

# On J. K. Rowling's Discourse on Transsexual Issues, An Analysis of the Language Used on Rowling's Twitter and the Sociolinguistic Implication of Hate Speech

Amerigo Quatrini

**Abstract**—2019 Maya Forstater against transgender women rights have left the online community shocked, especially when renowned author J. K. Rowling have shown support for the case. In this paper it will be analyzed how author J. K. Rowling's opinions on the matter have caused a social uprising against the very author, who has been loved for over two decades by millions. Her words will be analyzed to find out what she has really meant and what the public has understood. The main purpose of this analysis is to understand whether Rowling has or has not a position of power over her followers and whether her words have an influence in the fight for LGBT+ rights. In the present study the topics of social injustice and word formation related to such phenomenon are also discussed and analyzed. The paper analyzes how public opinions can lead to linguistic neologisms and how such words are used in the everyday language, explaining how these linguistic creations not only enrich our lexicon but also contribute to fight social injustice. Finally, regarding the structure of this study, the present paper is subdivided in three main sections: section one covers the events of late 2019, from the very first vocal tweet to the uprising of the web; section two covers the events of 2020 leading to the most recent controversies; and lastly section three, which will cover the linguistics features of the language used in the midst of the controversies. In this paper the social phenomenon of publicly voicing opinions is analyzed to investigate on language evolution.

**Index Terms**—J. K. Rowling, transsexual, LGBT, language and power, CDA.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on analyzing how Harry Potter author J. K. Rowling's careless statements on Twitter in late 2019 about transsexuality, have affected the whole LGBT+ community on a social level. Hatred towards the transsexual community seems to be ignored by the masses and when the renowned author of the billion-worth franchise Harry Potter gives such inconsiderate statements on a minority group that has been mistreated for decades, it only highlights that the trans community is still misunderstood in today's society.

Transsexuality and discrimination go hand in hand, it would be pointless in our research to ignore this fact. Anyone could just do a quick Google search and that would be enough to understand to what extent the hatred toward transsexuality is rooted within our society. For the sake of impartiality a few samples from recent events will be given.

On March 30th, 2020, HRC (The Human Rights Campaign) the largest LGBT+ advocacy group in the United States have

published: "HRC Mourns Lexi, Trans Woman Killed in Harlem". In late 2019, The Advocate published a list of all the transpeople who have been murdered in America in 2019 titled "These Are the Trans People Killed in 2019". On Nov 18th, 2019, Forbes have said that over 300 transgender people have been murdered in 2019 around the world, "Murdered, Hanged and Lynched: 331 Trans People Killed This Year". It is then more than clear that transpeople are one of the main targets of hatred and violence in our society. Not only that, statistics show that the highest percentage of suicide victims are transsexuals who have been abused either physically, verbally or both.

This present study is to be considered as an interdisciplinary study that uses analytic methods from different linguistic branches; methodology provided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be implemented with the aim of examining what views Rowling has towards the transsexual community, taking her Twitter statements and essay as data, and also by analyzing how the mass media and her followers have reacted to such ill tweet. The other main branches of linguistics this paper uses its tools from are sociolinguistics and lexicology. Despite how it might seem to only fall within the paradigms of sociolinguistics, the main reason why this very analysis is to be also considered within the realm of CDA paradigms, is because it instigates the power Rowling has as a worldwide renowned writer who has influenced a whole generation of readers; of course, on a sociolinguistic dimension. This paper does not provide a final judgment on Rowling's real intentions and sentiments towards the trans community, but only a mere analysis of what has been understood by the public and what her words have caused.

## II. ON SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND THE WEB

Social Injustice is how we can describe the phenomenon of hatred towards the transsexual community. Social Injustice has always been part of the human experience, there is no need to sugarcoat it. Slavery, violence, nepotism, corruption, dictatorships, homophobia, misogyny, all of the above have been part of our society since the beginning of time, however as 2020 there had been resurging cases of intolerance toward minorities everywhere in the world.

To define social injustice in a more objective way, it is necessary to first define the opposite, social justice. Social justice is considered to be a concept of fairness and justness in relation with the individual and society; it is measured by the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity, and social privileges. When there is a disparity in one or more

Manuscript received February 10, 2022; revised May 9, 2022.

Amerigo Quatrini is with Shanghai University, Shanghai 200444 China (e-mail: amerigoquatrini@shu.edu.cn).

of these factors, there is social injustice.

#### A. Social Justice on the Internet, PC and SJW's

Social justice should be regarded as one of the most important issue of our times, not only it deals with every and each of us, but also lays the basis for a fair society where everyone is equal and has the same rights. The same can be said of social media and online platforms, that had become more and more aware of minorities that keep on being treated unjustly on a daily basis. On the internet, social justice has become synonym with *PC* or *politically correct*. The term politically correct refers to the usage of language, policies, or measures that are meant to avoid offense to members of particular groups in society, mostly minorities.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the term had become widely used by masses, so much so, that in the United States most people had said to dislike the phenomenon [1], saying that freedom of speech is more important than being *butthurt* [2]. Fascinatedly, the term *butthurt* is the very exact reason why political correctness should be integrated in our speech and society to a certain extent. The word *butthurt* allegedly comes from spanking, describing the act of complaining about being offended, just like a child who is whining about having been beaten<sup>2</sup>. In recent years though, the term assumed a new connotation that refers to anal sex and gay men, becoming in some circumstances a derogatory term for gay people [3].

To wrap up everything that has just been said, social justice and political correctness led us to another phenomenon, SJW's or social justice warriors. According to Urban Dictionary, an online resource for slangs in the English language<sup>3</sup> "[...] a social justice warrior is a person that uses complex serious social, economic and political issues as a way to further their own agenda by claiming they are fighting to 'correct a wrong'. Specifically, it is used to refer to people claim to be fighting for social justice but are actually validating their own ego, looking for special treatment, or attention." (Urban Dictionary) The term social justice warrior then is used as derogative to describe a person who is either exaggerating or being hypocritical, at the same times, goodhearted people denouncing social injustice are being called out to be SWJ by internet trolls and people who have a different opinion from theirs.

#### B. Twitter and Hashtags

Social injustice is being mostly talked over the internet; one of the most prolific platforms where such topic is being discussed on a daily basis is the popular – or notorious – website Twitter. Most activists and supporters use twitter every day to discuss about social injustice. One way to assure that a topic will become relevant (trending) on Twitter, is to use hashtags (#) to facilitate the research of the topic. The main focus of this paper will be author J.K. Rowling, who had been trending on Twitter after her first statements on transsexuality in late 2019, spanning to the most happenings

throughout 2020.

### III. ON THE HAPPENINGS OF LATE 2019, ANALYSIS OF THE INNER TRANSPHOBIA OF ROWLING'S LANGUAGE

In this section the main events of 2019 are analyzed, starting from late 2019 and subsequent happenings leading to the first controversy surrounding author J.K. Rowling.

#### A. Maya Forstater's Case and the #IStandWithMaya Hashtag

Maya Forstater is a British woman who has become notorious for losing her job at the Center for Global Development (Think Tank) in 2019 following a series of tweets (September 2018), where she has stated that trans women are not real women. In the incriminated post Ms. Forstater stated:

*"What I am so surprised at is that smart people who I admire, who are absolutely pro-science in other areas, and champion human rights & womens rights are tying themselves in knots to avoid saying the truth that men cannot change into women (because that might hurt mens feelings)".*

Forstater have kept on voicing her opinion loudly, disregarding possible repercussions under the Gender Recognition Act 2004 [4], the legislation that protect the LGBT+ community against discrimination.

*"Yes I think that male people are not women. I dont think being a woman/female is a matter of identity or womanly feelings. It is biology. People of either sex should not be constrained (or discriminated against) if they dont conform to traditional gender expectations"*

According to The Guardian (2019) following this tweet Forstater contract had not been renewed; in May 2019 Forstater have announced that she had lost his job.

*"OK. Here goes. Deep breath... I lost my job @CGDev for tweeting, writing & discussing gender critical ideas & my concerns about govt proposals to allow people to change their legal sex by 'self-identification"*

This have led to an employment tribunal. Snopes (2019) have reported that Forstater have brought a claim against her company, under the U.K.'s Equality Act [5], arguing that her rights have been violated because she was denied a new contract on the basis of her beliefs and finally on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the magistrate in charge, Employment Judge Tayler, had dismissed the case saying that Forstater's views on transgender people are *"not worthy of respect in a democratic society"* [6]. This sentence has led to many of

<sup>1</sup> POLITICALLY CORRECT: meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/politically-correct>

<sup>2</sup> Dictionary.com. Butthurt. Dictionary.com. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/butthurt>

<sup>3</sup> The Urban Dictionary is an online dictionary for slang words and phrases founded in 1999 by Aaron Peckham, at the time still a college student at the California Polytechnic University of San Luis Obispo. Urban Dictionary was initially created as a half-serious parody of traditional

dictionaries, mostly to compare the different slangs used by students in campus. In 2003 eventually, Urban Dictionary gained popularity after the website had been used by the High Court judges of the United Kingdom in a case involving two rappers who had allegedly used slang words the judges could not understand and needed translation. Over the years Urban Dictionary gained increasing fame eventually reaching extreme popularity among the web, so much so that the website had been translated in multiple languages and an app for mobile phone had also been created.

Maya’s supporters voicing their opinions on Twitter, included author J. K. Rowling. The hashtag #IStandWithMaya was born. Here a few of the most recent excerpts from supporters to highlight how after months from the end of the judicial case, Forstater still is relevant to the public.

*There's only one real woman & that's us who are born women. A man in a dress wearing lippy is a bloke in a dress wearing lippy. Nothing else. Everything else is fake #IStandWithMaya.*

Twitter User: Harris, S. (2020, March 27).

*Maya, I'm SO with you! How can I support you? Are you going to be selling any Maya-brand merchandise? Maybe a DNA test to weed out any trans people who might pass too well? Calipers to measure skull sizes? Maybe badges they have to wear to let everyone know??#IStandWithMaya.*

Twitter User: (2020, March 06).

On the very same day of the initial tweet from Forstater, following the sentence ruling, Harry Potter’s creator J. K. Rowling have posted a response on her personal Twitter account [7].

*“Dress however you please.  
Call yourself whatever you like.  
Sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you.  
Live your best life in peace and security.  
But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?  
#IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill”*

Rowling’s statement has initiated an online uprising on the social platform, with users from everywhere in the world have criticized the author for her statement. The following tweets just a small sample of the hundreds of tweets one may still find under Rowling’s original post.

*“In fact, the World Health Organization--among countless other medical authorities--validate trans people in their authentic gender identity. It is quite clear you don't understand the first thing about the trans community or the science at play. This is heartbreaking.”*

Twitter User: C. (2019, December 19).

*“The saddest thing is that the woman who inspired millions of kids to be good to each other, include each other despite our differences and stand up against those who would oppress us - is now a bigot herself. Good job.”*

Twitter User: Harry Potter And The Transgender Agenda. (2019, December 19).

*“What, exactly, is to be gained by using your platform to be cruel and exclusionary to one of the world's most vulnerable populations?”*

Twitter User: Mara “Get Rid of the Nazis” Wilson. (2019, December 19).

*“Never thought I would say this but here we are...Fuck you, J.K.”*

Twitter User: Posnanski, T. (2019, December 19)

*“As a gay man that found safety in Hogwarts throughout my childhood - knowing that Trans people wouldn't be able to have that safety breaks my heart.”*

Twitter User: Sanni, S. (2019, December 19).

*“My daughter, who is trans, is a big fan of yours. It breaks my heart to see you post something indicating that discrimination against her is perfectly fine behaviour for an employee. The world's most credible medical orgs affirm trans people.”*

Twitter User: Knox, A. (2019, December 19)

*“I grew up as a trans child reading your books as an escape. I would often pick out names from characters to give to myself, before I ever felt comfortable in who I was. This decision, to support people that hate me, and want to do me harm. It brings me to tears... Why. Why?”*

Twitter User: It, L. (2019, December 19).

*“Wholeheartedly disagree. I stand with intersectional feminist humans, who recognize that trans women are real women, and against bigots like yourself. Bigotry masquerading as feminism is anything but. Your internalized distortions are helping me to continue dismantling mine. Thanks!”*

Twitter User: Ramirez, S. (2019, December 19).

These tweets, are just a mere sample of what Rowling’s account has been stormed with, but they are a testimony of what her statement have provoked, both socially than politically.

**B. Critical Discourse Analysis of Rowling’s First Tweet**

Let’s analyze her statement and try to understand why user on Twitter have criticized Rowling. Rowling’s tweet consists of only five lines and two hashtags, 38 words excluding the hashtags.

As shown in Table I, Rowling has used 8 verbs, 6 in the imperative tense, 1 in the gerund, 1 in the present simple; 4 prepositions; 4 adjectives; 6 nouns; 5 pronouns; 2 conjunctions. In her tweet Rowling has chosen a very poetic prose, each verse but the last one, begins with a verb. *Dress, call, sleep, live*, and in the last verse *force*. These are the verb Rowling have cautiously chosen to show her view on Maya’s case; these five verbs are all in the imperative tense, used carefully to what it seems like hiding condescendence.

TABLE I: LINGUISTIC UNITS USED BY ROWLING’S

Verbs	Prepositions	Adjectives	Nouns	Pronoun	Conjunction
Dress (to dress)	With	Any	You x 3	Who	However
Call (to call)	In	Consenting	Adult	Your	Whatever
Sleep (to sleep)	Out of	Best	Life	Their	But
Will Have (to have)	For	Real	Peace	That	
Live (to live)			Security		
Force (to force)			Women		
Stating (to state)					
Is (to be)					
8	4	4	6	5	2

*“Dress however you please.”*

In the first sentence it is easy to see how *dress* is used to state how Rowling does not care for what transpeople wear.

*“Call yourself whatever you like.”*

In the next sentence the verb *call* refers to Rowling having no issues on how a transperson identifies themselves. It seems that Rowling has, from what seems to be a ruling position has decided to allow trans people to use their preferred noun.

*“Sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you.”*

In the following line Rowling used the verb *sleep*, as in to have sex with. Rowling appears to be very permitting and allows transpeople to have sex with their partner of choice. (How very *tolerant* of her.)

*“Live your best life in peace and security.”*

*Live* is used to emphasize how a transperson should be living a life in safety, far from harm: A admirable sentiment than immediately defied by the final verse of her tweet.

*“But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?”*

*Force women out of their jobs*, as if women all around the world were being fired because transgender people exist. No one is forcing anyone out of their jobs, in actuality transpeople are usually the ones being forced to leave their place because “their lifestyle choices are wrong” [8]. The final part *sex is real*, directly reflects the case of Maya Forstater and her statements, *sex is real, exclusively male and female, while transpeople are not*.

The use of these imperative clauses shows that Rowling seems to be displaying a *dominance* over the trans community; after all, she is indeed a privileged, wealthy, famous, influential, heterosexual white woman living in the first world<sup>4</sup> and knows nothing of what a transgender person might be feeling.

TABLE II: SENTENCES AND THEIR RESPECTIVE CLAUSES

Original Text	Type of Clause
<i>Dress however you please.</i>	Imperative Clause
<i>Call yourself whatever you like.</i>	Imperative Clause
<i>Sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you.</i>	Imperative Clause
<i>Live your best life in peace and security.</i>	Imperative Clause
<i>But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?</i>	Rhetorical Imperative Clause
6 Sentences	6 Imperative; 1 Rhetorical Imperative

Imperative clauses (summarized in Table II) denote a sense of superiority and dominance of the reader, while rhetorical imperatives convey an assertion of the opposite polarity, Rowling is not asking a question, she is telling the reader what her opinion is and there are no answers to this but hers.

*“Dress however you please”*

From the top of her status quo, she is allowing transgender people to dress however they want

*“Call yourself whatever you like”*

Rowling is allowing transpeople to call themselves whatever they identify with.

*“Sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you”*

Rowling is also saying that you may have sex with whomever you want, she does indeed *allow* that.

*“Live your best life in peace and security”*

Rowling wants transgender women to be safe, meaning they should be quiet and abide to social norms.

*“But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real”*

Rowling seems not to allow transgender women to be on the same plane of existence with cis women, also does not allow to fight for their rights. Demanding equality has led to a transphobic woman (Forstater) who has made transphobic comments to being rightfully fired. Rowling gives the impression of deeming employment higher than human rights. On this specific matter, Rowling’s history of unemployment prior Harry Potter should be taken into consideration [10]; that might have molded Rowling into a certain state of mind. Rowling does not allow transgender people *to be* if they dare to challenge the social norms she seemingly is so desperately clinging to.

The use of conjunctions is also crucial to reveal Rowling’s what might be her true feelings on the matter. In the sentence *“dress however you please”*, the conjunction *however* indicated a negative implication; when used as conjunction, *however* expresses that “how something is done will not make any difference”. Therefore, the phrase *“however you please”*, states that Rowling does not care how a transgender person dresses, not because she is supporting the person, but because it does not affect her directly. Rowling is not supporting the trans community, she is obviously *tolerating* it. One who is tolerant does not necessarily support. *“Call yourself whatever you like”*, in here *whatever is* in its conjunctive form, used in the same exact fashion as *however* in the previous sentence. The phrase *“whatever you like”*, does not imply support but condescendence. To Rowling it does not matter how a transperson is referring to themselves, because once again it does not affect her. The final conjunction found is *but*, used the final sentence *“but force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?”* *But* is used to emphasize her argument; it carries a contrast, a negation. You may be yourself *but* do not affect other people’s lives.

Adjectives used by Rowling are also a reflection of her views. The adjective *any* is used in the sentence *“sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you”*, and it refers to the type of sexual partner a transperson might have. In this very sentence there is a clear trace of transphobia; in the adjective phrase *“any consenting adult who’ll have you”*, it is obvious Rowling does not accept transsexuality as a normal variation of gender. The end of the phrase shows it perfectly, *“who’ll have you”*, meaning that there might be people *willing* to have sexual intercourse with a transperson, as if transpeople were inferior to non-trans. This seems to show how little Rowling cares for transgender people. In the third sentence *“sleep with any consenting adult who’ll have you”*, the adjective *consenting* seems to reflect a very wrong idea of transgender people; it look as if Rowling might be implying that transsexual people are *sexual predators* of some sort, and as

<sup>4</sup> Before becoming a successful writer, J. K. Rowling had experienced extreme poverty and had indeed been an outcast of society. Suggested article on the matter: Gillett, R. (2015) [9].

such she feels compelled to make a remark on how they should only have sex with consenting adults. Isn't this what everyone should abide to, though? No one should force themselves on anyone else, this should be the norm; actually, this is the norm. There was no reason to remind the reader that transsexual people should only have sex with *consenting adults*. If one of the parties is not consenting, it is not sex anymore, it is **rape**! Also, according to statistics conducted by The Human Right Campaign "The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey" found that 47% of transgender people are sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime [11]. Transgender people **are** the victims of rape.

The other adjective Rowling uses is **best**, in "*live your best life in peace and security*". In this specific context, this sentence acts as a connector with the final statement "*but force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?*" Where the last adjective **real** is found. It seems like Rowling might be implying that as long as transgender people are not saying anything that goes against Rowling's opinion [trans right] they might be allowed to live their **best** lives. Finally let's analyze the use of the adjective **real**; with the last statement Rowling has concluded her rant towards how transpeople have condemned Forstater. "*But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?*" She asks, implying to the notion that being either male or female is the only possible sex option in nature for mankind. This has been debunked by science several times [12], [13]; not everyone is born either female or male, there are other chromosomic combination that might happen. Binarism cannot be acceptable in a modern society that has free access to information daily.

Lastly, the use of hashtag in Rowling's tweet must be analyzed. Rowling has only used two, #IStandWithMaya and #ThisIsNotADrill. The first *one* is a clear statement on Rowling's political view on the matter, she *stands* with Maya, Rowling might not support fully what Maya have stated in the past<sup>5</sup> but she does support Maya's case and she does tacitly declare that discrimination at work is not an issue if the victim is a minority. #ThisIsNotADrill confirms the theory, the reader must take Rowling's statement as a reflection of her political views, what she is saying *is not a drill*. Rowling is taking full responsibilities for her actions with this final hashtag; Rowling knows what Forstater has done, she is fully aware that her tweet will be scrutinized by the web, she is purposely admitting she has the power to have a controversial opinion, she is showing the world that she can do *whatever she likes*.

In Table III a summary of what majority of the Twitter users who support transsexuals' rights have understood.

TABLE III: MEANING CONVEYED BY ROWLING VS MEANING UNDERSTOOD BY LGTB+ COMMUNITY

Rowling's original text	Understood meaning by the LGTB community
Dress however you please.	Rowling doesn't care how you dress
Call yourself whatever you like.	Rowling doesn't care how you want to be addressed
Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you.	Rowling doesn't care who you have sex with
Live your best life in peace and security	Rowling doesn't care how you live your life
But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real?	But please don't affect Rowling's life with your life choices

<sup>5</sup> Rowling is yet to give a public response on the matter.

#### IV. ROWLING'S LATER TWEETS AND NEW CONTROVERSIES

Following the first set of tweets, Rowling decided to keep quiet for a few months, until June 2020, when she stated on Twitter that only women who menstruate are indeed women and that *only these women* have a say in the woman-experience. This of course caused a new wave of disdain toward Rowling who kept on replying to people that she is not against transpeople, on the contrary she is *tolerant* and supportive. After this tweet, Rowling inexplicably decided to publish an essay titled "*TERF wars*", where she wrote about her views on transsexuality – confirming once and for all she is indeed a transphobe and that she does not have the faintest idea on how transpeople are being marginalized already by our society.

##### A. Essay

*"So I want trans women to be safe. At the same time, I do not want to make natal girls and women less safe. When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman – and, as I've said, gender confirmation certificates may now be granted without any need for surgery or hormones – then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside. That is the simple truth."*

Rowling's essay, published on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, is the author's direct response to recent criticisms towards her statements on the matter. Rowling seemingly appears to be seeking for understanding, and asks the web to stop attacking her and stop threatening her life. The sentiment, of course, is admirable; no one should be threatened for expressing an opinion and no one should refrain from voicing their thoughts. At the same time, Rowling has been sharing misinformation and kept on attacking a demographic that is already in danger. As it can be seen in the above excerpt taken from paragraph 37 of Rowling's essay, the author does indeed compare trans women to predators, stating that a despite what science is saying on the matter, she does not agree that trans women should be able to use the women's room, especially if they have not – for whatever reason – started hormonal therapy yet. It is unclear what Rowling expect trans women to do in a bathroom, but according to transwomen themselves they simply want to use the bathroom.

Moving to a more linguistics-focused approach, the most controversial statements of the essay will be analyzed and discussed. Rowling's essay has been published on her own website (<https://www.jkrowling.com>) and then shared on her twitter page to reach her followers; the essay is divided in 44 paragraphs and it cover the main events starting from 2019 to recent days. In the introductory section, Rowling explains her point of view, what she believes has happened to her and how she is being wrongly accused of being a transphobe. The main body of the writing goes then into the realms of politics and science, where Rowling affirms that sex, gender and gender identity are different and people should only focus on the sex they were born, discarding years of transsexual rights fights to finally being recognized. The author continues defending

her views, affirming that she does love and respect transpeople and she understands that they are indeed victims in the real scheme of things; despite that, Rowling remains firm in her opinion stating that transwomen yes are victims but they though carry an ideology that is dangerous to women born women. Rowling also takes her past of being abused by her ex-husband as example of how women are victims in our society; abusing other is despicable, but should not be used as part of your narrative when the main issue are not abusive men but transsexual women who only wants to be accepted.

Going further on, Rowling explains her five reasons to why she has decided to publish an essay on the matter; these five reasons are the following.

*Firstly, I have a charitable trust that focuses on alleviating social deprivation in Scotland, with a particular emphasis on women and children. Among other things, my trust supports projects for female prisoners and for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse. I also fund medical research into MS, a disease that behaves very differently in men and women. It's been clear to me for a while that the new trans activism is having (or is likely to have, if all its demands are met) a significant impact on many of the causes I support, because it's pushing to erode the legal definition of sex and replace it with gender.*

In the first of her five reasons, Rowling seems to be implying that *new* trans activism's main purpose is to erode the legal definition of sex, and by doing so it would attack – somehow – children and women's right. The language used by Rowling wants to elicit the reader's sense of indignation; "it's pushing to erode the legal definition of sex and replace it with gender", she writes, excluding the possibility that transsexual people do indeed know the difference between sex and gender. For the sake of clarity, sex refers to what people are born as, either female, male or intersex (and even other variations that might occur naturally); gender refers to the social construct we all base our society on, man and women and additionally non-binary or genderfluid individuals. Rowling uses strong the verb **to erode**, to describe what she thinks is happening; she is using strong language to convey her message, showing power and therefore a position of privilege.

*The second reason is that I'm an ex-teacher and the founder of a children's charity, which gives me an interest in both education and safeguarding. Like many others, I have deep concerns about the effect the trans rights movement is having on both.*

By the way Rowling phrases this paragraph, it is clear that she feels in danger; she is scared, frightened even, that children and education will be affected by trans activism. Rowling uses what rhetors would call *pathos*, or emotional appeal, to persuade the readers to join her side. While the use of pathos is nothing new in text, it is advisable to only use it when there is truth in it; trans activism, as for 2020, has yet to impact society negatively. Transpeople are usually the victims of society, as such it is nearly impossible to believe that trans activism could in any way affect society negatively. What transpeople are fighting for is equality and not being

victim of violence.

*The third is that, as a much-banned author, I'm interested in freedom of speech and have publicly defended it, even unto Donald Trump.*

Rowling takes the example of Donald Trump, whose she does not agree with<sup>6</sup>, to defend her right to freedom of speech; if Trump can say something, so can Rowling. Freedom of speech though, despite being a human right has many drawbacks. One might have the right to state something, but does this statement have a value? Should it be said aloud? It is controversial to defend freedom of speech completely when in some specific case it might lead to contributing to hate speech. With *much-banned author* Rowling wants to emphasize her condition as a wicked-writer banned by certain demographics; Harry Potter has been banned by some religious groups in the past and the newly arisen controversies have led to people around the world asking for Harry Potter author to simply disappear. It is understandable why Rowling uses this sort of language then, to once again persuade the audience with emotional appeal, in this case based on past events involving the author directly.

*The fourth is where things start to get truly personal. I'm concerned about the huge explosion in young women wishing to transition and also about the increasing numbers who seem to be detransitioning (returning to their original sex), because they regret taking steps that have, in some cases, altered their bodies irrevocably, and taken away their fertility. Some say they decided to transition after realising they were same-sex attracted, and that transitioning was partly driven by homophobia, either in society or in their families.*

According to science, the percentage of transman (ftm) detransitioning only reach a tiny percentage [14], an incredibly large minority compared to the transpeople happily *transitioning*. Once again, she is trying to use pathos to elicit a moral indignation in the readers, to provoke a social revolt against "easy transitioning". In reality transitioning for transpeople is never easy and usually it takes years before being approved by experts in the field.

*On Saturday morning, I read that the Scottish government is proceeding with its controversial gender recognition plans, which will in effect mean that all a man needs to 'become a woman' is to say he's one.*

As already mentioned in the second chapter, Rowling is referring to the new Gender Recognition Act in Scotland, which would simply allow transpeople who have not yet gone through sexual reassignment surgery nor hormonal therapy to use their preferred noun (she/her, he/his, they/their); and therefore, also use their bathroom of choice. Rowling uses take the example of her abusive ex-husband, who used to beat her as beacon of reason for the matter. A violent man could dress up as a woman, enter the bathroom and abuse of women. With all the due sympathy for Rowling and her abusive experiences, what she is stating does not have any logical value. Allowing transpeople to finally feel comfortable and

<sup>6</sup> Rowling on trump

use whatever bathroom they feel safe in, does not put women in danger. By saying “become a woman is to say he’s one” Rowling is saying she does not accept transwomen, not only that, using the emotional appeal of her troubled past in her narrative only shows that she is still presenting symptoms of PTSD and the way she uses language clearly shows it. The language she uses in these final paragraphs is aggressive, presents verbs such a terrified, doxing, afraid.

*Huge numbers of women are justifiably terrified by the trans activists; I know this because so many have got in touch with me to tell their stories. They’re afraid of doxxing, of losing their jobs or their livelihoods, and of violence.*

Rowling implies that women, cis women, are afraid of trans activists, because the latter want their jobs or even kill them. In reality, what has happened is that a minority of people are expressing violent thoughts in response hate speech while the other are simply stating that Rowling, and who like Rowling, is wrong.

#### B. New Tweets

Additionally to her essay, in most recent days Rowling has doubled down on the matters with a new set of tweets, eleven to be exact, where she stated once again that transsexual women have Rowling’s fullest support and admiration, but at the same time allowing children to acknowledge their trans identity and eventually start hormonal treatments before puberty. Without going too far into the topic of sexual reassignment treatment and surgery, Rowling seems to be oblivious of the fact that majority of transpeople have no access to such medications, and usually are rejected by their families. Rowling compares helping young transpeople to transition peacefully into their preferred gender as gay conversion therapy, the **barbaric** treatment to convert gay people into “perfectly normal” straight elements of a “respectable society”, still in use in **too many** countries in the world. (The author of this paper despises and condemn such treatments).

Author J.K. Rowling created an incredibly powerful wave of controversies that has been shaking the internet for almost a year. This internet phenomenon has then started creating new words that are now being used by internauts.

#### C. Book Release and New Controversy

Finally, the newest controversy has come from Rowling’s newly published book *Trouble Blood*, where the main happens to be a man in drag. There would not be any issues with that if the author had not been Rowling herself. The trope of main putting on women’s clothes to go on a murder spree is not new; in recent year it has become less acceptable, but from movies like Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* to *Sleepaway Camp*, and many other pieces of literature, man in drag have always been seen as monsters, freaks, perverts. By making her new main villain a man in drag, Rowling is only sending out the message “being a man in women’s clothes only makes you a maniac”. Despite not having any explicit transphobic references, the book does heavily imply, with the language chosen by Rowling, that women are not safe when men, especially men in drag are around. This sort of language caused many people on the internet to go against Rowling and her views.

#### V. ON THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC VALUE OF HATE SPEECH AND HOW SOCIAL INJUSTICE INFLUENCES LANGUAGE

In this final chapter word creation as a response to Rowling’s statement will be analyzed and discussed to highlight what impact they might have had on a linguistic level. The main purpose of this section of the study is to demonstrate how social issues like injustice can influence language and contribute to enrich language. Many on web have been resorting to new lexicons to address J.K. Rowling, the following chapters will take the most used in consideration.

##### A. To J. K. Rowling, A Brand-New Verb

In response or Rowling’s transphobic views, one of the most linguistically notable reply has to be that of Jameela Jamil, stating on a tweet: “*To JK Rowling’: verb: To go out of your way to destroy your iconic legacy.*” In here Rowling’s name had been transformed into a verb to indicate a person who goes the distance to ruin their own life; this process of transforming a non-verb into a verb is known as conversion. To JK Rowling can be then used to describe someone, somewhat successful who has taken a road to personal destruction on their own will. For example:

- Mark keep on saying racist stuff despite what people says. He’s JK Rowling badly”

Prior to this definition, JK Rowling was already a verb on the internet, referring to people retonning their own past adventures to sound more interesting. On the Urban Dictionary the definitions is as such: “*When your 'cool mom friend' inserts details into her stories of the past to make her appear more woke than she is.*”. This refers to J.K Rowling’s habit to add to the Harry Potter canon with trivial information; most notable example being Hermione Granger, one of the main characters in the books, who suddenly turned black in the theatrical adaptation of *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child* [15]. Rowling stated that she had never described Hermione as a white girl and she’d been of British African origins all along, when in reality she has never clearly stated so. By turning a character into a minority years after publication, Rowling is promoting a form of low key otherism, the exclusion of a person based on their perceived diversions from an acceptable norm. If Hermione has always been of color, why was it never stated clearly? Another example on the matter, Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Magic, had been outed as gay after the final book of the series had been published already; of course, there are not references of Dumbledore being gay in the story. These two examples, are once again a tool to explain how Rowling had decided to appear openminded and progressive by exploiting minorities to appear *woke*. Minorities, either racial or LGTB+, do not need to be further exploited or used for the wellbeing of someone already privileged: a CIS white woman in a first world country as Rowling. This leads to the next term, Cisgender.

##### B. CIS, Cisgender and Gender Identity

Surprisingly cisgender does not quite meet one of the first criteria of our research; cisgender, as a word, appears to have been created in the 1990’s by German sexologist Volkmar Sigusch [16] while researching on transsexuality and gender. Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity matches

their sex assigned at birth; in simple words a person assigned male at birth is a man, and a female a woman. The etymology of cisgender origins from Latin, with cis- meaning “on the side of”, being cis- the antonym of trans-, “across from” (Fig. 1). This opposite cis-trans set can be usually seen in the field of genetics. The main reason cisgender made the cut to be discussed in this paper, is because before 2007, it was not customary and not widely used, while among LGTB+ circles and on the internet, cisgender is used constantly to describe someone who is not trans or not non-binary.

Another term that goes hand in hand with CIS is *gender identity*; the word gender identity refers to the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth or can differ from it, in the case of cisgender people, their gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth. Linguistically speaking, the term is composed by two separate words that serve the purpose of a single word; both the components are nouns and the resulting new word is as well a noun.

Cis- / Trans-  
Positive / Negative  
Cisgender / Transgender  
Gender + Identity = Gender identity  
Noun + Noun = Noun

Fig. 1. The relation of cis- and trans-.

### C. TERF, TERFy and TERFing

“A bitch and a TERF. She keeps adding details of the HP series when it has been over for a decade.” (Urban Dictionary on Rowling)

*“I feel its fine to have nostalgic feelings for books like harry potter, and appreciate the world and art behind them.... it’s an entirely different thing to continually support and turn a blind eye to a clear TERF and fake ally to queer community. #Idontstandwithmaya”* (Twitter User Yovska. 2019, December 19).



Fig. 2. 8th definition of TERF on the urban dictionary.

A TERF, according to the Urban Dictionary (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3), is a “*Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist. That group of feminists that claims that trans women aren't really women, as biological determinism is only a fallacy when it used against them, not when they use it against others.*”<sup>7</sup> The word TERF is an acronym (Fig. 5); the term is the current online

slang used by users to describe a person who does not support transwomen’s rights; as many other vocabularies birthed by the web, TERF has become widely used in the online community. In the following images taken from Urban Dictionary, a few examples of how the word TERF is used.

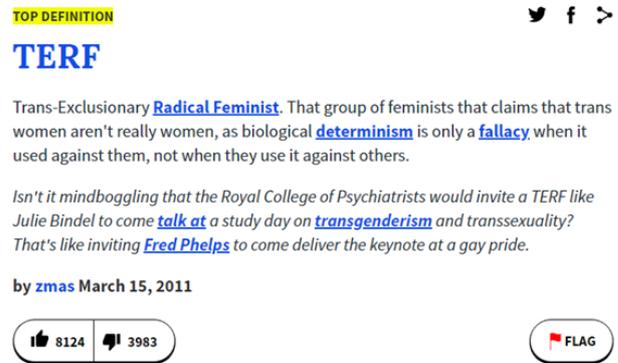


Fig. 3. Top definition of TERF on the urban dictionary.

The word TERF can be used as an adjective by adding y to it, TERFy. The suffix y, that serves the purpose of transforming the acronym into an adjective, is written in lower case, most likely to avoid confusions. The form *terfy* though, written completely in lower case, can also be found on the web.



Fig. 4. Definition of terfing by Urban Dictionary.

A verb form of TERF can also be used; according to Urban Dictionary terfing (or TERFing) describes the phenomenon of behaving like a TERF as shown in Fig. 4.

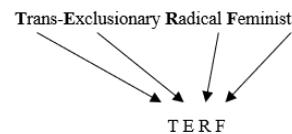


Fig. 5. TERF acronym structure.

Process of conversion of TERF into TERFy  
TERF + suffix -y = TERFy  
Noun + Suffix = Adjective

Process of conversion of TERF into TERFing  
TERF + suffix -ing = TERFing/terfing  
Noun + Suffix = Verb

### D. Rowlingism

Another neologism encountered on the web is the word Rowlingism. Urban Dictionary defines Rowlingism “the act of saying/tweeting something that is often controversial or contradictory to the source material in order to stay relevant

<sup>7</sup> TERF. (2011). <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=TERF>

in the current media climate.”. The word is both a compound and a conversion, being composed by Rowling and the suffix -ism, originating from ism indicating a philosophy or an ideology of something else, in this case author J. K. Rowling. The word is also a conversion, reason being Rowling is the name of a person – actually a surname – while Rowlingism is a simple noun.

## VI. SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS, AN OVERVIEW ON HOW ROWLING’S LANGUAGE IMPACTED SOCIETY

Rowling’s use of language has led to a social uprising that have changed not only how people see the author, but also how language is used. It can then be said that the controversies arisen by Rowling have successfully altered language a sociolinguistic fashion leading to creating not only new words that have entered our vocabulary but also new ways of associating language to the author; for some people the name Rowling now resonates with bigotry and no longer with Harry Potter.

### A. Death of the Author, Cancel Culture and Call-Out Culture

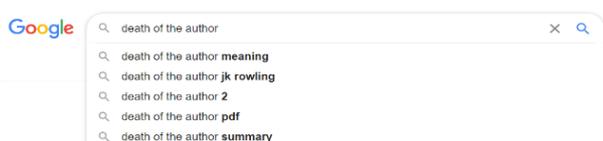


Fig. 6. Screenshot of the Google search box with “death of the author” typed in.

As Fig. 6 shows, J. K. Rowling appears to be the second most searched thing in relation to Death of the Author on Google; originally Death of the Author was only a 1967 essay by French literary critic Roland Barthes. In his essay Barthes argues against the traditional literary criticism’s practice of including the intentions of the author as well as the biographical context to interpret a text. Barthes claims that the art and the creator are to be considered unrelated. In today’s terms, Death of the Author is a term that does still retain the original meaning, but also it has become in recent years a way of detaching a beloved piece of word from an author that proved themselves to be either racist or homophobic on simply not in line with today’s standards. In the case of Rowling, there is still a discussion on whether people who love and respect transpeople should or should not consider the death of the author, reason being Rowling though she has become a very influential author and as such she should be careful on what she says on social medias, however she has always been supporting toward *most* minorities and it would be hard to detach her persona from Harry Potter when she is still so active in the world of the books and continues to speak about them on a daily basis. In the following screenshot (Fig. 7), groups and association like The Harry Potter Alliance, decided not to go against the art, but only against the author [17].



Fig. 7. Screenshot of the Harry Potter Alliance Twitter page.

The Harry Potter Alliance not only supports transsexual women, they openly support any minority without discriminating, ignoring what the author of Harry Potter said against transgender women. This though only works for people who are willing to ignore the transphobic views of Rowling, others decided to opt for a different route, called *cancelling*.

Cancelling comes from *cancel culture*, a phenomenon that have been rising in the past few years. According to Urban Dictionary, cancel culture is *a desire to cancel out a person or community from social media platforms*, to finally make said person irrelevant to the world. Cancel culture has become more and more common, and as such many people decided to speak against it on an open letter [18], one of them of course being Rowling herself. On the open letter, the 150 authors speak against cancel culture, saying that free speech is the basis of a democratic and free society; yet, they do not address the fact that most of the targets of cancel culture movements had made offensive statements that should not be tolerated in a modern society. Cancel culture is part of a larger phenomenon called online shaming, which is self-explicatory.

Finally, Rowling had been targeted also by another online movement called *call-out culture*. As for cancel culture, the call-out culture aims to cultural injustices that are not being addressed properly; Rowling, since late 2019, have been making clear statements on her outdated views on transsexuality for everyone to see, a series of actions that led to many LGTB+ (the author of this paper included) to call out Rowling for an explanation. Call-out culture comes from the verb to call out and its noun form call-out.

### B. Social Ramifications of Rowling’s Narrative

The actual reason why Rowling’s statements have become so crucial in the fight for equality is not the fact that Rowling is a celebrity; there are so many celebrities out there that are undoubtedly more intolerant towards transpeople than her [19]. The problem is that Rowling calls herself a feminist and an LGTB ally, when in actuality she doesn’t really seem to be [20], [21]. Rowling has, as October 2020, 14.5 million followers. Not only that, Rowling has influenced millions of children across the globe with messages of tolerance and equality for decades. To then seemingly discard everything that she has published since 1997<sup>8</sup> with her apparently ugly *online persona* who spews hatred and misinformation. As a world-renowned writer, Rowling should know better than spreading hatred – even if she did not intend to do so – on a platform that is accessible to everyone such a Twitter. Rowling seems to not know or not care the implications that the power she is holding in her hands might have; literally

<sup>8</sup> Rowling published her first novel in 1997

millions listen to her, millions have been and will be influenced by her. Carelessly saying that a minority is not entitled to the respect it is asking for is dangerous for the very same minority. Transpeople are still being regarded as inferior by a large amount of people, so then how can a person with such influence as J. K. Rowling be so inconsiderate towards this minority? The same person who has written about tolerance for a whole decade! In 2007 at a Carnegie Hall press conference in New York she has stated:

*“The Potter books in general are a prolonged argument for tolerance, a prolonged plea for an end to bigotry, and I think it’s one of the reasons that some people don’t like the books, but I think that it’s a very healthy message to pass on to younger people that you should question authority and you should not assume that the establishment or the press tells you all of the truth.”*

Are 2007 J. K. Rowling and 2019 J. K. Rowling even the same person? Does Rowling not understand she is putting the trans community at risk with her words?

In 2019 the Washington Post published an article titled **“Why can’t J. K. Rowling accept transgender people like me?”** a cry of exhaustion from the transsexual community that only asks for one thing, being accepted for who they are. Humans. With her stand on transgender people, Rowling have shown to be capable of display a power, over the transsexual community, that she should not have had in the first place. Rowling has decided to use the #IStandWithMaya hashtag to show the extent of her influence in the world; if Rowling have managed to raise a generation with her books, she will surely manage to convince her followers what is right and what is wrong. Or so she thought.

*“J.K. Rowling, whose books gave kids hope that they could work together to create a better world, has now aligned herself with an anti-science ideology that denies the basic humanity of people who are transgender”*

## VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued how J. K. Rowling, from her privileged position, has chosen to go against a minority that keep on suffering because of people just like her who cannot fully accept diversity. Rowling has willingly shared messages full of bigotry with her 14.5 million followers, not caring that people who are following her on Twitter might as well be the very same minority she is bashing on. Rowling, the writer who has inspired millions of children with messages of hope, equality, acceptance and tolerance, has become the very same villain – *ignorance and intolerance* – that Harry Potter have fought against throughout the series. What have led Rowling to such apparent devolution is not the purpose of this paper, but one might ask “how did she get to become such an intolerant and careless person?” But did she really change? Can the public really be sure that Rowling has really become an intolerant *monster* that the loyal fans must defeat? How can people be sure of someone’s real intention from a mere tweet? So far, this paper has analyzed what the incriminated

tweets and her now notorious essay appear to mean. On this analysis it has been argued that there is indeed a position of power and that she is apparently misusing it; what has not been asked though, is whether she wants to have a position of power. Rowling is after all just a writer, not a politician; she has millions of followers, she has never shown to accept the role of “*leading figure*” society expects from people so influential. While analyzing what Rowling have said, one of the questions should be “*did she really mean to create such controversy?*” Despite her newest replies on the matter, it still remains confusing on whether she is indeed seeking for changing society or just expressing her opinion without fully understanding her role of influential person in society. Rowling was born in the 1960’s, she has experienced the world in a totally different way from the new generations. In 1980’s homosexuality was still considered a disease and transsexuality was indeed considered a medical condition. For a person who was born in an era when being different was considered a pathology, she has still managed to become a person who has displayed *open mind-ness* and tolerance during the years. The standards held today might not be the right tools to criticize Rowling’s believes, she might be accepting and tolerant but she might still keep hold of those that have been the norms in her generation. This can be seen by the language the author has chosen to use on her essay on transgender issues. While she is trying to demonstrate she loves and care about transsexual people, yet she falls into bigotry right after. It is then hard to accuse someone of being intolerant when there are so many factors to be put into consideration. On a final personal note, no one should cherry pick who is entitled to having rights and who is not. Transsexual rights are human rights; transsexual women are women; transsexual men are men. On a critical discourse analysis standpoint though, what Rowling have written does display dominance and condescendence, and it must be analyzed as such, despite the true intentions of the author who has left us with a cold no comment.

Public opinions used by people in a position of power may pose a contributing factor in social injustice matter that can lead to language evolution and how language itself may be shaped to adapt to a certain social phenomenon. J.K. Rowling and her somewhat transphobic views and her usage of language and led to the LGBT+ community to transform her, a once untouchable author of the most famous book series in the last 25 years, into a despicable middle age woman with a close mind and therefore transformed the language surrounding her name and works. Language after all is a tool, and as such it should be used to fight social injustice in every way possible, finally breaking the walls of obsolete ways of thinking.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor professor Xiao for giving me the courage to go out and try publish my work.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my partner Guillermo, I would not have been here if he weren’t for his constant support.

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**Amerigo Quatrini** comes from Rome, Italy. He is currently pursuing his master's degree in linguistics at Shanghai University. Amerigo has been living in China for over 6 years, he has studied Chinese in Shanghai Normal University and passed the HSK6 test in early 2019. Amerigo holds a bachelor's degree in English and education, taught in both English and Chinese at Shanghai Polytechnic University.

He plans to have a career education, focusing on SLA. Amerigo speaks Italian, English, Chinese and Spanish, and plans to learn French and German in the future. Amerigo holds TELF, IELTS and CTBE.

Mr. Quatrini won the first prize in a writing competition in Chinese in June 2016. He won alongside other 5 colleagues the "2020 Chinese Government Outstanding Foreign Student Scholarship". In late 2020, he won the second prize in a Yangtze Delta-wide writing competition with a paper on sociolinguistics. Amerigo has published his first study titled "On social injustice and word creation on the web, 2020 BLM movement in relation to neologisms" in September 2021. His second published study, "Analysis of the Grammatical Passive Voice in English and Chinese, A Comparison Between the Two Languages", will be published on October 31<sup>st</sup> 2021. Amerigo is currently working his MA's thesis on English verb-noun collocations.