

# Let's talk about inclusive and accessible language | Alice Orrù

My name is Alice Orrù. I use female or they then pronounce as well. I'm Italian but I've been living in Spain staying close to Barcelona for 13 years now. I work as a freelance writer and communication consultant with a specific focus on inclusive and accessible languages.

## What is the job of someone who deal with inclusive and accessible language?

Well, my job is very broad. I try to focus on the specifics of language with intersectional lens with me which means not only communicating clearly or choosing the right words, but also trying to point out the importance of a language that is more democratic as possible and which also treats in a very conscious way intersectional discriminations, which can be gender-inclusive language, but also how to avoid ableism language, which is the discrimination against people with disability, ages, language. Uh, I mean, in the society we live in, we have a lot of different axes of discriminations and most of them uh passes are conveyed by the words we choose.

Um, and aside of that is so apart from the from the from the aspect of choosing words, the right words, and conscious language, there are also some strategies that we can that it we can adopt to write more accessible, especially in the digital spaces. So best practices that we can embrace, remembering that there are people using the web, reading our text with in different ways, which means with assistive technologies, for example. So, I try to shed some light on the different ways through which people use the web and how they all intersect in with each other, right?

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So, inclusive and accessible languages always go in pair in my view and that's what I try to pass to my clients or the people I work with.

## Is it difficult to find clients or association or institution the one who want to works on this theme?

It depends. It depends on what uh from what from the side you watch it too. For example, this year 2025 is the year of the adoption of the Accessibility Act in Europe. So there's been a lot of attention um from companies and the themes of accessible languages. Of course, they're all I mean, most of them arrive very late.

Um, this year is the year of the uh implementation of the law, but companies should have worked on this more years um before and this hasn't happened so often. Um, so today nowadays there's more interest that there's more um willing to um and there's more conscience as well to write inclusively and accessibly.

Um what I found difficult is um to dismantle the security and the um the pre-made uh ideas of people and companies on how they communicate.

So to show them that some part of their websites or the communication they publish is not super accessible, sometimes can find some I mean I can uh a stumble on some resistance and obstacles in I mean dismantle those pre-made habits communication habits.

## I am very curious about how to contrast ages with language. Tell us an example.

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Oh, the most basic examples are based on all the stereotypes and biases that we carry along like just in we don't even discuss we don't even discount of how many ages bias we carry with us.

Uh so one of my um basic work on this is to show how many ages expressions we pronounce every day, how many ways of talking about age we just perpetuate without even thinking. And the thing about ageism is very interesting because it's the more democratic discrimination of all.

Every person in some phase of their life will experience discrimination. Um be it because they grow older or because they are too young for the environmental moving on. So, let's think to a professional environment, for example, and being a woman, for example, women are always constantly controlled, not only for the how they look, but also on the age axis.

So, how young you look, how old you look, there's a lot of social pressure, sometimes professional pressure on how you are off at work, and there's there are a lot of intersections between gender discriminations and age as men how we talk about women, for example. Let's think about all the marketing, selling, all the companies marketing anti-age products. What does it mean to sell something that is anti-age?

Age is a natural process. We can't block it, but we have interiorized this idea that we can block age is something bad, something negative, um things like that, for example.

## Is there something that each of us can do to use a more inclusive language?

Um, yeah, basically, I mean, if we have um the resources to write on the web, to curate our social media presence, right, for pleasures or for work, we already have the

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resources to apply inclusive language strategies. Be, for example, be more attentive and focus on this aspect that I was talking about.

I mean, the kind of in discuss language that we use every day without even thinking and that convey ages stereotypes or, of course, sexist but there's also there are also technical practices for example when we post when we post a text or something we think in social media and we upload an image with it we can always add an alternative text behind that image.

Nowadays every social media platform has a field for alternative text which is the description more or less detailed according to where we are uploading it.

The description of the image we are we are attaching to our text, which is very important for people using assistive technologies, people that don't read with their eyes by they listen to the to what we write to what they write. So also images are part of the message and alternative text help describing the image and so making them part of our communication.

An image without all test all text is a miss opportunity to convey part of our of our message. And this works also for videos, for other media in general. Let's always try to provide at least two ways of fruition for our communication. So textual, um not only for text, but also for image and media files, for example.

## Why are you so passionate about this?

Um, it's been a long ride. I guess um it was first of all for personal necessity for a long time I've worked in client support uh both in the medical sector and in the tech sector. So they're very different environments, but the key for me was to find the right, the most respectful language for all the people I was talking to. Especially in the medical sectors,

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you have to think that I was talking with international people from all works of life or kind of cultural language backgrounds. And we were dealing with medical medical things, medical doubts, medical questions.

So, there were very sensitive info for me to provide. And that's when I realised that I needed to uh to study and to read more about how to be the most inclusive as possible um while speaking different languages with people, I don't know, people I I don't know I don't know well.

So how to be professionally respectful, but also personally very empathetic with an empathetic communication to find the right words to talk to them. So that's where the start of my interest and my passion for applying inclusive languages in my professional and daily life.

### **What is the biggest challenge facing feminist today in your opinion?**

This is very little question. Um, I think one of the main challenges we are facing is uh related to gender, for example, is the lack of truly intersectional approaches in social and political context. So, as the feminist movements are try to convey this uh this message is more and more.

We still have to fight a lot to uh to make institutions um adopt this view in a most profound sense. So too often we talk about gender issues in a as a single axis issues leaving behind all the people uh who experience overlapping from of discrimination such as women and gender no conforming people with disability or rationalized individuals or migrants, for example.

And also we are living in a in a in a times of great backlash against the so-called gender ideology which threatens the right of trans queer feminist communities across the

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globe. And so intersectional remains key in the in this aspect in the way we have to fight for our rights.

## What would be the next challenge maybe in the years?

Um, I mean this this question was bit difficult for me to think of because tomorrow's um biggest challenges I think will be the same as today's unless, of course, we uh we shift how we imagine empower, care, social justice. So we really have we should really revolutionize the society we lived in.

So I think that um gender-based violence transforms phobia, racism, ableism, none of these are issues that we can solve today. And so I think we will carry them also in in the future.

Yeah, but what worries me most about the future is the rise of reactionary movements that resist gender equality and attack the possibility of even imagining different ways of being. So my my hope is that we really will be able to build coalitions to listen across differences and defend the complexity of our movements without losing strength.

## Can you tell me three names of women or movement who in your opinion have made feminist history?

Um, the first name that comes in my mind are Silvia Federici for her works on intersection of capitalism, gender, violence, and reproductive labor.

Um, Angela Davis for a work of intersectionality and an internationalist work on anti-racist, feminism, which is which is a lens that we really need uh a lot also to in opposition to the white feminist liberal movement.

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And I really like Gloria Anzaldúa, who is a Latina feminist, who works a lot on the voices of border line, multilingual, multi-cultural, diasporic feminism. So, in the intersection with queer identity, spirituality, and putting the margins at the center.

Um, I think in a recent history also the Argentinian movements feminist movements that fight a lot for abortion rights, for example, are a great recent examples of feminist movements that are really putting forward um I mean the fight for gender rights and gender and reproductive rights.

Is there anything you would like to say that we haven't asked you about?

Um No, I just wanted I mean to just point out another time how um when we talk about inclusion we need to talk about accessibility, too. Uh, so nowadays we have a lot of things that we label as inclusive like events or um brands, uh communication, etc.

But most of the time there's accessibility is really over sided. So I just wanted to pass again this message that inclusion and accessibility must come together. There's no inclusion without accessibility. So that's something that we should always remember.

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