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Danielle Berkowsky   April 12, 2015

Compensating for the Lack of a Gender-Neutral Pronoun in English: What Makes a

Method Successful (with Evidence from Chinese) and What Should We Do?

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Abstract

Compensating for the Lack of a Gender-Neutral Pronoun in English: What Makes a

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By Danielle Berkowsky

Gender-neutrality is necessary in many circumstances, yet cannot always be expressed

optimally within the limits of the English lexicon. This paper looks at the ways English

speakers compensate for the lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun in

order to determine how to successfully navigate this deficiency. It uses results from a

survey of native Chinese speakers from Emory University on compensation methods in

written Chinese in order to detail the required characteristics of a successful gender-

neutral pronoun in English. Based on the avoidance method used in written Chinese, this

pronoun must be unambiguous, generally accepted, inclusive (specifically for those who

do not follow the gender binary), not androcentric, and flow easily, to allow English

speakers to produce grammatical and neutral language.

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"How often do I see a fellow-mortal pause in the middle of a sentence, groping blindly for the missing word."

-*Anonymous, Atlantic Monthly, November 1878*[1]

1. Introduction

The English language allows speakers to express thoughts and ideas in infinite ways with clarity and finesse. Nearly all concepts can be expressed in words, yet English still has some limitations. Namely, it does not have an accepted third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun. While there are methods of circumlocution around this deficiency, there are still various circumstances in which an **epicene**, or gender-neutral, pronoun is necessary or useful. The first instance is with unknown gender, when the speaker does not know the gender of the referent. The second is generic gender, when speaking broadly and not about one specific person or gender. Next is secretive gender, when the speaker does not wish to reveal known gender. Then there is irrelevant gender, when the gender is known but unnecessary to reveal. Finally, the last circumstance is for individuals who do not identify with the **gender binary** and/or standard conventions of gender limited to male and female.

This thesis will therefore investigate how English speakers compensate for a lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun and how Chinese speakers compensate for this same absence in written language. I will further study the effectiveness of the compensation methods related to each linguistic community. I will also explore what ways these compensation methods may represent an **androcentric**, or male focused, world-view in order to make suggestions for inclusive, gender-neutral language.

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[1] Baron, D. (1981). The Epicene Pronoun: The Word That Failed. *American Speech, 56*(2), 83-97.

The question of whether English needs a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun has been addressed countless times. A myriad of authors have called for its creation based on two main factors, that English lacks this pronoun and that the methods with which speakers compensate for this deficiency are problematic. Yet, not many authors look at what factors of these methods are actually successful and which are not. What makes this thesis unique is that it specifies a list of characteristics required for a successful solution to this deficiency in order to determine if a lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun indicates that there needs to be one, or if there is another solution available.

In order to explore this question, I will analyze evidence from written Chinese. English and Chinese are two very different languages, with a similar deficiency. English is a Germanic, analytic language that has relatively low inflection and utilizes a Latin, alphabetic script. Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan, analytic, tonal language that utilizes a logographic, character-based writing system. Both languages are natively spoken in different world areas and are related to very unique cultures and histories, yet English and written Chinese both do not have a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun (although there is no gender-distinction in spoken Chinese).

Results from my study determined that Chinese does not need a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun in written language, even though it does not have one, because of the success of its primary compensation method, avoidance. I therefore looked at the characteristics of what makes the Chinese method successful in order to make recommendations for English. I found that compensation methods must be unambiguous, generally accepted, inclusive (specifically for those who do not follow the gender binary),

not androcentric, and flow easily. Unambiguous means that the method clearly gets the intended point across and the referent is identified by to the compensation choice without confusion. Generally accepted means this method is used commonly and is not rejected on a large scale in a linguistic community. Inclusive indicates that every individual is represented with this method. Not androcentric specifies that the method does not enforce a male-focused linguistic society. Finally, easy flow verifies that the method fits with other grammatical patterns and speakers find it natural to produce. Success here is therefore defined by a compensation method's ability to satisfy these requirements without changing the intended meaning of a statement. This list is not exhaustive but includes the most significant factors based on my study results and has led me to conclude that English needs a third-person gender-neutral pronoun while written Chinese does not because it already has an suitable option.

I therefore recommend that English accept singular *they* as a pronoun that can be used in all situations, formal or informal, spoken or written. Coining a new term is possible but it would take time to catch on and to spread naturally. Allowing *they* to pair with singular referents is, in a sense, creating a new word with different usage from plural *they*. Singular *they* has all the characteristics required of a successful compensation method except general acceptance due to its accused ungrammaticality, so once it is accepted, it would satisfy the requirements. Beyond garnering general approval, I recommend teaching singular *they* in schools and grammar books as not only an option for neutral speech, but also to emphasize that gender is not limited to *he* and *she*, and that some people may fall outside or between that dichotomy.

I will first detail the instances where a gender-neutral pronoun is necessary. I will then explain the various methods of compensating for a lack of an epicene pronoun in English and analyze them in order to determine their effectiveness and inclusivity. I will further explore gender-neutral pronouns in other languages and the question of creating one in English. Next, I will present the history of written Chinese third-person pronouns and detail my study, which surveyed native Chinese speakers to investigate how they compensate for a lack of a third-person gender-neutral pronoun in written language. I will finally expand upon these study results to understand why written Chinese is successful in compensating for its deficiency, and why these two languages lacking the same feature do not require the same solution.

2. When is Gender-Neutrality Necessary?

2.1. Unknown Gender

One instance where a gender-neutral pronoun is necessary is when a referent's gender is unknown. This can be referencing a specific individual of whom the speaker does not know their gender, such as in (1) below. It can also refer to someone who has yet to be decided, and therefore leaves open the possibility for any gender, as seen in (2).

(1) Is your friend still coming over for dinner? What time will _____ arrive?

(2) I don't care who the next senator is, but _____ better help with student debt.

In (1), the aforementioned friend is an existing person, yet the speaker does not know gender. In (2), the next senator has yet to be elected so the speaker cannot know which

gender to use because there is no specific person associated with the statement at that moment.

2.2. Generic Gender

In some instances, gendered pronouns are not applicable because the statement is generic and therefore not referring to a specific person or gender. In this circumstance, the pronoun would have to indicate that it could be referencing any gender, as demonstrated in (3).

(3) If any student is hungry, _____ should grab a slice of cheesecake.

This is different from unknown gender because in (2) above, the next senator will eventually be a specific person and therefore there will be a preferred pronoun to use. In contrast, in this situation the sentence leaves the possibility open for an individual of any gender to "grab a slice of cheesecake" and therefore, requires a pronoun that matches the noun's singularity but does not assume gender.

2.3. Secretive Gender

With secretive gender, the speaker knows an individual's gender but does not want to reveal it for a variety of reasons, frequently to protect anonymity. These situations range from presenting an award and not wanting to preemptively give away the recipient's identity, to speaking anonymously about a friend's divorce and trying not to reveal identifying details. In the example below, I left the pronouns blank intentionally because specifying the gender could reveal individual identity.

(4) One of my housemates fell on the sidewalk . _____ was so embarrassed, I

promised I wouldn't tell anyone!

Using gendered pronouns in this situation could easily identify the embarrassed

individual instead of protecting anonymity, despite attempts to keep identity a secret.

2.4. Irrelevant Gender

Irrelevant gender means one or all parties know an individual's gender, but it is not

relevant to the conversation and therefore replaced with a neutral option. Granted, there

are acceptable gendered pronouns to use, but I included irrelevant gender because in this

situation, a gender-neutral pronoun would more precisely maintain the intended focus of

the statement. A gender-neutral pronoun would also reduce individuation, so that the

specific individuals are not the focus. Balhorn (2009) referenced an example of a

newspaper restaurant critique in which the writer knows the gender of the individuals in

the description, but chooses to not use gendered pronouns because the specific people

themselves are irrelevant to the review. The critic wrote:

(5) "At the next table, a woman is wearing a cotton candy mustache and goatee,

which inspires <u>someone</u> else to craft a toupee or stick cotton candy in <u>their</u> ears.

It's a sculpt fest."[2]

Balhorn explained that the focus of the story is the environment of the restaurant, not

the individuals. Their gender is just part of the background and "readers do not consider a

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[2] Balhorn, M. (2010). The Epicene Pronoun In Contemporary Newspaper Prose. *American Speech, 84*(4), 391-413.

referent as an identified protagonist in the discourse," so the author replaced the gendered

pronoun with an epicene option.[3]

Strahan (2008) identified a similar situation in written Australian English, where the

conversation evolved from one focus to another, and therefore gender lost relevance. She

found a pattern of writers replacing the gender pronoun with neutral *they* despite knowing

the gender, as demonstrated below.

(6) (Preceding context is a discussion concerning Helen's signature on what appeared

to be a manifest of some description)

A: Did Helen resign, or is that *their* signature?

B: Nah, she didn't resign.

A: Is that *their* signature?[4]

This example appears confusing out of context. Helen is presumably a female for

whom speakers would use *she*, but since the sentence is regarding the signature, Helen is

no longer the protagonist. *Their* is still referring to Helen yet the speaker, likely

unconsciously, replaced *her* because gender was not necessary to the understanding of

the sentence. This occurred in Australian English, but is a pattern I have also observed in

casual American English speech when speakers subconsciously use *they* despite knowing

gender.

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[3] Balhorn (2010).

[4] Strahan, T. (2008). 'They' in Australian English: Non-Gender-Specific or Specifically Non-Gendered?
Australian Journal of Linguistics, 28(1), 17-29.

In the instances described in (5) and (6), while a gender-neutral pronoun is not required, there is still an evident pattern of dropping gender and opting instead for the neutral singular *they*.

2.5. Transgender & Gender Non-Conforming Individuals

Some individuals do not identify with the **gender binary**, or "the classification of sex and gender into two distinct, opposite and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine."[5] Many of these individuals therefore choose not to use *he* or *she* as their preferred gender pronouns (PGPs). In the article *What the heck is a "PGP"?* the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) explains:

> In English, the singular pronouns that we use most frequently are: I, you, she, her, he, him, and it. "I", "you" and "it" are what we call "gender neutral" or "all gender", but "she", "her", "he" and "him" are gendered. This can create an issue for transgender and gender nonconforming people, because others may not use the pronouns they prefer when speaking to them or about them.[6]

Some frequently used PGPs include *ze/zie* (zi) and *hir* (hɪər), among others, yet one of the most common pronouns is singular *they* used with plural conjugations, as demonstrated below:

(7) *They* asked me to come over today to help decorate *their* house *(*Note: *they* is referencing a single individual)

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[5] Gender binary. (n.d.). Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_binary
[6] What the heck is a "PGP"? (n.d.). Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.gsafewi.org/wp-content/uploads/What-the-heck-is-a-PGP1.pdf

The lack of an epicene pronoun therefore proves an issue for individuals who do not conform to *he* or *she*, or who seek another option. While other options do exist, they are not in regular use and there is not one universal form utilized and accepted as an alternative to the gender binary.

3. Compensations

Studies have shown that use of masculine pronouns, whether generic or not, evokes more images of males than the use of *he/she* or *they* does, demonstrating the subconscious male bias of generic *he*.[7] Political activists and those against sexist language demanded that everyone should not be referred to in the masculine. *Fireman* and *mailman* became *firefighter* and *mailperson* and variations of *he/she* replaced generic *he* as the preferred option. Even now, calls for inclusive options for those who do no identify as *he* or *she* are changing preferred pronoun usage. Therefore, in formal situations, the most inclusive way to maintain grammaticality and political correctness seems to be to just avoid all pronouns, although this is not necessarily the most convenient and natural option for English speakers.

Each of the situations that need a gender-neutral pronoun typically takes on one of four compensation methods: generic *he*, singular *they,* avoidance, and variations of mixed gendered pronouns. The following sections expand upon the four compensation methods in greater detail.

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[7] Gastil, J. (1990). Generic Pronouns And Sexist Language: The Oxymoronic Character Of Masculine Generics. *Sex Roles, 23*(11-12), 629-643.

3.1. Generic *he*

Generic *he* uses the masculine pronoun to represent all people, regardless of gender. It flows easily but is androcentric, not inclusive, not generally accepted, and can be ambiguous as to whether the referent is truly male.

(8) If a student loses *his* uniform, *he* should report to the main office.

This construction is prescriptively deemed grammatically correct, even though the gender of the referent is not always masculine. Therefore, while it is generally perceived to be sexist, many prefer it stylistically because it does not detract from the flow of speech. It has been utilized for hundreds of years, and parallels patterns of generic masculine in other Indo-European languages. The Acts Interpretations Act of 1850 in British Parliament even made generic *he* the official pronoun in legal acts:

> Be it enacted, That in all Acts to be hereafter made Words importing the Masculine Gender shall be deemed and taken to include Females, and the Singular to include the Plural, and the Plural the Singular, unless the contrary as to Gender or Number is expressly provided.' [British Sessions Papers (1850) 338.I.5][8]

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[8] Parini, A. (n.d.). The Use of the Epicene Pronoun in written English: Variation across genres. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.academia.edu/1394442/The_Use_of_the_Epicene_Pronoun_in_written_English_variation_across_genres

This construction is taught in textbooks and schools with the justification that if *he* is associated with a person in sex-indefinite contexts then it does not retain its masculine meaning. Curme (1931) further argued that *he or she* is actually more sexist because it marks women as an other since *he* already refers to all people.[9]

The first recorded call for generic *he* was by a woman, Anne Fisher, although modern historians date its usage farther back to Chaucer.[10] For a long time, generic *he* was considered the most appropriate option in formal situations, thanks to Fisher's suggestion in *A New Grammar* in 1745. Fisher argued that in generic *he*, like in other universal terms (ex: *mankind*), "gender is supposed to evaporate right off."[11] Furthermore, Curzan (2003) explained that generic *he* has been utilized for at least hundreds of years, and cited several instances where generic masculine appeared from Old and Middle English texts.

> Swyche a **persone** ys ful slogh, Be **he** high, or be **he** logh… (Mannyng, *Robert of Brunne's "Hanglyng Synne"* 161)
>
> 'Such a **person** is very lazy, be **he** high or be **he** low'[12]

Use of generic masculine is a feature of many Indo-European languages. For example, in Spanish, if there is a group of people, having just one male in the group

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[9] Parini.

[10] McWhorter, J. (2013, April 30). The Royal They: Fighting against the tyranny of pronouns. *New Republic*. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112896/tyranny-pronouns-fighting-singular-they

[11] Bustillos, M. (2011, January 6). Our Desperate, 250-Year-Long Search for a Gender-Neutral Pronoun. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.theawl.com/2011/01/our-desperate-250-year-long-search-for-a-gender-neutral-pronoun

[12] Curzan, A. (2003). *Gender shifts in the history of English*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

makes it take on a masculine referent. So in a group with 999 women and one man, reference to the group would use masculine pronouns.

(9) Ell-os   est-an   bail-ando

3P-masc.plural   be-present.plural   dance-present.progressive

'They are dancing.'

Yet even though generic masculine dates back to ancient times and is similar to other languages, it is still not acceptable to refer to everyone with masculine pronouns. Not only could ancient society still have been androcentric, but by rejecting linguistic variation by forcing archaic generic *he* on speakers, supporters of generic masculine are attempting to control a defining feature of language, that languages change over time. In addition, generic masculine is not a language universal, as demonstrated by many Iroquoian languages that utilize feminine nouns as the unmarked ones. Furthermore, the ancient texts that cite generic *he* also demonstrate usage of singular *they* or paired pronouns (ex: *he or she*) in the same passages.

ffor whate **mann or woman** that hath hys mende on oure Lordis passhyon, I have no power ouer **theym** at no tyme…. (*The Life of St. Edmund* 168)
'For whatever **man or woman** who has his help in our Lord's passion, I have no power over **them** at no time.' (Curzan. p. 59-60).[13]

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[13] Curzan. (2003).

These concurrences demonstrate that that while generic *he* has endured for hundreds of years, other options also existed at the same time and its long history is not a valid argument for its continued usage.

In addition to being historically androcentric, generic *he* encounters a variety of other issues. First is the sexist hypocrisy that generic *he* is deemed grammatically correct while singular *they* is not. When determining what pronoun to use, the antecedent has two characteristics to take into account: gender and plurality. Traditional grammarians discourage singular *they* because they consider it sacrilege to not match plurality, yet they seem to turn a blind eye to the fact that generic *he* does not match gender. Second is that generic *he* promotes male-focused language and disregards non-male genders. Lastly, this construction leads to confusion and does not apply in every situation.

Use of generic *he* promotes androcentric speech. Emphasizing matched plurality while disregarding matched gender encourages erasure of genders other than male. Bodine (1975) cites support of men being placed before women in society as evidence of masculine pronouns being used instead of other gender markers.

> Some will set the Carte before the horse, as thus. My mother and my father are both at home… And what thoughe it often so happeneth (God wotte the more pitte) <u>yet in speaking at the leaste, let us kepe a natural order, and set the man before the woman for maners Sake</u> (Wilson I560: 189; also in Mair edition 1909: 167). (Bodine. p. 134).[14]

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[14] Bodine, A. (1975). Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: Singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he', and 'he or she'. *Language in Society, 4*(2), 129-146.

More specific to pronouns, Bodine cites Poole regarding pronoun agreement:

> The Relative agrees with the Antecedent in gender, number, and person… The Relative shall agree in gender with the Antecedent of the more worthy gender: as, the King and the Queen whom I honor. The Masculine gender is more worthy than the Feminine (Poole 1646: 21).[15]

Generic *he* erases non-masculine genders, and while some academics encourage generic *she*, its usage is perceived as biased towards women and it is primarily only used by females.[16]

Another drawback of generic pronouns, be it *he* or *she*, is that it leads to confusion and assumption of gender. This structure can make it unclear whether the speaker is speaking generally or specifically about a certain individual. According to Mouton, Robinson, and Elias (1978), this occurs because while masculine pronouns may be grammatically neutral, they are psychologically gendered. In the texts they used in their study, specific *he* was used approximately 10 to 20 times more than generic *he*. This made it difficult to distinguish when it was which type of *he* and caused the reader to assume specific *he*.

This issue is particularly troublesome with agents of expected gender.[17] For instance, in the examples below, it would be unclear whether the sentence is using generic or specific pronouns because readers tend to assume gender for certain jobs or positions.

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[15] Bodine. (1975).
[16] Hughes, D., & Casey, P. (1986). Pronoun Choice for Gender-Unspecified Agent Words: Developmental Differences. *Language and Speech, 29*(1), 59-68.
[17] Hughes & Casey. (1986).

(10) The *CEO* relies on the board members for feedback on *his* performance.

(11) The *teacher* is responsible for creating *her* own lesson plan.

In these examples, according to Sanford and Filik (2007), most readers would assume a specific gender because of the associated stereotypes of male CEOs and female teachers. Even if the pronouns were switched, the same assumption could be made because genders aside from the assumed ones are marked as different from what is expected. Eye tracking has further revealed a faster processing time for matching singular pronouns with their assumed gender, such as using *she* with *nurse* because nurses are assumed to be female, compared to plural neutral *they*.[18] Therefore, no matter what prescriptivist linguists decide is grammatically correct, generic gender is still unclear and ineffective.

Generic *he* has reached the point where it is outdated and inapplicable in modern English, such as the example below, where generics make the sentence ridiculous.

(12) No person shall be forced to have an abortion against his will.[19]

Generic *he* is not applicable in all situations, has a sexist history, promotes androcentric speech, and leads to confusion, so therefore another option is necessary. It's only successful factor is that it flows in speech and was generally accepted for a long

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[18] Sanford, A., & Filik, R. (2007). "They" as a gender-unspecified singular pronoun: Eye tracking reveals a processing cost. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 60*(2), 171-178.

[19] Meyers, M. (1990). Current Generic Pronoun Usage: An Empirical Study. *American Speech, 65*(3), 228-237.

time. Now, as early as 1985, a survey of national editors favored *he or she* over generic *he*, and found females used generic *he* less than males did.[20] Generic *she* is used almost exclusively by females and falls to the same problems as *he* such as excluding non-female individuals and leading to confusion. Generic *she* also stands out, which reinforces the acceptance of generic *he* as the standard form, while females and others are marked.

3.2. Singular *they*

A prescriptivist nightmare, singular *they* means using *they* as a pronoun with singular lexical antecedents (ie: *my friend*). It is unambiguous, inclusive due to neutrality, flows easily, and is not androcentric, yet it is not generally accepted. However, it is the closest option there is to a gender-neutral pronoun in English. While grammarians advise against its usage, it is a natural part of everyday speech used by nearly all native English speakers in various circumstances

(13) Anyone can do it if *they* try hard enough. (mixed-sex, distributive)

(14) Who dropped *their* ticket? (sex unknown)

(15) Either Mary or John should bring a schedule with *them*. (mixed-sex, disjunctive)[21]

Singular *they* is a form used by English speakers in formal and informal situations with a controversial reputation yet widespread usage as a gender-neutral singular third-person pronoun. There is evidence of *they*'s usage in the late 1300s as an alternative to

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[20] Meyers. (1990).
[21] Bodine. (1975).

generic masculine. Prominent authors such as Jane Austen and Shakespeare used it in their writing.[22] Further research shows common use of singular *they* by speakers from all walks of life since at least the 1300s until present day, including by college students, senators, and judges.[23] Yet in a study of English grammar textbooks, 25 out of 30 condemned singular *they* (although most noted that it is widely used).[24] Furthermore, the American Philosophical Association Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language classifies singular *they* as "CONTROVERSIAL (FOR INFORMAL CONTEXTS ONLY)" and adds that any intentional usage in formal writing requires a disclaimer.[25] Lastly, eye tracking reveals a longer processing time when a plural pronoun follows a plural antecedent than when it follows a singular, genderless antecedent. That being said, Sanford and Filik (2007) believed this could change and regardless of pronoun, singular antecedents typically have a longer processing time in general.[26]

Despite this, while many condemn singular *they*'s usage, multiple studies have reported its popularity in a variety of situations. In a study on what approaches adult student writers take to the hypothetical person of unspecified sex, the author found that 39% of participants used singular *they* at least once in formal writing.[27] Bate (1978) found that most participants condemned singular *they* yet used it themselves. Baranowski (2002) analyzed data from *The Independent of London* and *San Francisco Chronicle* newspapers and found that singular *they* usage has surpassed generic *he*. Pauwels (2001) studied Australian radio programs and determined that singular *they* is used more than

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[22] Berendt, E. (2014). Gender-Neutral Pronouns: Inclusive, Subversive, Progressive. *2014 Claremont Colleges Library Undergraduate Research Award.*
       http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cclura_2014/8
[23] Meyers. (1990).
[24] Bodine. (1975).
[25] Berendt. (2014).
[26] Sanford & Filik. (2007).
[27] Meyers. (1990).

other gender-neutral options in "semi-formal, non-scripted speech." Finally, Romaine (2001) studied English pronouns in American television interviews and talk shows and found a preference of singular *they* in cases of indeterminate gender. Even as I write this section, I struggled with suppressing the urge to use *they* for the authors whose genders I did not know, and instead opted to avoid any pronoun usage.

According to two online polls of non-binary individuals, singular *they* is the most commonly used PGP.[28] Although these were not scientific studies, but rather informal surveys, singular *they* is likely very common because unlike *ze* and *hir*, it is a familiar word in the English language. English speakers already know how to conjugate *they* into *them* and *theirs* and it is a work they are used to using.

Singular *they* is utilized to fill the gap left by English for an epicene pronoun by many people who do not identify with *he* or *she*. Yet while singular *they* is a convenient option, many criticize that it does not match plurality of a singular individual and therefore is grammatically incorrect. Furthermore, announcing one's PGPs as *they/them/theirs* can be construed as coming out as gender non-conforming, when an individual may not want to share that information. Singular *they* is as equally grammatically incorrect as generic *he* (according to prescriptive definitions of grammatical) yet is socially unacceptable despite widespread usage by prescriptivists and descriptivists alike.

3.3. Avoidance

English speakers are taught to strategically evade singular referents and pronouns. This method is generally accepted, inclusive, and not androcentric, but it does not

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[28]The Results of the Nonbinary Stats Survey. (2013, July 6). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from
    http://cassolotl.tumblr.com/post/54769253277;
 (n.d.). *Even if You Don't Understand.* Retrieved March 20, 2015, from
    http://anlamasanda.tumblr.com/psurvey

typically flow easily, especially with longer sentences, and it is not always clear who is being referenced. To fill in the potential blanks of the sentence below, an English speaker would change the wording to avoid any pronouns.

(16) If you ask your parent, _____ will probably tell you to go see a doctor.

    a. If you ask your parent, *your parent* will probably tell you to go see a doctor.

    b. If you ask your parent*s*, *they* will probably tell you to go see a doctor.

In (16a), the problem was avoided by using a noun instead of a pronoun, which works in theory but gets complex with longer conversations and typically does not last long in natural English speech. In (16b), the singular referents are changed to plural in order to avoid needing a singular pronoun. This technique is also grammatically correct but becomes difficult in longer speech and writing, plus not every referent can be pluralized. There are other methods of avoiding pronouns that vary depending on the situation, one of which is detailed below.

Morris and Sauntson (2007) discussed the avoidance of gender marking in the context of "lesbian discourse strategies." The author classified three instances where she used circumlocutions to avoid revealing her partner's gender, and thus her own sexual identity. The first instance she described as "subject/object pronoun deletion [and] replace with gerundive."

(17) I once managed to dislodge my partner's hyoid bone *when kissing*

(Instead of: *when I was kissing her*)

The next instance she explained as "distancing/depersonalizing by using indefinite pronoun and post-modifier."

(18) *Someone I speak to regularly on the phone…*

    (Instead of*: my partner…*)

The last instance was "demonstrative substitution for personal pronoun [and] alter subject noun phrase."

(19) This transcription is as my partner read it and *that's a* standard Mid-Western

    pronunciation…

    (Instead of: *she has a*)"[29]

She further noted that these "recognisably gay tactics of avoiding pronominal anaphora" reveals her identity to the queer students in her classes who are familiar with the practice of avoiding gender pronouns, but goes unnoticed by the heterosexual students unfamiliar with this strategy.[30] While the mere use of these circumlocutions may disclose her identity to the queer students and thus create a connection between professor and student, they make it a challenge to keep one's sexual orientation private in general discourse without careful rephrasing. This strategy is common among LGBT individuals

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[29] Morrish, L., & Sauntson, H. (2007). *New perspectives on language and sexual identity*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
[30] Morrish & Stauntson. (2007).

to avoid revealing the gender of their partner in order to keep their own orientation a secret.

3.4. Two-Pronoun Solution

3.4.1. He or she

English speakers compensate for the lack of a gender-neutral option with variations of paired pronouns, also called coordination, including *he or she, she or he, he/she, she/he, s/he,* and others.[31] This option is unambiguous, can flow easily, and is somewhat accepted. While this option is not always androcentric (some debate the word order of masculine typically preceding feminine), it sometimes does not flow easily and is not inclusive, so therefore not always accepted.

(20) If any student would like to meet with me after class, *he or she* should email me first.

This technique is frequently criticized for being "ugly and cumbersome" by speakers and grammarians alike.[32] It impedes the flow of speech and writing, and while it works for singular replacements, it becomes problematic with long sentences and questions.

(21) When I find the person who stole my wallet, *she or he* will regret that *she or he* even stepped into my house.

(22) Did *he or she* call to say when *he or she* would be arriving to the party, because *he or she* was supposed to be here hours ago!

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[31] Lee, F. (2007). Acceptability of sexist language among young people in Hong Kong. *Sex Roles, 56*(5/6), 285-295.

[32] Baron, D. (1981). The Epicene Pronoun: The Word That Failed. *American Speech, 56*(2), 83-97.

Variations of *he/she* are generally seen as inconvenient. Schwartz (2006) conducted focus groups with women varying in age and levels of education to understand their opinions on non-sexist language. In response to *she/he*, most agreed that it is messy and distracting. One woman further explained that she would never use *he or she* in speech because she lumps it with the awkward, written, "slashed" *he/she*.[33] As mentioned previously, in 1850, the British Parliament recognized this inconvenience and made a law that reduced instances of *he or she* to just *he* in all acts of Parliament in order to shorten the language used. Speakers, whether creating law or discussing language amongst peers, agree in the messiness of any paired pronoun variation.

English speakers recognize how awkward it is to stumble over paired pronoun sentences, but some see it as a worthy sacrifice because it appears to be a politically correct, inclusive option. Yet in actuality, pairing *he* and *she* is not truly gender-neutral because it excludes individuals who do not identify as male or female. It further reinforces the gender binary, as opposed to the idea of gender being on a spectrum.[34] Designating variations of *she or he* as the inclusive choice propagates the idea that male and female are the only available options, and eliminates the possibility of crossing the social constructs that create a boundary around genders.

According to Curme (1931), as discussed in the section on generic *he,* since *he* represents all people, *he or she* is sexist because it puts women outside the category of people.[35] While *he* should not represent all people in the first place, Curme was right that this structure has the ability to mark women as an "other." While English speakers are

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[33] Baker, P. (2008). *Sexed texts: language, gender and sexuality*. London: Equinox Pub.
[34] Berendt. (2014).
[35] Bodine. (1975).

straying from generic *he*, and masculine is no longer commonly seen as equivalent of *all people*, using feminine pronouns nonetheless remains a marked option that potentially distracts from the speech or text.

3.4.2. Alternating Pronouns

Instead of using two pronouns at once, another solution used in writing is alternating between masculine *he* and feminine *she* throughout a composition. For instance, one sentence may use generic *he* and a sentence later in the paper would use generic *she*. While this technique would be less distracting than using two pronouns at once, it still has many of the same problems associated with generic pronouns, including ambiguity on whether the pronoun is being used broadly or specifically. On one hand, alternating is more equal between the two genders, yet on the other hand, it still reinforces the gender binary (ie: only two genders).

Another pitfall of this technique is that it is perceived as biased towards women. Madson and Hessling (2001) found that readers tend to "overestimate the frequency of feminine pronouns" and therefore find alternating between the two pronouns more in favor of women than using *he or she*.[36] To further test this phenomenon, one study assessed 213 undergraduate psychology students and found that the students who read papers with paired pronouns did not perceive a difference in frequency between masculine and feminine. Meanwhile, students who read papers that alternated between generic *he* and generic *she* noted that the feminine pronouns occurred more frequently, even thought they did not, and therefore felt that the text favored women. Those students also rated the method of alternating as least effective in eliminating gender bias. So while

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[36] Madson, L., & Hessling, R. (2001). Readers' Perceptions of Four Alternatives to Masculine Generic Pronouns. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 141*(1), 156-158.

alternating seems like a less distracting method to compensate for a lack of an epicene pronoun while not promoting androcentric speech, it is still not universally perceived as the best option to rid bias.[37]

3.5. Do English Compensation Methods Meet the Required Characteristics?

The chart below details the compensation methods and whether or not they fulfill the designated characteristics of a successful compensation method. The "X" indicates that the method has the characteristic and the "S" denotes that the method sometimes has the listed characteristic, but not always.

Table 1: Effectiveness of English Compensation Methods

	Avoidance	He/she	Generic *he*	Singular *they*
Unambiguous	S	X		X
Generally accepted	X	S		
Inclusive	X			X
Not androcentric	X	S		X
Flow easily		S	X	X

4. Pronoun Usage in Legal Language

While details such as pronouns may be considered minor nuances in language, detailed word choice in legal writing has historically been extraordinarily influential, although not always in a beneficial way. In 1868, the 14th Amendment, which granted

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[37] Madson & Hessling. (2001).

freedom to African American slaves, specifically utilized the word *male* making it clear

that while males and females may be considered citizens under the law, only men

retained the right to vote. Since masculine *he* legally represented all people, specifying

male in this instance was utilized to avoid the implications of generic masculine

pronouns.

Various women found contradictions in the wording of U.S. laws. In Bradwell vs.

Illinois, Myra Bradwell was denied a license to practice law because she was a woman,

despite having passed the state bar examination. In her trial, she referenced the state

interpretation rule, "When any party or person is described or referred to by words

importing the masculine gender, females as well as males shall be deemed to be

included." Yet despite the explicit generic and inclusive wording of the law, Bradwell

lost the case because the interpretation of the law deemed it "repugnant" that a woman

become an attorney.

In 1872, Susan B. Anthony was arrested when registering to vote. She argued that if

the law uses generic masculine, then it either includes or excludes women, but cannot be

selective depending on the circumstance. She proclaimed:

> [I]t is urged [that] the use of the masculine pronouns he, his, and him, in all the
>
> constitutions and laws, is proof that only men were meant to be included in their
>
> provisions. If you insist on this version of the letter of the law, we shall insist that
>
> you be consistent, and accept the other horn of the dilemma…. There is no she, or
>
> her, or hers, in the tax laws. The same is true of all the criminal laws… I insist if
>
> government officials may thus manipulate the pronouns to tax, fine, imprison, and

hang women, women may take the same liberty with them to secure to themselves their right to a voice in the government.[38]

Anthony argued that generic pronouns were used selectively against women and either all laws should either be inclusive, or none of them should be. Generic *he* was considered grammatically correct and legally represented all people yet when women tried to take advantage of laws utilizing an allegedly generic pronoun, they found themselves rejected. This caised inconsistency as to which pronouns included women and which did not. Anthony and Bradwell both lost their cases because of their gender, but it did not stop calls for non-sexist language throughout the next two centuries and up until today. This includes demands for use of generic *she,* alternating *he* and *she* in formal writing, the acceptance of gender-neutral singular *they,* which is already widely used colloquially, and calls for new epicene pronouns, many of which have been suggested since 1850 with the first recorded proposal being *ne, nis, nim.*[39]

5. Creating a Gender-Neutral Pronoun

A majority of world languages do not have solely gendered pronouns. According to an interactive map on *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, 254 of the studied languages have no gender distinctions at all, compared to 124 with one or more form of a gendered pronoun (although some of those also have a neutral option).[40] Words are modified and created frequently, and while some believe creating a new pronoun is

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[38] Bustillos. (2011).

[39] Baron, D. (n.d.). The Epicene Pronouns: A Chronology of the Word That Failed. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.english.illinois.edu/-people-/faculty/debaron/essays/epicene.htm

[40] Feature 44A: Gender Distinctions in Independent Personal Pronouns. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://wals.info/feature/44A#2/16.6/148.5

impossible, evidence from English and other languages has shown that making a gender-neutral is possible, be it creating a new word or utilizing an existing one.

Coinage occurs to label unrepresented concepts, either with neologisms (new words) or by reassigning existing words to novel ideas, such as *meme*, which means "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture" but now primarily refers to popular media that spreads via the internet.[41] Some argue that pronouns already exist so there is no need to create new words. Scholars such as Dennis Baron and John McWhorter claim that pronouns are so imbedded in the language that changing them would be practically impossible. Yet, as demonstrated throughout this paper, gender-neutrality is not acceptably represented in pronoun usage and compensation methods do not adequately solve this issue, so there is still a need for an epicene option. In theory, if creating pronouns could not possibly occur in English, then how have various communities successfully created gender-neutral pronouns and who is to say they cannot be extended to the larger English speaking community?

Baron compiled a list of epicene pronouns titled, "A Chronology of the Word That Failed," and further discussed the difficulty of using genderless pronouns and referents to genders other than male and female in his *New York Times* article "Changing Gender in Language Isn't Easy."[42] His point was that English speakers are conservative about sex, even more so about pronouns, and are therefore resistant to change, especially in the realm of gender and sexuality. Despite the 58 choices for sex on Facebook and the 80+

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[41] Meme. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme

[42] Baron. (n.d.).; Baron, D. (2014, October 19). Changing Gender in Language Isn't Easy. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 19, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/10/19/is-checking-the-sex-box-necessary/changing-gender-in-language-isnt-easy

gender-neutral pronouns suggested since 1850, most options have never caught on in English aside from in specific, niche communities.[43]

McWhorter (2014) argues that as necessary as a gender-neutral pronoun is in English, "hoping to invent a new gender-neutral pronoun hoping for any change… is a waste of energy, despite even the most enlightened of intentions."[44] McWhorter points out that pronouns are closed-class words and therefore hard to change. Yet on the other side, he also comments that *you* was previously used with plural referents, with *thou* being the singular option.[45] If *you* can go from plural to singular (and sometimes still plural), surely *they* can go from plural to singular.

Students at Wesleyan University utilize *ze, zim, hir* pronouns as alternatives; options also recognized outside the Wesleyan community.[46] Stotko and Troyer (2007) studied a trend in Baltimore that school children use the slang *yo* as a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun in informal situations, such as "<u>Yo</u> handing out papers."[47] They also use *yo* when gender is known but they feel it is unnecessary to mark. Researchers were unable to find an origin to the word, which spread naturally and was not forced or imposed by linguistic activists.[48]

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[43] Baron. (2014).

[44] McWhorter, J. (2014, January 24). A Gender-Neutral Pronoun Won't Work in English. We're Stuck With "She" and "He." *New Republic*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.newrepublic.com/article/116331/gender-neutral-pronouns-will-we-ever-replace-she-and-he

[45] McWhorter. (2014).

[46] Weir, W. (2007, June 25). Gender Issues meet the pronoun problem, again. *Houston Chronicle*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.chron.com/life/article/Gender-issues-meet-the-pronoun-problem-again-1817725.php

[47] Stotko, E., & Troyer, M. (2007). A New Gender-Neutral Pronoun In Baltimore, Maryland: A Preliminary Study. *American Speech, 82*(3), 262-279.

[48] Fogarty, M. (2008, January 10). Yo as a Pronoun. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/yo-as-a-pronoun?page=1

Finally, there is the quintessential example of gender-neutral language in the Twin Oaks community in Louisa, Virginia. Residents at Twin Oaks value "cooperation, sharing, nonviolence, equality, and ecology."[49] Speakers here use gender-neutral *co* as a pronoun to counter androcentrism through language. They explain:

> Co means *he, she, his, hers, him*, and *her*. It was invented by a women's liberation group in New York who felt that the generalized *he* referring to both sexes should be done away with as part of our language. Many Twin Oaks members agree and write their articles accordingly, (unknown, 1971, p. 115).[50]

Co is used as an alternative pronoun; it is not a replacement for gendered pronouns. Flanigan (2013) wrote that, "The study shows that functions of *co* have expanded from its early use as a substitute for sex-specific pronouns to current uses that mask individual identity, celebrate a communal identity, and act as an 'ideological conduit' that reinforces feminist ideology in the community."[51]

Co demonstrates the potential success of an additional pronoun in an English speaking linguistic community. According to Flanigan, *co* is used for unknown gender identity, for people who do not identify with male or female, as gender inclusive speech, to replace *man* in compound speech (ex: *Snowman*→ *Snowco*), to camouflage a member's identity (vital in such a small community), and as a noun ("if you're the last *co*

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[49] Twin Oaks Intentional Community. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.twinoaks.org/
[50] Flanigan, J. (2013). The Use and Evolution of Gender Neutral Language in an Intentional Community. *Women & Language, 36*(1), 27-41.
[51] Flanigan. (2013).

online…").[52] Most of these instances match the reasons we need a gender-neutral pronoun in English.

It is hard to imagine a situation where an attempt to remove gender from all pronouns would gain traction, not only because removing words from language would surpass the difficulty of imposing new words, but also because gender erasure rejects those who wish to be identified by a certain gender. That being said, creating a pronoun, such as *co* or *yo*, is definitely possible on a larger scale, as demonstrated by Sweden's new pronoun, *hen*.

6. The Impact of Gendered Language Change

Linguistic Relativity, or the Whorfian Hypothesis, states that language influences how humans perceive the world. Edward Sapir said, "We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation," and that the world is "unconsciously built up on language habits of the group,"[53] The Whorfian Hypothesis is controversial in the linguistic community, but I have adopted it because I believe that language does have the capability to influence how humans view the world. For instance, Whorf argued that certain cultures have different perceptions of time and space due to their language utilizing different grammatical features. In the same way "concepts of time and matter are not given in substantially the same form by experience to all men but depend upon the nature of the language or languages through the use of which they have been developed,"

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[52] Flanigan. (2013).

[53] Whorf, B., & Carroll, J. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

concepts of gender can be understood different based on the choices of a linguistic community.[54]

Sweden, consistently rated one of the world's top countries in gender equality, recently added *hen* to the National Encyclopedia to use "instead of he [*han* in Swedish] and she [*hon*]."[55] *Hen* was recently made official, although linguists first proposed it in 1960. It was later reintroduced in 1994 by Hans Karlgren in order to "speak of a person without specifying their gender… improve Swedish… and make it more nuanced."[56] While some criticize Sweden's move towards gender neutrality as erasing gender, it is nonetheless improving gender equality, and the pronoun has gained momentum. For instance, the book 'Kivi och Monsterhund' (Kivi and Monsterhund) utilizes *hen* and is written in entirely gender-neutral language, even using *mappor and pammor* instead *mammor and pappor* ("mother and father") in order to "challenge stereotypes and obsolete norms and traditions in the world of literature."[57] Sweden's gender-neutral pronoun is just one example of attempts around the world to push for gender-equality in language.

Sweden is not the only nation to recognize the power of linguistic change in social and economic advancement. Germany was rated #12 in the 2014 Global Gender Gap Index, "a scale… to measure one important aspect of gender equality: the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics." As of 2013, Germany allows **intersex** babies to be registered as neither male nor

[54] Whorf. (1956)

[55] Rothschild, N. (2012, April 11). Sweden's New Gender-Neutral Pronoun: Hen. *Slate*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from
http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/04/hen_sweden_s_new_gender_neutral_pronoun_causes_controversy_.html

[56] Rothschild. (2011).

[57] Rothschild. (2011).

female.[58] Those born with characteristics of both sexes can have an *X* on their birth certificate.[59] Therefore, individuals whose sex is not clearly male or female are less likely to be assigned an arbitrary gender with which they may not identify due to there not being a linguistic option for them on legal paperwork.

In 2013 in Australia, ranked #24 in the 2014 Global Gender Gap Index, a court of appeal ruled that individuals do not need to be registered as male or female.[60] Individuals can be registered neutrally as "non-specified" which can potentially have a significant impact in legislation on births, deaths, marriages, and other legal reports, demonstrating another instance of progressive language leading to progressive societal impact.[61]

How we use language influences how we see the world. If there is no word for a concept, it makes it harder for a speaker to accept it. There are arguments that we do not need one word for every concept, as long other words strung together can get the point across, but I disagree. Not having a word for certain individuals, or labeling everyone as male, hinders advancement towards gender equality. If people are taught that the world is only for *he's* and *she's*, then how can there be equal opportunities for those outside of the binary? If CEOs are consistently referred to with generic *he*, there is less possibility for a young female to envision herself in that position. Furthermore, not having proper language for an individual can lead to confusion and debate on what words to use.

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[58] The Global Gender Gap Report 2014. (2014, January 1). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/
[59] Germany offers gender-neutral option for babies, but advocates say law doesn't go far enough. (2013, November 2). Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-02/germany-allows-babies-to-be-neither-boy-or-girl/5065918
[60] The Global Gender Gap Report 2014. (2014).
[61] Hawke, S. (2013, May 31). Gender-neutral ruling in NSW court could have legal implications across Australia. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-06-01/gender-story/4727326e

Recently, there was a character with an unclear gender on a TV show, and a friend referred to the character as a "he-she" because, she asked, "what else do I say?"

On an economic level, using the example of Sweden's new pronoun, "Lann Hornscheidt, a professor of gender studies and linguistics at the Humboldt University's Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies, told *Newsweek*, 'The gender gap creates poverty among women. Initiatives like *hen* are all part of an effort to create a more just world.'"[62] If justification for male superiority in language use comes from society, then identifying all people on the same level linguistically can have a reverse outcome as one step towards a more equal society. Basically, if we are taught to refer to everyone as male, then other genders are perceived as secondary to men. If *he/she* is considered politically correct, then we grow up thinking those are the only two options. Alternatively, if as children, we are given a third pronoun that can be used for syntactic reasons requiring neutrality, generics, or for people who do not fit standard categorizations of male and female, then we can put all people on the same level from the start.

To be clear, a gender-neutral option would not be in place of PGPs, or intended to force a label on everyone. This is not a call for a state-enforced pronoun for all non-binary individuals, but rather an option to fill a grammatical void and to provide a starting point of neutrality to avoid assuming gender. Julie Scelfo, a contributing author to the *New York Times*, wrote an article on a genderqueer individual, Rocko Gieselman, with a follow up piece on the linguistic struggle to write the article with appropriate pronouns. Scelfo expressed this qualm over the phone, to which Gieselman followed up via email:

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[62] Bianco, M. (2014, October 21). Sweden is Making a Move for Gender Equality the U.S. Would Never Consider. *Mic.com*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://mic.com/articles/101726/sweden-is-taking-a-mainstream-approach-to-gender-equality-the-us-would-never-consider

Writing about genderqueer-identified people can seem grammatically challenging; it is much more challenging to live as a genderqueer-identified person and try to fit into a world that does not seem to make room for you.[63]

Whether we create an additional pronoun or standardize alternatives already in use, inclusive language can be productive towards making room for those who do not fit within the boundaries of our language, with a byproduct of added convenience in formal writing. In the same way that plural *you* took over for singular *thou*, plural *they* can fill the void left for a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun.

7. What about Chinese?

7.1. History of Written Chinese Pronouns

English and written Chinese share the same problem, a lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun. The history and culture of a linguistic community is relevant in understanding why speakers and writers make the choices they do, and helps determine if similar problems in two different languages require the same solution. In spoken Chinese, there is no gender distinction in the third-person pronoun; it is simply *tā* [tɑ]. Written Chinese used to be the same, with the character 他 representing spoken *tā*. 他(*tā*)is made up of two parts; the first is the radical, the preceding part that indicates the category of meaning, and it signifies 人(*rén*), "person."

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[63] Scelfo, J. (2015, February 6). Writing Around Gender. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 20, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2015/02/06/writing-around-gender/?_r=0

During the May Fourth Movement in 1919, progressive academics called for a gender distinction in written Chinese, primarily in order to translate the influx of Western texts. Now there are multiple forms of the third-person pronoun, distinguishing between *he*, *she*, and *it*. The character that previously represented all of the above, 他 (*tā*) became *he*, while a new character was created for *she*. The character representing the third-person female pronoun, 她 (*tā*) "she" is also made up of two parts, yet the radical here is *nü* (女), "female."

One of the first calls for a female pronoun in Chinese came during the *Wǔsì (*五四) or May 4th period from a progressive magazine called *New Youth*. Amongst discussion for how best to translate gendered pronouns such as *she* into Chinese, the call for 她(*tā*) was suggested by Liu Bannong. This suggestion was later published by Zhou Zuoren in 1918 in an article called "Reform," where Zhou explained, and subsequently rejected, Liu's proposal:

> I think it is very inconvenient that there is no distinction between the third person pronouns in Chinese. It is great that Bannong wanted to make a word "她" in Chinese to use with the word "他"; in Japanese, the Kanojo (彼女) and Kare (彼) were new creations as well. It was awkward to use at the beginning, but people gradually got used to it. Now (in China), the problem is that if we adapt the new character "她", it would be difficult to print them since the publishers do not currently have the character and it would take much effort to make new molds; therefore, it is decided that we shall not use the proposed character "她". Instead,

we shall use the character "他女" put together with "he" and a small "woman".

This decision, however, needs further discussion.[64]

Zhou credited Liu with the invention of the new character, 她 (*tā*) "she" to use instead of the typical 他女 (standard *tā* plus a small version of the character meaning "female"), yet rejected the suggestion due to inconvenience for printers.

During this time period, female participation in politics and government was increasing, and students, such as those at Peking University, quickly caught onto the new 她 trend. Another reason for the popularity of 她 was its contrast to the ancient alternative for females, 伊(*yī*). While 伊 (*yī*) is, by no coincidence, meant to sound like a little bird, 她(*tā*) is pronounced the same as the male pronoun and "seemed to enable women the same right and power that reveals the 'individual' and 'revolutionary' figure of contemporary women."[65] The creation of the female distinction was intended to be a progressive gesture, meant to bring equity to language and convenience to a globalizing country. Additionally, a new character was less cumbersome than classifying then neutral 他 (*tā*) with either a small character for man, 男 (*nán*) or woman, 女 (*nü*) each time a distinction was needed.

7.2. The Problem

The resulting issue is that since creating this distinction, there is now arguably no written option that is entirely gender-neutral, and the most common option shares the same difficulties as generic *he* in English. While masculine 他 (*tā*) is commonly used for

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[64] Huang, X. (2009). "她"字的文化史 [The Cultural History of the Chinese Character "ta" (the third person feminine pronoun)](C. Lu & J. Ke Trans.). Fuzhou: Fujian Jiaoyu Chubanshe.
[65] Huang. (2009).

generic or unknown gender based on its neutral history, it still maintains a masculine implication. Feminine 她 (*tā*) is used strictly for women while masculine 他 (*tā*) can be used for all people, even a group consisting of only women if the gender is not deemed relevant. Yet similarly to how generic *he* in English uses masculine to represent all people, 他 (*tā*) still has a masculine meaning and using it in neutral circumstances is contradictory to its gendered meaning.

Yi Xuan expressed concern through 民国日报 (*mínguó rìbào*), *Republic Daily*, after the addition of a new pronoun in the newspaper, that there should not be a distinction between male and female. She questioned why there is a difference in pronouns yet other characters referencing women do not also have a female component. Others, led by Han Bing, argued against the new character because it specifically marks women with the radical 女 (*nǚ*) "female" while the male character uses the ungendered radical 人 (*rén*), meaning "person." This, they remarked, classifies those who use the female character as others, instead of just as a person.[66]

8. My study

Now that there are gender distinctions in the Chinese script, the specific aim of this study is to understand how native Chinese speakers compensate for a lack of a third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun in written language, in order to determine if a gender-neutral pronoun is necessary. Instances where one may need a third-person pronoun are for unknown gender, generic gender, secretive gender, irrelevant gender, and for individuals who do not identify with the gender binary or standard conventions of

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[66] Huang. (2009).

gender. Through a survey, the study asked questions regarding compensation methods in order to determine if there are successful circumlocutions in place and what role culture plays in these choices.

The survey also investigated if Chinese speakers use an additional pronoun, Romanized *TA*, in the instances when a gender-neutral pronoun is necessary. I first saw this structure in an article in the Chinese People's Daily regarding a transgender woman. The article was written entirely in Chinese but when referencing this individual, used the capital letters "TA" instead of gendered Chinese characters. This solution allowed the author to avoid offending the protagonist with incorrect pronouns, and was easily understood by Chinese readers, yet did not transfer over to English where translated versions of the article either used *he* throughout the paper, or alternated between *he* and *she*. After reading the article, I further sought to understand if this structure is common, especially among young people with modern technology that utilizes Roman letters, or if it is a small trend with the potential to spread.

8.1. Methodology

The sample was limited to students at Emory University. These students were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese who could write Simplified Chinese and speak English. The study excluded students who did not meet these criteria and took the format of a survey. Survey questions included fill in the blank, Likert scales for pronoun usage, and short responses, in order to ask the respondents directly what they would do in these instances but also to have them produce language naturally. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

Recruitment took place through posts on social media, announcements from professors, emails from English as a Second Language (ESL) tutors, and flyers on bulletin boards on Emory University's campus. The survey itself was distributed online via the platform, Survey Monkey.

The study had 29 qualified respondents: 15 female, 14 male, and 0 transgender or other. Not every participant answered every question. All were native Mandarin speakers. In addition, one was a native Cantonese speaker, four were native speakers of another Chinese dialect, and eight were also native English speakers. All had studied English for at least eight years. Of the participants, 22 lived in a Chinese speaking country for at least eight years, with three participants who lived in a Chinese speaking country between one and seven years (four respondents skipped this question). Most lived in China and one respondent lived in Singapore.

It is important to note that in self-reporting linguistic research, speakers cannot always be fully aware of their own linguistic choices, and therefore results may not be entirely accurate.

8.2. Preliminary Results

Generic masculine was commonly rated as the most frequently used compensation method, while generic masculine and pronoun avoidance were the most frequently produced options. To get a baseline of what pronoun participants would naturally produce, they were first asked to fill in the blank of the following gender-neutral sentence in Chinese:

This is my friend. _____ is really nice.

Most of the responses utilized masculine 他 (*tā*) demonstrating the tendency of this character to represent all people. When the female character was used, it was specifically marked for women and never as the default. Of 14 responses, 10 respondents used the masculine pronoun (他), and two used feminine (她). Two participants used both pronouns (他/她), and one of them wrote the sentence twice, once with both pronouns and again but with a female name in order to use the female pronoun.

I further inquired as to why participants made these specific choices. Reasons for using the male pronoun included that it is the default pronoun, the common choice when gender is unknown, the natural response (they did not even think about it), that it means "she/he/it," and that it was the first character to pop up when typed in pinyin, the system for transcribing Mandarin into the Roman alphabet. Those who used both pronouns indicated that it was because both are acceptable, yet those who chose only the female pronoun indicated that they were specifically referencing a female friend. When asked to translate sentences, participants translated *he* and *she* to their respective Chinese counterparts, as expected. When the sentences were plural, the male pronoun was used, and even when the sentence solely referenced a group of females, four out of 14 still used the male pronoun generically.

The next sections were all structured with the same format to see how Chinese speakers compensate for a lack of a written third-person gender-neutral pronoun in different circumstances. Participants were first asked what pronoun they would use in a certain situation, then given a prompt to write a brief response based on that situation, and lastly asked to rate the frequency at which they would use specific compensations in

each situation. Exact questions can be found in the Appendix. The five compensation options were 他 (*tā*) "he," 她 (*tā*) "she," 他/她 "he/she," 她/他 "she/he," and *TA*.

8.3. Specific Results

Participants generally felt that a gender-neutral pronoun is not necessary because of the success of existing compensation methods, which was supported by survey results demonstrating simple circumlocutions around pronouns. When asked "Do you ever find yourself struggling to choose a pronoun when writing in Chinese?" eight out of nine respondents said they would not, and only one said they "sometimes" struggle. The latter individual compensated in earlier survey sections with 他 (*tā*) "he" informally and 他/她 "he/she" formally. This respondent further wrote that creating an additional neutral pronoun with solve this struggle, but reducing all forms to just one would leave a problem when one needs to differentiate between *he* and *she*. Most of the other participants said an additional neutral pronoun is unnecessary because writers can just avoid pronouns by using the noun or "the one/the individual." Others agreed that it would be unnecessary because a neutral pronoun already exists, 他 (*tā*) "he," even though its neutrality is debatable.

8.3.1. Unknown Gender

When asked what pronoun respondents would use with unknown gender, masculine 他 (*tā*) was the most popular choice, although avoidance was the most common in actual phrase production. The feminine character was also selected, either alone or paired with the masculine, yet it was not produced when prompted.

Regarding unknown gender, 75% of participants resorted to generic *he* and indicated the male pronoun, 他(*tā*). One participant avoided the pronoun with 那人(*nà rén*) "that

person," and another responded with both *tā* pronouns, 他/她 "he/she." As indicated in Table 2, when asked how frequently they would use certain compensations, 91% responded that they would use the masculine pronoun most frequently. While many said they would also use both pronouns (他/她), they unanimously agreed that they would never put the female character first.

Table 2: Choices for Unknown Gender

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Total	Weighted Average
他	90.91% 10	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	11	1.09
她	12.50% 1	37.50% 3	50.00% 4	8	2.38
他／她	37.50% 3	25.00% 2	37.50% 3	8	2.00
她／他	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	100.00% 7	7	3.00
TA	0.00% 0	12.50% 1	87.50% 7	8	2.88

When participants were asked to write a brief response to a prompt indicating unknown gender, out of 11 responses there were three instances of generic masculine (by male and female participants alike) and eight avoidance techniques, of which seven used no pronoun (ex: 这个人 *zhège rén* "this person") and one switched to second person 你 (nǐ) "you." In cases of unknown gender, although some respondents said they would use the female character either alone or with the male pronoun, most participants primarily used the male character or avoided pronouns altogether.

8.3.2. Generics

In cases of generics, masculine 他 (*tā*) was the highest rated option, yet again, avoidance was the most commonly produced method.

When asked what pronoun participants would use when speaking about people in general, not about a specific individual, the result was unanimously masculine 他(*tā*). When rating frequency, generic masculine took the lead with 90% of respondents saying they would frequently use 他(*tā*) "he" in generic situations. Responses further indicated that one or more participant would use all other given options at least "sometimes," as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Choices for Generic Gender

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Total	Weighted Average
他	90.91% 10	9.09% 1	0.00% 0	11	1.09
她	18.18% 2	45.45% 5	36.36% 4	11	2.18
他／她	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	45.45% 5	11	2.27
她／他	9.09% 1	27.27% 3	63.64% 7	11	2.55
TA	0.00% 0	18.18% 2	81.82% 9	11	2.82

As for the prompt, when I analyzed the narratives with regard to generic gender, out of nine qualified responses, I found one instance of generic masculine, seven instances of avoidance, of which five used no pronoun (ex: 这个学生 *zhège xuéshēng* "this student") and two switched to plural (ex: 他们 *tāmen* "they"), and one instance where the participant assigned a name, and thus a gender.

It is important to note that while many respondents indicated they would use a female pronoun, none of the produced responses actually used a female pronoun. In cases of generics, the masculine pronoun was the clear preference. Some respondents understood generic to mean plural, and since masculine is practically always used with plural pronouns unless it is a group of all females where stating gender is relevant, chose the masculine pronoun.

8.3.3. Secretive

When attempting to keep gender a secret, avoidance was once again the most commonly produced technique, yet participant responses varied from those of unknown and generic gender. If an individual is male, but participants do not want to reveal gender, most would still use the masculine pronoun. 77.8% would use the male pronoun, 32.5% said they would use both pronouns (他/她), and 44.4% said they would use Romanized *TA*, either sometimes or frequently. This was one of the few sections of the survey where participants reported they would frequently use *TA*.

Table 4: Choices for Secretive Male Gender

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Total	Weighted Average
他	66.67% 6	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	9	1.56
她	0.00% 0	37.50% 3	62.50% 5	8	2.63
他／她	25.00% 2	12.50% 1	62.50% 5	8	2.38
她／他	0.00% 0	25.00% 2	75.00% 6	8	2.75
TA	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	55.56% 5	9	2.33

When attempting to keep a female's gender a secret, the responses were relatively similar, although inconclusive. Out of nine people, 33.3% would use generic male, 25% would use both pronouns, and 11.1% would use *TA* most frequently. Most said they would never use any of the options, so I turned to the short response section to see what they used instead.

Table 5: Choices for Secretive Female Gender

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Total	Weighted Average
他	33.33% 3	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	9	2.11
她	25.00% 2	37.50% 3	37.50% 3	8	2.13
他／她	0.00% 0	37.50% 3	62.50% 5	8	2.63
她／他	0.00% 0	37.50% 3	62.50% 5	8	2.63
TA	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	55.56% 5	9	2.44

In this prompt, participants were asked to write an announcement about an award, without giving away identifying information about the individual, specifically gender. Out of seven responses, there were five instance of avoidance (ex: 该生 *gāi shēng* "the student"), one instance of using both pronouns (他/她), one instance of generic masculine, and one instance of Romanized (lowercase) *ta*. Most respondents did not seem to have an issue with keeping gender a secret, because they primarily avoided pronouns altogether.

8.3.4. TA

Romanized *TA* did not appear to be a popular option, although the small sample size could account for this result. The only instances it was rated that it would be used frequently was by three participants when trying to keep gender a secret, and one participant when writing about individuals of unspecified gender. That is not to say *TA* is not a viable option, for several respondents said they would sometimes use it in varying circumstances. When specifically asked about *TA,* participants indicated that they would use it for unknown gender, generic gender, when referencing a multi-gendered group, or in a formal context, as revealed in the chart below.

Table 6: Instances of *TA* Usage

Answer Choices		Responses	
▽	If I do not know the gender of the individual	28.57%	4
▽	If I am referring to a group of people with more than one gender represented	7.14%	1
▽	If I am speaking generally	14.29%	2
▽	If I know someone's gender, but do not want the reader to know it	0.00%	0
▽	If the person is transgender*	0.00%	0
▽	In informal contexts (ex: text messages or online chatting)	0.00%	0
▽	In formal contexts (ex: an academic paper)	7.14%	1
▽	I would never produce the word 'TA' in written Chinese	64.29%	9
▽	Other (please specify) **Responses**	7.14%	1
Total Respondents: 14			

In a short response, one participant produced *TA* when trying to keep gender a secret. This begs the question of if the male pronoun really can be neutral. It is commonly referred to as the default or used for unknown gender, yet when Chinese writers are

trying to keep gender a secret, they more frequently use Romanized *TA* than in any other instance, which may imply that it still contains gendered implications.

As a byproduct of the Roman alphabet frequently being used for typing and texting in Chinese, Romanized *TA* has caught on as a convenient trend among Chinese undergraduates, although does not appear to have taken over as a gender-neutral pronoun the way *co* and *yo* have in Twin Oaks and Baltimore, respectively. It is also possible that *TA* is in higher usage in certain communities or niche groups, but not amongst the general public.

8.4. Survey Summary

Can we come to the same conclusions about the Chinese language that we do with English? From the outside, it appears that the written gender distinction, created in part to work with Western texts, imposed a problem on Chinese that did not exist prior to globalization efforts. It also appears that Chinese writers use the same compensation methods as English speakers, so both languages should therefore utilize the same solution; a gender-neutral option.

Yet, the structure of Chinese allows for a successful compensation method that does not work as well in English: avoidance. I determined the success of this method in part based on the amount of responses utilizing this structure. I also deemed it successful based on responses to the question, "Do you think creating an additional third-person pronoun that is gender-neutral would be a good solution to this problem [of lacking a gender-neutral pronoun]?" Participants said no for reasons including "one can always use the noun rather than the pronoun," or "we can always use 'the one'/'the individual' etc." Furthermore, while participants noted recognition of controversies with specific

pronouns, none commented on any problems regarding avoidance. The following

example of avoidance demonstrates a structure that flows in Chinese that could not be

produced in English.

(23) ta 是 一 位 很 敬业 的

ta shì yī wèi hěn jìngyè de

[3Person] is a [classifier] very dedicated [possessive]

教授。 关心 学生, 总是 能够

jiàoshòu. Guānxīn xuéshēng zǒngshì nénggòu

professor. Care students always able

让 课堂 教学 在 轻松 幽默

ràng kètáng jiàoxué zài qīngsōng yōumò

make classroom teaching in relaxed humorous

的 环境 中 进行

de huánjìng zhōng jìnxíng.

[possessive] environment in conduct

'[Third person] is a very dedicated professor. *Cares about the students, always

able to conduct the class in a relaxed, humorous environment.'

Respondents may have produced the avoidance method even though it is not natural

to them or they find it awkward, so future research in order to verify its success should

involve asking Chinese-speaking focus groups if survey responses that utilized avoidance

appear natural. These responses should then be translated in order to ask English-

speaking focus groups if the same sentences work in English and then to compare responses to those regarding Chinese. For instance, the following sentence initially produced in Chinese would sound awkward in English.

(24) 此　学生　　　很　优秀。　　　这　位　　　　学生

Cǐ　xuéshēng　hěn　yōuxiù.　　Zhè　wèi　　　xuéshēng

This　student　　very　excellent.　This　[classifier]　student

很　有　天赋。　　这　个　　　　　学生　　　很　有

hěn　yǒu　tiānfù.　Zhè　ge　　　　xuéshēng　hěn　yǒu

very　have　talent　This　[classifier]　student　very　have

保护　　环境　　　的　　　　意识。

bǎohù　huánjìng　de　　　yìshí.

protect　environment　[possessive]　awareness

'This student is outstanding. This student is gifted. This student is very environmentally aware.'

It is possible that this sentence sounds just as awkward and choppy in Chinese as it does in English, but the respondent produced it anyway. Focus groups would help understand phrases similar to this one to truly comprehend the success of the avoidance method across the two languages.

Avoidance in Chinese is unambiguous, generally accepted, inclusive, not androcentric, and flows. While avoiding the pronoun in English is possible, as discussed earlier, it gets awkward and does not flow easily. Meanwhile, in Chinese, the avoidance

method, which is as simple as replacing any form of *tā* with a noun, does not give

Chinese speakers pause in production and is equally comprehensible. This is possibly

because English sentences typically require a subject with each verb phrase in a complete

phrase or sentence (not in clipped speech), yet Chinese is more flexible with dropped

subjects.

(25) 她　　喜欢　麻婆豆腐。　　[Ø]　　也　　喜欢　宫保雞丁。

　　　She　　like　　Mapo Tofu.　　　　also　　like　　Kung Pao Chicken.

　　　'She likes Mapo Tofu. She also likes Kung Pao Chicken.'

(26) He enjoys drinking coffee. *Enjoys eating quinoa and kale.

In examples (23) and (25) in Chinese, it is acceptable to add on phrases without a

subject once the subject has already been stated yet in example (26) in English, the first

sentence has a subject but succeeding sentence is ungrammatical because it lacks one.

When compensating for a lack of a gender-neutral pronoun, an English speaker would

therefore have to use a replacement such as "this individual" in every sentence, while a

Chinese writer would just need to replace the first pronoun in a block of text and can then

leave it out in the following sentences. The disparity between English and Chinese could

also be because English speakers are accustomed to marking gender on singular pronouns

so it is unnatural to leave it out, while spoken Chinese pronouns do not have gender so

omitting it in writing is less irregular.

The androcentric implications of generic masculine are not as clear-cut in Chinese as

in English since 他 (*tā*) "he" previously represented all people, not just males.

Furthermore, while 她 (*tā*) "she" clearly has a female radical, 他 (*tā*), "he," uses the radical meaning "person" and therefore is not explicitly marked masculine, in the way femininity is marked.

Regardless, some respondents were very aware of the sexism behind a generic masculine. One respondent recognized the controversy, but explained, "I don't think a third-person pronoun is really necessary. I understand that being gender-inclusive better reflects current society but 他, for at least, is just the default 3rd person singular. Adding another seems excessive."

Another respondent felt that reducing all options to a neutral option could work, "…but you would then have to create a brand new [word]. I would just default to 他 if that were the case but then people would say that's for males. I know some people that don't even use the *ta* with the female radical." Finally, others argued that despite these problems, at the end of the day, the dichotomy is useful in differentiating between genders, which was its intended use in the first place.

While the successful avoidance method voids the need for a gender-neutral written pronoun in Chinese, in order to understand the possible androcentric implications of generic 他 (*tā*), "he," it would be advantageous to investigate if its usage brings up a masculine mental representation, like generic *he* does in English, or if it is truly processed neutrally. Another important factor that may change this conclusion would be what choices Chinese transgender individuals utilize when selecting characters for pronouns, and how they identify with generic 他 (*tā*) "he." The answer to the above question of what mental image 他 (*tā*) "he" produces may help in understanding this situation.

9. Conclusion

The need for a gender-neutral pronoun does not go hand-in-hand with the lack of one. To make this decision, one must look at the compensation methods of languages without neutral pronouns in the context of that community's culture and history. That way, it can be determined whether the compensation methods are unambiguous, generally accepted, inclusive (especially for those two do not follow the gender binary), flow easily, and are not androcentric.

English's main compensation methods are problematic because they promote an androcentric perspective, are debated by grammarians and speakers, disrupt the flow of speech or writing, or are not inclusive. *They* is currently the most popular compensation yet despite usage by individuals of all statuses, is still heavily suppressed in formal situations. Further studies to understand if singular *they* is processed similarly to other singular pronouns would help determine if there is a significant processing delay and if another word should be used in its place. That being said, the creation of new pronouns has worked in various English-speaking communities, as well as in other languages around the world, and as demonstrated by Germany and Australia, changing language has the capacity to improve a country's society and level of equality.

In written Chinese, based on this study, avoidance is the most successful compensation option because replacing the pronoun with a noun does not disrupt flow, it is not gendered, and it is generally not disputed. Chinese generic masculine is debated as sexist but there are other options to use in its place, including noticeable usage of the Romanized *TA*. Therefore, there is still the potential for neutrality when writers wish to use a pronoun and creating a new one is not necessary. In English, whether singular *they*

or a neologism, a gender-neutral pronoun should flow easily in English, be an inclusive option, and have no gendered implications or history. This pronoun should be used like *co*, for the reasons when a gender-neutral pronoun is necessary but only until an individual's preferred gender pronoun is known. A third-person singular gender-neutral pronoun would help English speakers syntactically and grammatically, provide an alternative to *he* and *she*, and generate small steps towards a more accepting linguistic community.

Appendix 1 – Survey

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

Consent

Title: How We Compensate for the Lack of a Gender-Neutral Pronoun in English and Written Chinese

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Introduction
You are being asked to be in a research study. This form is designed to tell you everything you need to think about before you decide to consent (agree) to be in the study or not to be in the study. It is entirely your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later on and withdraw from the research study. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Before making your decision:
• Please carefully read this form or have it read to you
• Please ask questions about anything that is not clear

You can take a copy of this consent form, to keep. Feel free to take your time thinking about whether you would like to participate. By signing this form you will not give up any legal rights.

Study Overview
The purpose of this study is to understand how Chinese speakers compensate for a lack of a gender-neutral third-person pronoun in written Chinese.

Procedures
This study will consist of one visit, with an optional follow-up interview. The visit will consist of a survey and will last as long as it takes to complete the survey, which is anticipated to take approximately 30 minutes. You may stop the survey at any point or skip questions you do not feel comfortable answering with no penalty. The follow-up interview will consist of the researcher asking questions to better understand the choices you made in the survey.

Risks and Discomforts
Risk of breach of confidentiality will be safeguarded by a password-protected document on a locked computer. No identifiers linking data to individuals will be collected.

Benefits
This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about how Chinese compensates for the lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in the written third-person. The study results may be used to help others in the future.
Compensation
You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Confidentiality
Certain offices and people other than the researchers may look at study records. Government agencies and Emory employees overseeing proper study conduct may look at your study records. These offices include the Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Emory will keep any research records we create private to the extent we are required to do so by law. A study number rather than your name will be used on study records wherever possible. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

Study records can be opened by court order. They may also be produced in response to a subpoena or a request for production of documents.

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to do any procedures you do not feel comfortable with, or answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You also have the right to request that the researchers do not use the collected information.

Contact Information

Contact Danielle Berkowsky at (914)263-2931:

• if you have any questions about this study or your part in it,

• if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research

Contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 404-712-0720 or 877-503-9797 or irb@emory.edu:

• if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

• if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

• You may also let the IRB know about your experience as a research participant through our Research Partici

Demographics

*1. Gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Trans*

Other (please specify)

2. What is your native language(s)? (Check as many as apply)

☐ English

☐ Mandarin

☐ Cantonese

☐ Other Chinese Dialect

Other (please specify)

3. What other language(s) do you speak fluently?

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

4. How many years have you studied English (if non-Native speaker)?

- ○ 1
- ○ 2-4
- ○ 5-7
- ○ 8-10
- ○ 11+

5. How many years have you lived in a Chinese speaking country and which country/countries?

- ○ 1
- ○ 2-4
- ○ 5-7
- ○ 8-10
- ○ 11+

Which country/countries?

[   ]

6. How many years have you lived in an English speaking country and which country/countries?

- ○ 1
- ○ 2-4
- ○ 5-7
- ○ 8-10
- ○ 11+

Which country/countries?

[   ]

*7. Can you write simplified Chinese (简体字)?
(If "No," please discontinue survey)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Part 1: General

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

✱8. With only the given context, first translate the following into Chinese and then complete the sentence with a pronoun:

a) This is my friend. ___ is really nice.

9. Why did you choose that pronoun in question 8? (Please answer in English)

10. With only the given context, translate the sentence into Chinese:

This is my friend. He is really smart.	
This is my friend. She is really smart.	
These are my friends. They are really smart.	
These are my male friends. They are really smart.	
These are my female friends. They are really smart.	

Part 1: General (Cont.)

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

✱11. How frequently would you write the following when writing about individuals of unspecified genders? (Either formal or informal situations) Check the frequency that applies to you.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
这是我的朋友。他很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友。她很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友。他／她很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友。她／他很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友。TA很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。他们很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。她们很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。他／她们很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。她／他们很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。TA们很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的朋友们。TAMEN很聪明。	○	○	○
这是我的很聪明的朋友。	○	○	○

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

✱12. In what context would you produce the romanized 'TA' in written Chinese? [eg: TA 是我的朋友。] Check all that apply.

*Note: Transgender: "A term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth." (National Center for Transgender Equality)

☐ If I do not know the gender of the individual

☐ If I am referring to a group of people with more than one gender represented

☐ If I am speaking generally

☐ If I know someone's gender, but do not want the reader to know it

☐ If the person is transgender*

☐ In informal contexts (ex: text messages or online chatting)

☐ In formal contexts (ex: an academic paper)

☐ I would never produce the word 'TA' in written Chinese

☐ Other (please specify)

_____

Part 2: Uncertain Gender

13. If you do NOT know the gender of an individual, what pronoun would you write in Chinese?

14. You found a cell phone on the ground but do not know who it belongs to, and therefore do not know their gender. Make up a simple 3-5 sentence story in Chinese of how you think this person lost their phone.

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

✱15. How frequently would you write the following if you do NOT know the gender of an individual? (Either formal or informal situations) Check the frequency that applies to you.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
他	○	○	○
她	○	○	○
他 / 她	○	○	○
她 / 他	○	○	○
TA	○	○	○

Part 3: Generic Gender

16. If you are speaking about people in general and not about a specific individual, which singular pronoun would you use in Chinese?

17. You are writing an article about how many students in general at your university seem to really care about the environment. Write 3-5 sentences in Chinese about a single typical student.

✱18. How frequently would you write the following if you are speaking about people in general and not about a specific person? Check the frequency that applies to you.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
他	○	○	○
她	○	○	○
他 / 她	○	○	○
她 / 他	○	○	○
TA	○	○	○

Part 4: Secretive Gender

The Missing Pronoun in Written Chinese

*19. How frequently would you write the following if you know someone's gender is male but do not want your reader to know the gender?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
他	○	○	○
她	○	○	○
他 / 她	○	○	○
她 / 他	○	○	○
TA	○	○	○

*20. How frequently would you write the following if you know someone's gender is female but do not want your reader to know the gender?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
他	○	○	○
她	○	○	○
他 / 她	○	○	○
她 / 他	○	○	○
TA	○	○	○

21. Imagine you are writing an announcement about an award being given to an individual next week, but do not want to give away any information about who the person may be, including the gender, in the statement. Write 3-5 sentences in Chinese about this person.

Part 5: Follow Up

*22. Do you ever find yourself struggling to choose a pronoun when writing in Chinese?

○ Frequently

○ Sometimes

○ Never

23. If 'Frequently' or 'Sometimes', how would you explain the problem you experience in choosing a pronoun? Please answer in English.

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24. Do you think creating an additional third-person pronoun that is gender-neutral would be a good solution to this problem? Why or why not?

25. Do you think reducing all forms of 'ta' and only using one generic, all encompassing form would be a good solution to this problem? Why or why not?

Part 5: Follow Up (Cont.)

26. Thank you so much for participating! If you are willing to be contacted for some follow up questions, please leave your email below.

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