



A digest on

**INCLUSIVE  
LANGUAGE**

by

**SOUR**



# WHY?

## Language matters.

Inclusive language enables access and shows respect for other’s feelings  
According to the Linguistic Society of America, inclusive language  
**“acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.”**

Inclusive language is ever-evolving and varies across cultures and communities. There are roughly five main categories of topics in inclusive language: **Gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, disabilities, age, and socioeconomic status**. We also need to be mindful of the intersectionalities of these characteristics along with potential other lived experiences (See Figure1). Various communities and individuals have also established different guidelines and preferences for others to follow.

## What affects the language we speak?

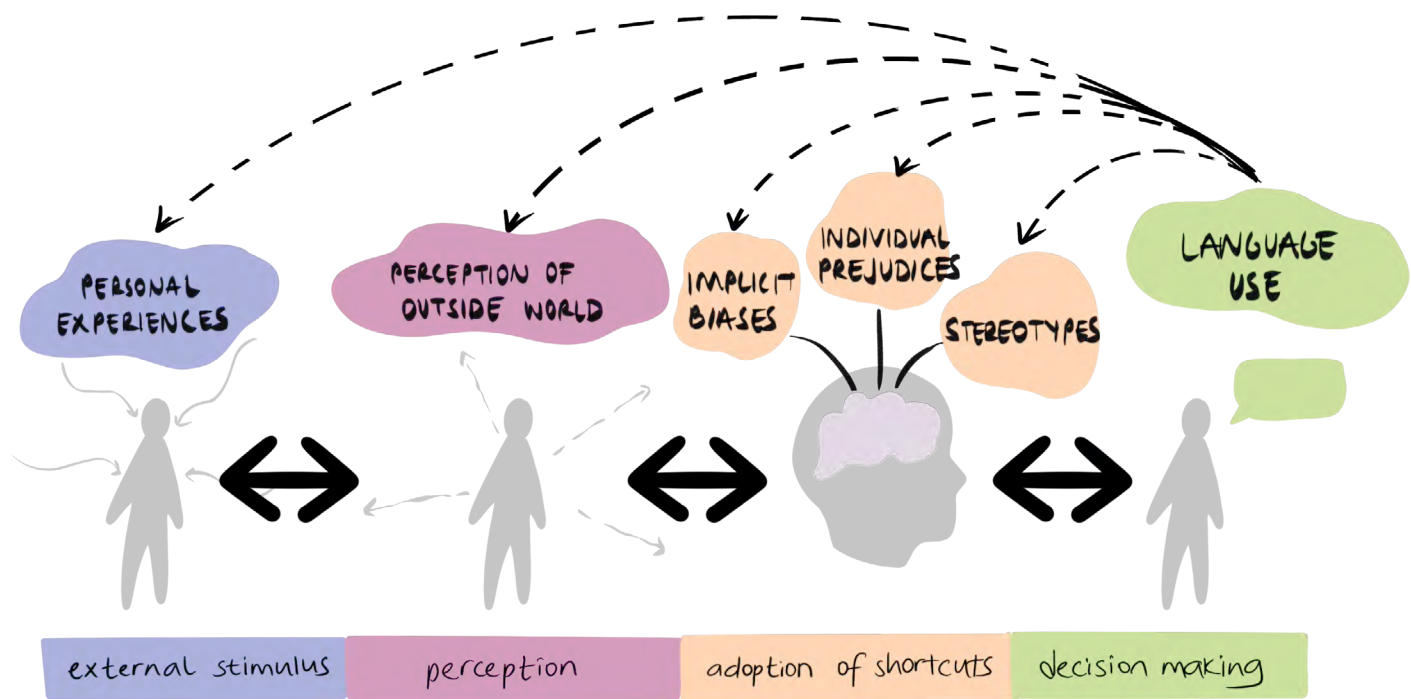
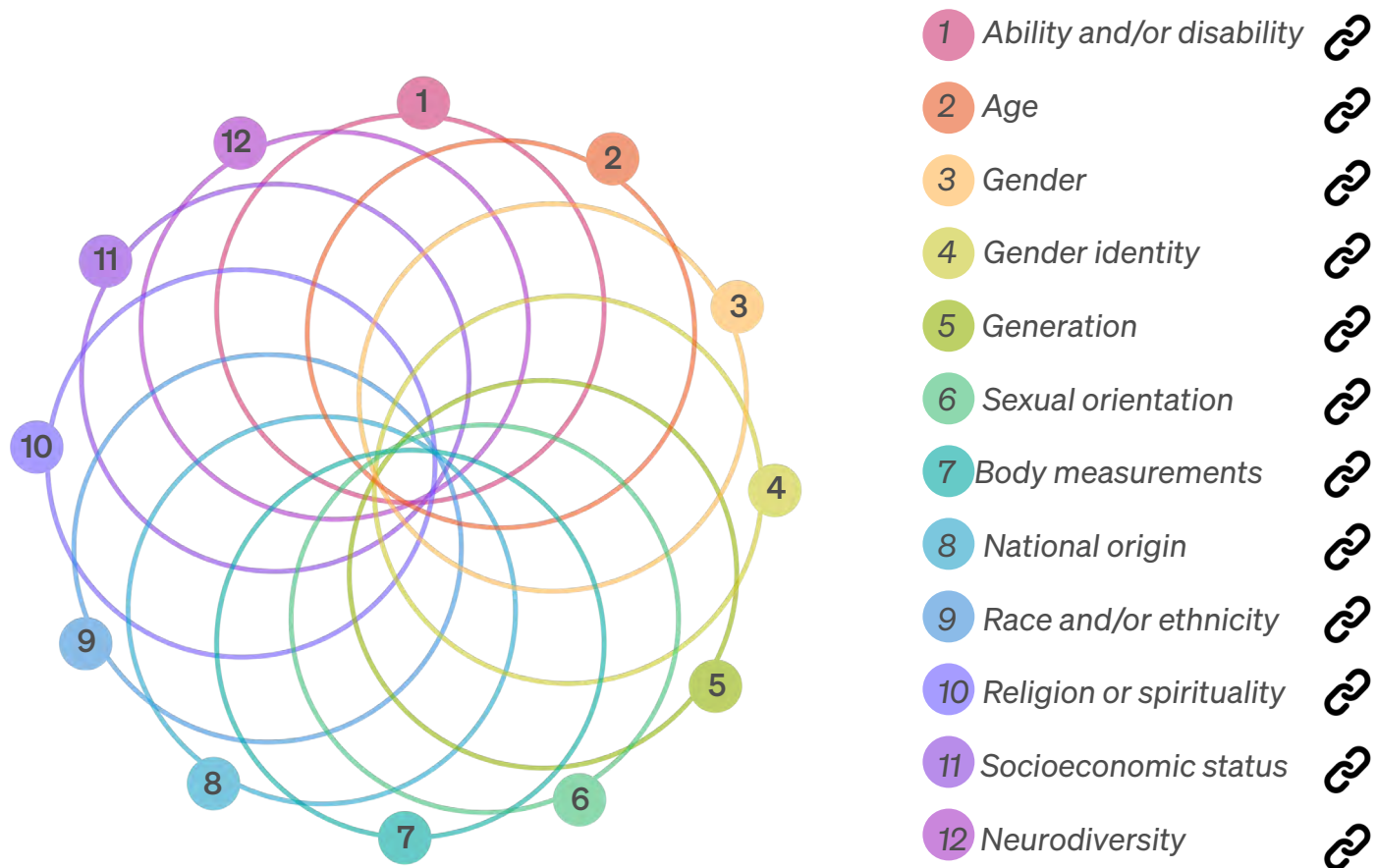


Figure 1



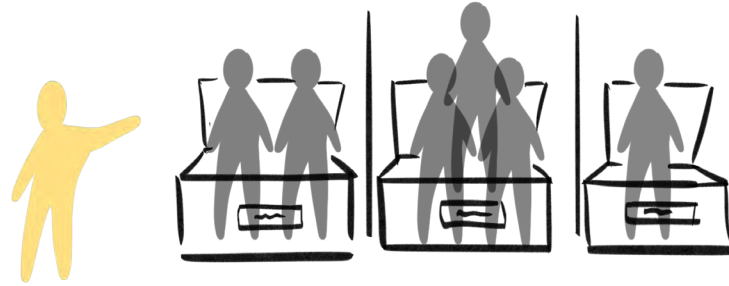
Our personal experiences have formed how we perceive the outside world, which might generate our **individual prejudices, biases, and stereotypes** toward others. These factors influence our **use of language** and how we communicate with people.

Although we might consciously be mindful of inclusion, we still have **implicit biases** that affect our decisions and behaviours. Since we have limited cognitive capacity, our brains adopt **shortcuts** to reduce our cognitive loads. While these automatic responses allow us to process vast amounts of information in seconds, they also pave the way for these biases to seep in to our **decision-making** process.

Here are a few examples;

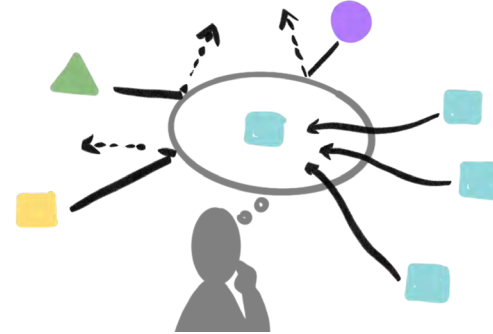
## Sorting

To categorize based on specific characteristics  
→ Affects our judgements and perceptions towards people



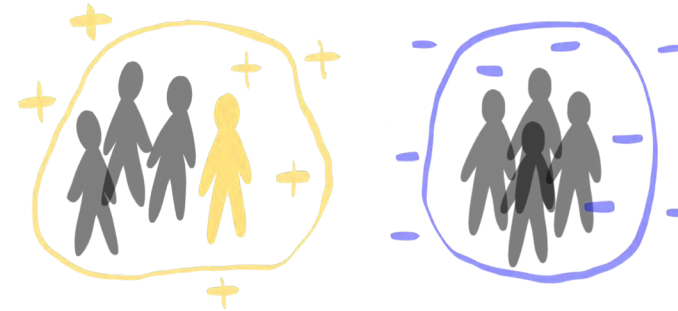
## Confirmation bias

To look for information that confirms our beliefs and ignore those that contradict → To perceive individuals as a representation of a group



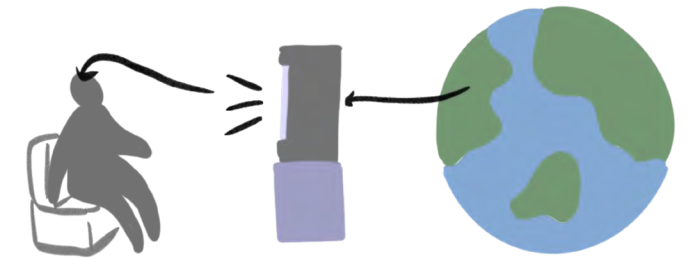
## In-group favoritism

To favor in-group members and dislike out-group members → More respect toward in-group and more biases toward out-group



## Availability heuristics

To rely on immediate representation or example in mind. → Impacts first time interactions



However, language can also become a key element to interrupt our bias at an unconscious level, which results in a behavior change.

# For Individuals: Adopting Inclusive Language

Using people-first language to emphasize the individual as the most essential part (sometimes the opposite may be preferred to break stigmas ie. people with autism vs autistic. However people should be consulted on their preference first before using).



Always consider nuances and the context that words are being used in.

Refer to a theoretical person as 'they' rather than 'he' or 'she'.

Educate yourself and your peers on inclusive language for diverse groups.

Only include identity information that is relevant.

Be mindful of terms related to gender, race, ethnicity, culture, age, disabilities, etc.

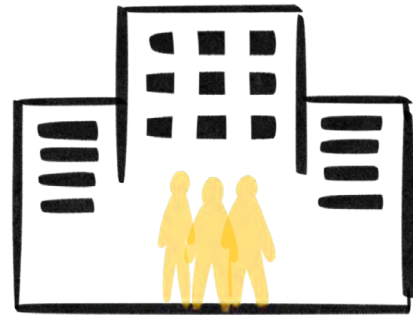
Avoid using jargon, idioms, acronyms and languages that show bias.



# For Organizations: Adoption and Implementation of Inclusive Language

## Internal

(Employees, managers, shareholders, etc.)



Review existing communications & remove inappropriate language

Generate guidelines and facilitate workshops & training sessions

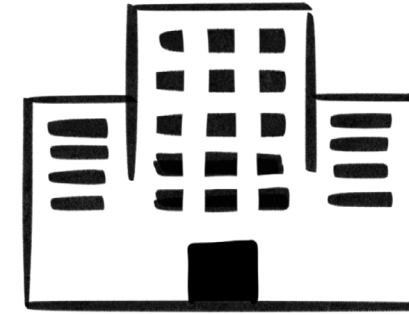
Encourage inclusive language during daily conversations and be open for feedback/criticism

### Such practices will:

- Encourage **diversity, equity & inclusion** at the workplace
- Reduce prejudices & assumptions
- Generate a stronger sense of belonging
- Improve employee engagement & retention

## External

(Public facing marketing, PR, customer service etc.)



Add inclusive language guidelines into the brand style guide

Create checkpoints during project cycle or production to ensure inclusion

Collaborate with specialized storytellers and inclusive consultants

### Such practices will:

- Build a foundation of inclusion in all communications, which will resonate with customers
- Strengthen brand reputation and image which overtime will convert into brand loyalty
- Ultimately impact the bottom line
- Set successful benchmark in relevant industry which will encourage further inclusion throughout the industry

### Case Study #1

Chase Bank announced to remove “Gender-Specific Language From Its Bylaws” to align its commitment on inclusivity and diversity. While corporations always use languages that emphasize men’s positions, Chase replaces phrases like “chairman” with “chair” and removed gendered pronouns. Its goal is to lead the employees to feel more valued, heard, and respected.

### Case Study #2

Microsoft acknowledges that its products have a global reach and impact society, so it created a communication guideline to reduce biases and prejudices in language. The guidelines suggest terms and phrases that employees should use during the development phase and in what context these languages should be implemented.

## Food for Thought

Language is dynamic and ever changing. We need to listen, pay attention and be open to such changes as our society evolves. Only an open and inclusive mindset will promote a collaborative future.

*If you want to dive deeper into the topic or need a roadmap for adoption and implementation, don't hesitate to reach out to us at [hello@sour.studio](mailto:hello@sour.studio)*