

Grammar of Inclusion: Language of Accelerators and Women Entrepreneurship¹

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Extant research illustrates that women are roughly half as likely to become entrepreneurs as men (Kauffman Compilation: Research on Gender and Entrepreneurship, 2016). Increasing the participation rates of women in entrepreneurship is an area of inquiry where theory-driven research is needed, and where evidence-based insights might facilitate more women applying to accelerator programs (Newman, 2019).

Researchers have found that language can create a sense of belonging. Women may see themselves fit in traditionally male jobs when the language used in the job advertisement is communal in nature (Gaucher, 2011), and vice versa. Hence, in this project we asked two questions: *are the calls for application of accelerator programs gendered*, and *will advertising accelerator programs with feminine rather than masculine words increase the perceived entrepreneurial fit, application intent, and sense of belonging for women?*

Research Design

Study 1. Using a validated scale of masculine and feminine words, we sought to understand if there were any gender biases in the accelerators' calls for applications. Specifically, we used the accelerator list provided by ANDE to estimate what percentage of the words used in the accelerators' call for applications were gendered, and if those words were more masculine or feminine in nature. We also looked to see if the average use of masculine or feminine words differed depending on the region of the world where the accelerators were located. For both studies we used the survey platform Prolific.

Study 2. We manipulated the language used in an accelerator program call for application by creating vignettes across 3 conditions: (1) masculine or feminine words, (2) economically or prosocially oriented, and (3) whether the masculine or feminine words are 3-4% or an exaggerated 9% of the total words in the advertisement. For each vignette, self-identified entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs of both genders responded to the different dependent variables such as application intent.

Results

Study 1. We found a higher percentage of feminine words across most regions. South and East Asia had a higher percentage of masculine words, but our results showed a tendency for accelerator programs to use a higher percentage of feminine words. In general, this result is in an opposite direction from what we expected. One way to view the results is that several

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accelerators in ANDE's list identify themselves as social impact focused. Prior research shows that social impact is related to feminine characteristics and stereotypes (Bode, Rogan & Singh, 2022; Grimes, Gehman & Cao, 2018). As a result, accelerators with social impact focus are likely to have more feminine words in their call for applications as compared to masculine words.

Study 2. A summary of main results is below:

- **Perceived entrepreneurial fit**
 - Higher for women than for men across all accelerator calls for application in Latin America
 - Higher for men than women across all accelerator calls for application in the United States
 - Higher for economically-oriented 9% feminine than the economically-oriented 9% masculine call for applications in Latin America
- **Perceived sense of belonging**
 - Higher for women than for men across all accelerator calls for application in Latin America
 - Higher for men than women across all calls for application in the United States
- **Perceived application success**
 - Higher for men than women across all calls for application in the United States
 - No differences found for participants in Latin America
- **General attractiveness**
 - Higher for men than for women across all the calls for application in Latin America
 - No differences found for participants in the United States
- **Application intention**
 - No differences in Application Intentions across advertisements or between genders in either region.

In general, women in Latin America report results that are opposite to men in the United States. Men in the U.S. express high entrepreneurial fit, sense of belonging, and application success possibly because the U.S. is high on both individualism and masculinity on Hofstede's country culture dimensions. Men in the U.S. may see entrepreneurship as naturally fitting to their stereotypical gender role. However, and quite interestingly, the results flip for women in Latin America. This contrast could be interpreted as the difference between a women entrepreneur *seeking* belonging and fit in a more collective region (Latin America). In other words, the calls for applications are contextual in the sense that in an individualistic context (U.S.), the fit and belonging might be seen by men as something that is available to them, while in a more collectivist context (Latin America), and with a women entrepreneur's more communal approach, they may see fit and belonging as something that they have to seek and achieve.

Interestingly, the results for perceived application success and perceived general attractiveness do not follow this pattern.

As well, the results show no differences in application intentions across advertisements or between genders. This could be because of the research context in which the respondents may

see intent to apply as too far from their role as respondents in the survey. Future research may consider including practices such as childcare, mentorship, etc. alongside words.

In Latin America, we found higher Perceived Entrepreneurial fit for the Economically-Oriented 9% Feminine Advertisement than the Economically-Oriented 9% Masculine Advertisement, but no differences for the U.S. This pattern could indicate that in a highly collectivist context, but also masculine (at least for Mexico), economic orientation combined with feminine words in application could be seen as best of both worlds in which communal is juxtaposed with economic, which is often seen as self-interest oriented. Such ‘both/and’ juxtaposition may be the reason for high perceived entrepreneurial fit.

Limitations

Study 1. Although we conducted surveys for Study I in regions outside of the United States (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), the final list of words for our dictionary of masculine and feminine terms came from the results in the United States. Methodologically, this was the right decision for our study, but this North American centric lens for our word list is a limitation that must be considered in interpreting the results.

Study 2. We checked the conditions of different vignettes across respondents. United States-based respondents saw the conditions as we intended. However, this pattern was not as clear cut in Latin America. There are two ways to interpret this result. One way could be that it is a failure of our manipulation check in Latin America, i.e., the advertisements were not perceived as we intended them. If true, our results for Latin America must be considered with this limitation. Alternately, these results may indicate a contextual difference, or a difference in the understanding of terminology, rather than a failure of the manipulation. Implications for accelerators in Latin America could be to emphasize the tone and wording in their calls for applications, even exaggerating it, especially for prosocial and feminine worded calls, for entrepreneurs to notice.

Practice Implications and Future Research

There are multiple future research directions and practice implications. First, Study 1 shows us that calls for applications are indeed gendered and that one way to explain the bias toward masculine or feminine words is by accelerators’ social impact focus. Future researchers studying accelerators, and accelerators crafting calls for application will benefit from considering this gendered nature of the calls. Second, future efforts need to look more closely at why results for Study 2 were more significant for men in the United States and for women in Latin America. The fact that men had higher ratings for most outcomes seems to indicate that regardless of condition, men believe entrepreneurship is more aligned with them. For the future, we should consider research and practice projects that help us understand how we can increase those ratings for women. For example, concrete practices such as daycare facilities, or better messaging around mentorship may prove more useful than simply manipulating the text in the calls for application, given the overwhelming effect of gender (stereotypes). Along these lines, a future study testing different benefits and services listed in accelerator calls for application could be insightful. We also suggest exploring the question about why women in Latin America have a higher sense of perceived entrepreneurial fit and perceived sense of belonging compared to men? Why do

women see these programs as part of their world? Do women feel they need more training or support?

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