH	NO	TERFBLOCKER	JUST	ARE	AND	OF	WANT
4	SO	ABOUT	WOMEN	TO	EVIL		INFILTRATORS	IS		ARE	IF
5		ARE	ARE	NOT	HER		AND			JUST	IT
6			IF	FOR	OF		HAVE				LIKE
7			THEY	CALL							
8				NO							
9				IS							

Fig. 11: Trans-exclusionary patterns of TERF

However, there are some instances such as example 8 in which individuals identify themselves as TERFs. This could be analysed as a strategy of appropriation of the term usually performed by non-normative groups with the objective of de-connoting the term.

- (8) I'm not afraid of being called a TERF. (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).

Finally, there is a noticeable contrast regarding the gender associations with *TERF* in the two sub-corpora. While in the trans-inclusive patterns no gender was associated directly with the notion of *TERF*, in the trans-exclusionary sub-corpus *TERF* is preceded multiple times by the noun *women* and the pronoun *her*. This way, the representation of TERFs in the trans-exclusionary sub-corpus is female.

Last of all, Figure 12 illustrates the concordances for the items *TRA* and *TRAs* in trans-exclusionary forums. These results show the representation of the other (trans-inclusive community) from the trans-exclusionary perspective.

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N	Concordance
1	AGPs, sex offenders, misogynists and TRAs each in their own circle, there's
2	it's bigoted to reject a TIM nurse) and TRA gay allyship (some women have a
3	parties. We're used to TIMs and TRAs having tons of power online, but
4	This is technically a hate crime. TRAs like this person should be
5	how TERFs are the evil ones if TRAs are the ones who want use to
6	here is so muddled. My infamously TRA friend, who called me a TERF
7	he has pals there? It seems one TRA tactic is to manoeuvre into
8	topics regarding the scarecrows TRAs have been made of women who
9	I'm just waiting for the day when some TRA points out to them that they,
10	and the another newer belief system - TRA ""intersectional"" feminism (trans
11	criticism directed at them, so that TRAs/Libfems come to their defense
12	open up her eyes! This is a reality that TRAs like to dance around and
13	himself. There will be crickets from the TRA camps. They have an extremely
14	about my teenage years !!! Since the TRAs version of 'hell' is my personal
15	actually feel this way and are what the TRAs love to call 'crypto terfs' without
16	with a vagina. I would LOVE for the TRAs to try to defend this. How do we
17	feelings. I just don't understand how the TRAs are seen as the normal people
18	he's a big part of why reddit turned TRA all of a sudden. According to KF

Fig. 12: Trans-exclusionary concordances of TRA and TRAs

Again, it is relevant to mention the conceptualization of *TRAs* through a metaphorical entailment as enemies in a war. An example of this is the statement 9 as well as the presence of the following words: *allyship*, *camps*, *defense*, *maneuver*, *power*, and *tactic*. Moreover, the opposition is clearly illustrated by expressing the situation as a war and by instances as the one shown in examples 10 and 11, which use the dichotomy of hell and heaven as a metaphor for TERF and TRA ideologies. Additionally, there are derogatory adverbs and adjectives that precede and add a connotation to *TRAs* such as *infamously* and *scarecrow*, which could be interpreted as a strategy of power dynamics towards the dehumanization of the trans-inclusive community.

- (9) “It seems one TRA tactic is to manoeuvre into positions of online power” (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).
- (10) “Since the TRAs version of 'hell' is my personal heaven, I'd gladly burn there. (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).
- (11) “I can't understand how TERFs are the evil ones if TRAs are the ones who wantus to die/ be tortured” (trans-exclusionary subcorpus).

To conclude, Figure 13 presents the schematic wordcloud of the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* across trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary forums.

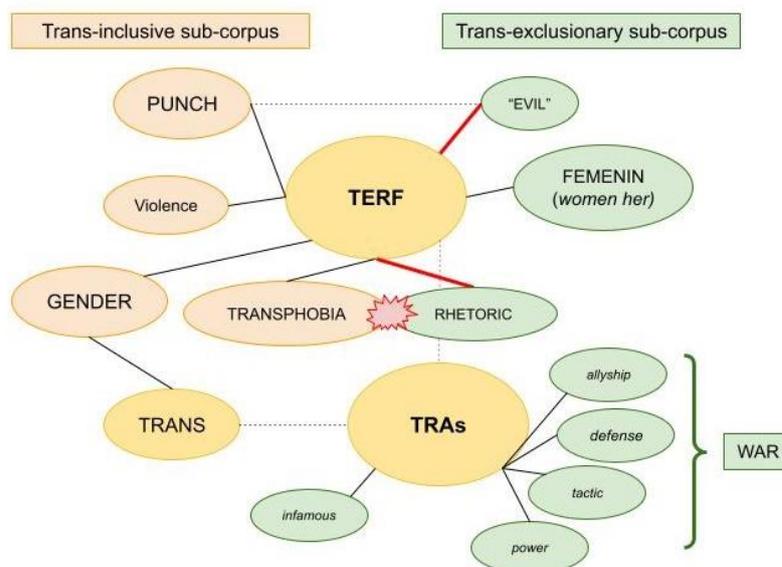


Fig. 13: Schematic wordcloud of the concepts of TERF and TRA across the sub-corpora

5. Conclusion

The present research paper aimed to shed light on the linguistic manifestation of the conflict between the trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary communities in online forums. The purpose of the study was to analyse the use and the connotations of the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* across the two groups, as well as study the representation of participants in forums regarding this matter. As presented in section 1, there were two research questions. The first one was aimed to examine the use of the acronyms and its connotations, while the second one focused on the identification and positioning of participants from forums.

Regarding the first research question, it was expected that the acronym *TERF* would have a higher frequency of use in trans-inclusive forums than in trans-exclusionary forums. This hypothesis was proved by the quantitative data examined in Figure 3. Moreover, the connotations this term conveys were expected to be negative, even derogatory, in trans-inclusive forums. As presented in section 4.3.2. and in Figure 13 the words associated with the acronym *TERF* in trans-inclusive forums have a negative connotation and a violent undertone. However, derogatory strategies were only found in trans-exclusionary forums associated with the words *trans* and *TRA* (see section 4.3. and Figures 9 and 13).

In relation to the identification and positioning of participants (research question 2), it was expected to find trans-inclusive and trans-exclusionary groups opposing each other and using the acronyms *TERF* and *TRA* to identify themselves. The results make the opposition between the two groups rather clear, both groups position themselves against each other using the preposition *against* and treating the conflict as part of a social fight. In addition, in trans-exclusionary forums the conflict is conceptualized through a metaphorical entailment as a war, being the trans and *TRA* communities the violent enemy (Figures 9 and 13). As for the identification of participants, the hypothesis was not proved since trans-

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inclusive participants do not use nor identify with the term *TRA*, but tend to identify themselves as *trans*. In the case of the trans-exclusionary forums, there were cases of identification with the acronym *TERF* (example 8) as a strategy for appropriation. Nonetheless, the trans-exclusionary community tends to refer to their principles as “gender critical” and simply identify as women.

In conclusion, it could be argued that there is a linguistically complicated situation in the conflict under study in regard to terminology and the representation of social actors. The dynamics present in trans-exclusionary forums deny trans identities and dehumanize the collective. Moreover, the representation of the conflict as social fight and war by the two groups respectively operates to enhance online violence and opposition. Taking into consideration the results obtained, further research could be carried out to analyse the metaphors present in the conflict and to study more in-depth the situation created between these two groups specifically regarding gender ideology from a linguistic perspective.

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