**What are your pronouns?
And why does it matter?**

Organised by Ann Coady & Sandrine Sorlin

Conference website and <u>registration</u>: <u>https://pronouns.sciencesconf.org/</u>

For **<u>online</u>** attendees, please register on Zoom by 15th October (see the website for links)

For those **<u>physically attending</u>** in Montpellier (and who are *not* presenting), the conference is free, but please email as soon as possible to let us know you are coming: whypronounsmatter2024@gmail.com

PRESENTATION

It is almost a platitude today to say that pronouns are political. Recently, however, they seem to have become more political than ever. Putting pronouns on a social network bio, in an email signature, on badges at conferences, or disclosing them during a pronoun round, i.e., introducing oneself with the formula "Hi my name is X and my pronouns are *she/her, he/him, they/them*…" is more than simply stating a fact, it is an intrinsically political act. These practices reveal much more than someone's gender, they also indicate their stance on gender politics, and potentially much wider political issues.

However, as these pronoun-sharing practices have gained momentum and become more popular, they have also provoked backlash from certain quarters: in March 2023 Ron DeSantis, governor of Florida, signed a new state law against what he dubbed "the pronoun olympics". It is now illegal in K12 educational institutions in Florida to refer to someone, or to ask to be referred to, with a pronoun that does not correspond to the sex assigned at birth, demonstrating just how politically charged pronouns have become.

This two-day hybrid interdisciplinary conference will focus on these recent pronoun-sharing practices, covering all forms of disclosing one's pronouns including name badges, the pronoun round, putting pronouns in an email signature, Zoom profile, etc. What theories, methodologies and approaches can be mobilised to explain these new phenomena, as well as the backlash against them? What is the genealogy of these practices: how do they fit in with, or diverge from previous debates about pronouns?
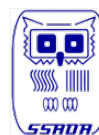
Some argue (Cameron, 2016; Baron, 2020) that debates over pronouns in the 1960s and 70s focused on *reducing* the relevance of gender and imagining a world *without* gender. However, today gender is envisaged by many as a vital part of one's identity. If second wave feminists conceptualised gender as a

system of oppression, could asking, expecting or even obliging (Thomas-Hébert, 2022) people to disclose their pronouns be considered "just another way queer people are being pushed to perform their queerness" (De Freitas, 2021), a compulsory "pronominal coming out"? Even if the objective of these practices is to question the stability, universality, and binarity of gender (Thomas-Hébert, 2022), is there nonetheless an inherent paradox in wanting to question gender binaries, wanting to avoid pigeonholing people, and yet at the same time asking them to put a label on themselves? Have these practices unwittingly amplified gender binaries, simply creating a new gender binary of transgender/cisgender, rather than challenging the binary system per se (Manion, 2018)? What light can feminist and/or Queer theory shed on these issues?

The practice of disclosing one's pronouns originated in trans communities as a way to inform others about how to refer to them appropriately, but quickly spread to the mainstream. If the risk of being misgendered is much less present for cis people, why do they do it? Do these pronoun-sharing practices mean different things for different people?

From a sociolinguistics perspective, *who* is using these new practices and *why*? Thomas-Hébert (2022) found that cis women declared their pronouns more often that cis men and Tucker and Jones (2023) found that the most widely used pronouns on Twitter were *she/her*. What does this indicate? That cis women are more likely to be allies than cis men? That more trans women disclose their pronouns than trans men? How do we explain these differences?

Alternatively, these practices are perhaps not to be associated with *categories* of people (trans, cis, non-binary, gender non-conforming, etc.), so much as with the *stances* that they index (Eckert, 2008). Are they a way for cis people to show allyship, a way of indicating their stance and alignment (Du Bois, 2007; Kiesling, 2022a) on trans issues, or even a way of signalling wider political allegiances? If so, what are these stances and how have these new pronoun-sharing practices changed the indexical value of pronouns over recent years? Stating one's pronouns seems to be increasingly tied to, not only gender issues, but a liberal/left-wing ideological position.

What does it mean when the practice is taken up by high profile politicians like Elizabeth Warren (Democrat Senator for Massachusetts) and Kamala Harris (Democrat Vice President of the USA) (King and Crowley 2023)? What stance is being taken in these cases? Is this real allyship or simply "virtue-signalling", a *performance* of transgender inclusion that does little to advance transgender rights (Manion, 2018)?

Equally, how far can these pronoun-sharing practices be considered a form of "gender-washing" that companies and universities exploit in order to appear ethically irreproachable? In this context, do these new pronoun-sharing practices risk losing their political potential and simply becoming a conformist ritual of political correctness (Jones, 2022)? To what extent does pronoun sharing fit into the "political correctness" debate, if at all?

From a pragmatics perspective, what seems specific to these pronoun-sharing practices is the detour taken via the 3rd person, which is not used in the *I-you* dyad. These practices thus seem to be a social ritual as well as an exchange of information, fulfilling a socio-pragmatic function, or as Cameron (2016) argues, "a symbolic affirmation of the parties' intention to conduct their subsequent dealings in good faith and with mutual respect." How then, do current practices fit into previous research on pronouns? Is disclosing one's pronouns (for a cis person) a politeness strategy (Conrod 2020; Brown and Levinson 1987), an act of solidarity/allyship, part of an ethics of care towards non-binary, gender non-conforming and trans people (Zimman, 2017; Conrod, 2022)?

This interdisciplinary conference welcomes proposals from a variety of disciplines including (but not restricted to) sociolinguistics, pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis, philosophy, cultural, civilisation or literary studies that shed light on how these new pronoun-sharing practices matter. Communications can exploit various data (ethnographic data, interviews, surveys, online corpora, press articles, autobiographies,

novels, TV series, films…) from any critical perspective. Comparative linguistics approaches are welcome, as long as the focus is on English.

The conference aims to answer some of (but not exclusively) the following questions:

- Who employs these new pronoun-sharing practices and why?
- What do these practices index about a speaker? How does this practice relate to other political stances?
- How have these new practices changed the indexical value of pronouns over recent years?
- Do people choose different pronouns depending on the context (e.g., professional email signature, bio on dating sites, pronoun rounds…)? If so, why?
- Apart from *he/him*, *she/her* and *they/them*, what other pronouns are used and why?
- What are people's attitudes to these new practices? How are they perceived?
- If these new practices are the heir to past struggles for gender-neutral pronouns, to what extent are they the continuation of these struggles? In what ways is the debate about pronouns today different from that of the 1960s and 70s? How does the use of non-binary singular *they* impact the use and perception of singular *they* as a generic gender-neutral pronoun ("somebody called but *they* didn't leave a message")?
- How can we explain the backlash against these practices? What role do these practices play in the current climate of the culture wars and moral panic about gender?
- To what extent do these practices open up a positive space for those questioning gender norms? Is the invitation to become pronominally visible, and therefore to make public what might be private, a source of liberation or alternatively a source of potential anxiety? Does it generate opportunities for gender fluidity or simply reify gender divisions and therefore gender hierarchies?
- How does this phenomenon play out in different languages compared to English, or in different varieties of English?
- What is the future of this new phenomenon? Will it become widespread, partly also because it helps recipients of an email to identify the gender of someone whose first name might not be marked for gender?

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

- Julie Abbou, Università di Torino, Italy
- Dennis Baron, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
- Rodrigo Borba, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Daniel Elmiger, Université de Genève, Switzerland
- Laure Gardelle, Université Grenoble Alpes, France
- Brian King, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong
- Andrea Macrae, Oxford Brookes university, UK
- Éric Mélac, Université Paul-Valéry, Montpellier 3, France
- Laura Paterson, Open University, UK
- Charlotte Thomas-Hébert, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France
- Lal Zimman, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY 17TH OCTOBER

9.15am:	Conference registration
9.45am:	Opening words

Session 1

Chair: Sandrine Sorlin (Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France)
& Ann Coady (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

10.00-11.00am: (**in person**) Plenary: **Laura Paterson**, Open University, UK: **"PRONOUNS IN BIO: A SITE OF EMPOWERMENT, VALIDATION, STRUGGLE, PERFORMANCE, DISTRACTION, AND CORPORATE RAINBOW WASHING?"**

11.00-11.30am: Coffee break

Session 2

Chair: Sandrine Sorlin (Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France)

11.30-12.00pm: (**online**) **Theresa Heyd**, Universität Heidelberg, Germany: **"MOCK PRONOUNS"**

12.00-12.30pm: (**online**) **Hannah Sawall**, Universität Duisburg-Essen, Germany: **""MEIN NAME IST LENA UND MEINE PRONOMEN SIND SHE/HER": EXPLORING INDEXICALITIES OF PRONOUN SHARING PRACTICES IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN"**

12.30-2.00pm: Lunch at university

Session 3

Chair: Theresa Heyd (Universität Heidelberg, Germany)

2.00-2.30pm: (**in person**) **Ann Coady**, Université Paul-Valéry, France: **"PRONOUN SHARING AND STANCETAKING: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL (DIS)ALIGNMENT"**

2.30-3.00pm: (**in person**) **Sandrine Sorlin**, Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France: **"WHAT'S IN A PRONOUN AND HOW DOES IT MATTER?: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS"**

3.00-3.30pm: (**online**) **Brittney O'Neill**, York University, Canada: **""WHAT'S A SHE/THEY?": AN (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND THE DOUBLE BIND OF SPLIT PRONOUN DISPLAY"**

3.30-4.00pm: Coffee Break

Session 4

Chair: Ann Coady (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

4.00-4.30pm: (**online**) **Marina Zhukova** and **Cooper Bedin**, University of California Santa Barbara, USA: **""QUESTIONS THAT PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO ASK OUT LOUD": FEAR VS. SELF-DETERMINATION IN ANGLOPHONE AND RUSSOPHONE PRONOUN DISCOURSES"**

4.30-5.00pm: (**online**) **Alexandra Gilbert**, Arizona State University, USA: **"EPISTEMOLOGY AND SHARING ONE'S PRONOUNS: FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD-PERSON KNOWLEDGE?"**

7.30pm: dinner in a Montpellier restaurant

FRIDAY 18TH OCTOBER

Session 1

Chair: Ann Coady (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

9.00-10.00am: (**online**) Plenary **Lal Zimman**, University of California Santa Barbara, USA: **"PRONOUNS, POSITIONALITY, AND POWER: INSTITUTIONALIZED TRANSPHOBIA, INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRANS-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE"**

10.00-10.30am: (**in person**) **Carlos Hartmann**, Universität Zürich, Switzerland: **"A SOCIOLINGUISTIC CASE STUDY ON THE PRONOUN DECLARERS OF REDDIT"**

10.30-11am: Coffee break

Session 2

Chair: Claudine Raynaud (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

11.00-11.30am: (**online**) **Lena Mattheis,** University of Surrey, UK: **"GENDERNONCONFORMING PRONOUNS IN LITERATURE"**

11.30-12.00pm: (**in person**) **Justyna King** and **Elijah King**, Universität Bern, Switzerland: **"PRONOUNS IN MOTION: PRONOUN VARIABILITY AMONG SWISS NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS"**

12.00-1.30pm: Lunch at university

Session 3

Chair: Lynn Blin (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

1.30-2.00pm: (**online**) **Katie Slemp**, York University, Canada: **""WAIT, WHAT ARE YOUR PRONOUNS, SORRY?": CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF PRONOUN REQUESTS IN COMEDIANS' CROWD WORK ON TIKTOK"**

2.00-3.00pm: (**in person**) Plenary: **Claudine Raynaud**, Université Paul-Valéry, France: **"PRONOUNS, PAST STRUGGLES, NEW PRACTICES: POLITICAL CONTINUITY OR RADICAL CHANGE?"**

3:00pm: **END OF CONFERENCE**: Wine, fruit juice, biscuits, fruit

PROGRAMME & ABSTRACTS

THURSDAY 17TH OCTOBER

9.15am:	Conference registration
9.45am:	Opening words

Chairs: Sandrine Sorlin (Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France) & Ann Coady Université Paul-Valéry, France)

10.00-11.00am:	(**in person**) Plenary: **Laura Paterson**, Open University, UK: **"PRONOUNS IN BIO: A SITE OF EMPOWERMENT, VALIDATION, STRUGGLE, PERFORMANCE, DISTRACTION, AND CORPORATE RAINBOW WASHING?"**

Abstract:

11.00-11.30am: Coffee break

Chair: Sandrine Sorlin (Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France)

11.30-12.00pm:	(**online**) **Theresa Heyd**, Universität Heidelberg, Germany: **"MOCK PRONOUNS"**

Abstract: This paper gives an account of mock pronouns as a (predominantly digital) discursive practice. The rise of pronouns and pronominal discourse as a gender-inclusive practice has been accompanied by heavy antifeminist and transphobic discourse, where the very mention of "pronouns" is derided and cautioned against. In particular, pronoun discourse can become a vehicle for antifeminist and transphobic sentiment (see e.g. Dafaure 2022: 244 on the case of Jordan Peterson) that is in line with current misogynist and anti-emancipatory backlash in online and other public spheres (e.g. Aiston 2023).
Based on data from digital discourse, this paper investigates a specific digital-discursive corollary of such antipronominal discourse, namely the usage of mock pronouns. The display of mock pronouns harnesses the linguistic strategies of pronoun sharing by exploiting digital affordances (such as user bios), metadiscursive routines such as "my pronouns are" constructions and the suggestion of pronominal case display through slashes ("they/them"). However, the potential pronominal slots are filled with other items, intended as derisive, funny or transgressive. This yields examples such as
My Pronouns are Fuck/Off
My pronouns are ✨Your/Majesty✨
My analysis focuses on the linguistic and semiotic strategies involved in the display of mock pronouns, including the semantics of the items chosen as well as their metadiscursive framing. By treating this practice under the label of mock discourse, I seek to connect this discursive practice to other forms of linguistic marginalization and derision as described by Hill (2009) and others for Mock Spanish and similar racializing practices. Tapping into the semiotic resource that gender-inclusive pronoun sharing has become, the practice of mock pronouns enables users to engage in anti-feminist and transphobic discourse that oscillates between openly hostile and seemingly benevolent or playful stances. This exploratory study is intended as a contribution to our understanding of (anti-)pronominal discourse in digital contexts.

12.00-12.30pm: (**online**) **Hannah Sawall**, Universität Duisburg-Essen, Germany: **""MEIN NAME IST LENA UND MEINE PRONOMEN SIND SHE/HER": EXPLORING INDEXICALITIES OF PRONOUN SHARING PRACTICES IN ENGLISH AND GERMAN"**

Abstract: Practices of pronoun sharing are present in online contexts but also especially in queer offline-spaces. People often share which third-person singular pronouns they want others to use in nominative and accusative case (e.g. *she/her*). However, the motivations for people's pronoun choices and form of sharing them remain unexplored. In German specifically, some people use language-crossovers as they share English pronouns in otherwise German speech/texts (see also Minning 2004). Since pronoun sharing has been associated with different political stances from virtue signaling to trans liberation (see e.g. Manion 2018; de Freitas 2021; King & Crowley 2024), it is clear that they transport more information than simply how a person asks to be referred to. My study therefore explores indexicalities (Silverstein, 2003; Eckert, 2008) of pronoun sharing practices of English and German speakers.

I use triangulation of English and German data sources including (online) ethnography to cover different contexts in which pronouns are made relevant. While some social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Reddit) allow users to share pronouns and can thereby influence pronoun sharing choices, they are also home to metalinguistic discussions. Additionally, ethnographic interviews survey people's experiences with and thoughts on as well as their own reasons for (or against) pronoun sharing.

Preliminary results suggest a complex indexical link between pronouns and gender, where sometimes pronoun sharing can be used as an additional modality of gender expression (see Kotthoff 2003). Furthermore, choices about whether/how pronouns are shared are influenced by other factors like globality/internationality (see e.g. Jenkins, 2014; Vriesendorp & Rutten, 2017) and participants' personal experiences. Understanding those connections will improve our understanding of how people (try to) manage the perception of their identities in both on- and offline contexts and can, in turn, make pronoun sharing practices more gender-affirming — especially for trans people.

12.30-2.00pm: Lunch at university

Chair: Theresa Heyd (Universität Heidelberg, Germany)

2.00-2.30pm: (**in person**) **Ann Coady**, Université Paul-Valéry, France: **"PRONOUN SHARING AND STANCETAKING: POLITICAL AND CULTURAL (DIS)ALIGNMENT"**

Abstract: People sharing their pronouns has led to a growing metalinguistic discussions about pronouns and what it means to share one's pronouns (King and Crowley, 2024). It perhaps began as a way of telling people which pronoun to use in the 3rd person, but it has come to index much more than gender over the past few years. People share their pronouns for many different reasons, the most obvious one being to avoid being misgendered. However, this risk is generally much less present for cis people, in which case, why do they do it? Pronoun sharing is not simply to indicate one's gender, it has become a kind of shibboleth, often indexing not only one's stance on gender issues, but also one's general political alignment. Stating one's pronouns seems to be increasingly tied to, not only gender issues, but a liberal/left-wing ideological position, often instrumentalised by the right wing as evidence of "political correctness gone mad" and "woke nonsense".

I begin my presentation by putting current pronoun-sharing practices in political and theoretical context, briefly discussing the current political debate surrounding these practices and comparing them to previous work on pronouns. The rest of the presentation focuses on the results of an online survey about pronoun sharing, conducted with over 800 respondents in 2024. The main questions I would like to explore are why the respondents share, or don't share, their pronouns, the stances they are attempting to index and the kinds of identities that are linked to pronoun sharing. I also explore some of the language ideologies that underpin attitudes towards this practice.

My analysis is based on the conceptual frameworks of the sociolinguistics of stancetaking (Jaffe, 2009; Kiesling, 2022b), indexical order (Silverstein, 2003), and indexical field (Eckert, 2008). I also draw upon concepts from the field of Language Ideology (Silverstein, 1979) to explain some of the attitudes towards pronoun sharing that respondents describe in the survey.

2.30-3.00pm: (**in person**) **Sandrine Sorlin**, Université Paul-Valéry/IUF, France: **"WHAT'S IN A PRONOUN AND HOW DOES IT MATTER?: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAGMATICS"**

Abstract: In this talk, I first wish to give a quick overview of the quite recent 'pronoun sharing' trend from a linguistic and pragmatic perspective, going through the new collocations and semantic shifts of the term 'pronoun' with examples drawn from SketchEngine and from X. I also try to account for the 'indirectness' of the use of the third-person pronoun mentioned after a speaker's name so that people can refer to them in their absence. I then go on to analysing more than 800 responses to a questionnaire designed to assess people's motivations for pronoun sharing or non-sharing. Elaborating on the sociological concept of "indexicality", "abstraction" and "stance-taking" (Silverstein 2003, Conrod 2019 Kiesling 2022), I study the responses through a pragmatic filter that allows me to gather all of them under the same theoretical banner, explaining why pronoun sharing matters to some and why others are more reluctant or entirely averse to the practice. I indeed categorise the sharing and non-sharing respondents into different kinds and subcategories in terms of face work (Goffman, 1967), equity rights (Spencer-Oatey, 2002) and (im)politeness (Leech 2014, Culpeper 2011). I isolate a third category that I call the "rejecters" disregarding the practice altogether for reasons linked to their negative face and strict adherence to pragmatic maxims. For the rejecters, "abstraction" consists in packing the sharers into an ideological box from which they clearly wish to disalign with.

3.00-3.30pm: (**online**) **Brittney O'Neill**, York University, Canada: **""WHAT'S A SHE/THEY?": AN (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND THE DOUBLE BIND OF SPLIT PRONOUN DISPLAY"**

Abstract: While language and gender researchers and activists have emphasized that declared pronouns are not the same as gender identity (e.g. Conrod, 2022; Olsen, 2022), many laypeople, even those who support individual semantic authority (McConnell-Ginet, 2008) over pronouns, continue to treat pronouns as a proxy for gender. In my experience of wearing a she/they button in a public-facing role, members of the public have often responded to my button with confusion and some form of the question "what's a she/they?" or "how can you be a she and a they?" While typically framed with an awareness of pronoun declaration as a legitimate practice and a desire to avoid offense, such questions suggest that pronouns are understood to indicate a particular type (gender), such that a "she" and a "they" cannot be the same person.

In this paper, I combine autoethnographic reflections with an exploration of epistemic injustice (e.g. Berenstain, 2016; Davis, 2016; Fricker, 2007; Pohlhaus, 2014) to consider how this persistent conflation of pronouns with gender identity positions split-pronoun users as non-legible in public space and leaves them vulnerable to epistemic exploitation (Berenstain, 2016), as the public display of such seemingly confounding pronouns marks the wearer (or declarer) as available to be questioned about pronoun practices in general. I argue that, in

addition to unsettling models of gender which map pronouns directly onto gender identities (i.e. she—woman, he—man, and they—nonbinary), the public display of split pronouns can lead to credibility excess and resulting compulsory representation (Davis, 2016), a form of epistemic injustice requiring individuals to "speak for" a minority community (in this case "the" queer community) as a whole, thus exceeding their own experiences and expertise. Further, such presumptions of the split pronoun user as spokesperson, can also make individuals vulnerable to microaggressions (Sue, 2010) even from well-meaning, but confused, interlocutors. Thus, even as the display of split pronouns may provide a catalyst for unsettling existing language and gender ideologies and encourage the use of appropriate terms of reference, such display also makes the individual vulnerable to novel epistemic injustices.

3.30-4.00pm: Coffee Break

Chair: Ann Coady (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

4.00-4.30pm: (**online**) **Marina Zhukova** and **Cooper Bedin**, University of California Santa Barbara, USA: **""QUESTIONS THAT PEOPLE ARE AFRAID TO ASK OUT LOUD": FEAR VS. SELF-DETERMINATION IN ANGLOPHONE AND RUSSOPHONE PRONOUN DISCOURSES"**

Abstract: Trans-inclusive language change (Zimman, 2017) involves managing many competing ideological goals (Crowley, 2022): e.g., creating language that is affirming to trans community members, but making it possible to be understood in non-trans spaces (Konnelly, 2021). These goals are shaped by power dynamics within trans spaces, and are affected by the sociopolitical status of LGBTQ+ individuals.
Non-binary offers a lens into these tensions, shifting from a community-internal identity label to an umbrella term increasingly in use in non-trans (Zimman and Hayworth, 2020) and non-anglophone spaces—in Russian, non-binary has spread as an ideological loanword, небинарный. Thus, we compare and contrast how non-binary identities are discussed in trans-centric English- and Russian-language podcasts, focusing on self-identifying practices and how these practices are situated within geopolitical context. The Russian data comes from Гендер Блендер 'Gender Blender', a Russian podcast about queer culture; and Персонаж 'Character', a podcast created by the independent Russian-speaking German TV channel. The English data comes from Gender Reveal, a podcast featuring interviews with trans individuals primarily living in the United States.
We examine stance-taking practices (Du Bois, 2007) with respect to (1) pronoun-sharing, (2) the political usefulness of non-binary as a category, and (3) how information about non-binary identity and pronouns is communicated. We find a didactic approach in the Russian-language podcasts, with an intention of educating listeners. By contrast, hosts and interviewees on Gender Reveal overtly challenge widespread ideologies about non-binary, presenting identity as a matter of self-determination (Zimman, 2019).
Scholarship and discourse on trans language often centers an English-language perspective. By also examining the practices of Russian language users, we consider the ways in which trans Russophone linguistic practices are influenced by Anglophone discourses, while metapragmatically negotiated in relation to anti-LGBTQ+ politics in Russia. This study thus offers new perspectives on global trans-inclusive language change and pronoun sharing practices.

4.30-5.00pm: (**online**) **Alexandra Gilbert**, Arizona State University, USA **"EPISTEMOLOGY AND SHARING ONE'S PRONOUNS: FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD-PERSON KNOWLEDGE?"**

Abstract: In this paper, I consider sharing one's pronouns as an act that asserts self-knowledge and positions oneself in relation to an addressee and a shared social landscape: see me this way, interact with me thusly. But on what authority and to what ends do we make such assertions? Considering this question, this project forges connections between sociocultural approaches to the English gendered pronoun system (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1994; McConnell-Ginet 2015), stancetaking (Du Bois, 2007; Kiesling, 2009, 2022b), and post-analytic and neopragmatist philosophy of language (Davidson 2001; Rorty 2009; Brandom 2019). This is done primary in service of transfeminist (Enke 2012; Stryker 2006) goals of self-determination and the continued exploration of the specifically linguistic front of this struggle through trans linguistics (Zimman, 2021). I consider the epistemological grounds for this assertion of self-knowledge in relation to a tripartite distinction of first-person knowledge, second-person knowledge, and third-person knowledge, adapted from Davidson (2001). I question whether epistemological authority can be extended to any of these dimensions of knowledge, exploring each in turn.

Sharing one's pronouns can be understood as an expression of subjective or first-person knowledge, but to what extent is the assertion of one's pronouns similar to a description of one's pain after an injury (an example given by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations,* §244, and later referred to by others in relation to the private language argument)? Sharing one's pronouns relates to second-person knowledge as it is directed to an addressee and communicates certain metapragmatic information about how the addressee should situate the speaker in their mind. These practices can also be understood in relation to third-person knowledge because they require reference to the self as a particular kind of gendered object.

I suggest that these practices be justified not by reference to an essentialist understanding of privileged access to self-knowledge, but rather through an emphasis on intersubjectivity and free and open cooperation with one another. From this perspective, sharing one's pronouns is less about asserting an essential truth and more about moving through the world in ways less fettered by cisheteronormativity and other harmful discourses.

7.30pm: dinner in a Montpellier restaurant

FRIDAY 18TH OCTOBER

Chair: Ann Coady (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

9.00-10.00am: (**online**) Plenary **Lal Zimman**, University of California Santa Barbara, USA: **"PRONOUNS, POSITIONALITY, AND POWER: INSTITUTIONALIZED TRANSPHOBIA, INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRANS-AFFIRMING LANGUAGE"**

Abstract: Pronouns are one of the most visible domains for transgender people's language activism, particularly in so-called "natural gender" – or, following Curzan (2003), *notional gender* – languages. As a result, pronouns have also become a key area in efforts to advance institutionalized transphobia, which have intensified on a global scale.

This talk explores the complex role of pronouns in the negotiation of (socio)linguistic justice, leading to the argument that the success of trans-affirming language depends on a broader intersectional political framework and praxis. It begins with a cross-linguistic overview of trans pronominal variation, exploring some of the typological properties of personal pronouns and strategies trans people have developed to contest binary gendered forms. With this foundation, the next section of the talk addresses a specific case in which trans pronouns are under attack: one of numerous educational policies in the United States designed to restrict the affirmation – or even discussion – of trans people's pronouns. These efforts have dramatically proliferated in the US, but I focus specifically on a law passed in Florida in 2023, known as "Subsection 3." Subsection 3 generally prohibits teachers from sharing their pronouns with students if they do not align with their sex assigned at birth, and it has garnered legal challenges from the Southern Poverty Law Center, a prominent US civil rights organization. Drawing on advocacy work related to this case, I discuss the way the language of Subsection 3 and its supporters undermine their own arguments that gendered pronouns must be an index of "biological sex" rather than gender identity. At the same time, I identify ways that linguistic researchers can refocus our work to more directly support trans language activism and address its opponents.

In this context, trans communities now more than ever need to participate in broader intersectional coalitions aimed at linguistic justice for marginalized communities. The final section of the talk explores how trans language activism can be reshaped to contribute to these efforts, focusing on the relationship between colonial and Indigenous languages, ableism and linguistic nativism, class privilege, and the unequal impacts of using non-standard language. In this sense, the workings of racism, nativism, coloniality, ableism, and transphobia are inseparable, and I argue that trans-affirming language activism can only succeed to the extent that it is willing to broaden its range of linguistic concerns.

10.00-10.30am: (**in person**) **Carlos Hartmann**, Universität Zürich, Switzerland: **"A SOCIOLINGUISTIC CASE STUDY ON THE PRONOUN DECLARERS OF REDDIT"**

Abstract: Although the use of gender-inclusive language such as specific singular *they* (i.e. *they* in reference to a specific antecedent of known gender) has been linked to first-hand knowledge of gender-nonconforming identities (Bjorkman 2017: 3; Conrod 2019: 141), the topic still awaits thorough sociolinguistic analysis. It seems likely that the rise in specific singular *they* is a change from above (e.g. Conrod 2019: 101), meaning "the importation of elements from other systems" (Labov 2007: 346) such as from one speaker community to the rest. It seems furthermore plausible that people who declare their pronouns are a part of this ongoing change. For this study, I extracted and analyzed Reddit comments featuring pronoun declarations within their user flairs, the optional descriptors displayed alongside usernames. The goal was to identify a correlation between pronoun declarations and use of gender-inclusive language. To measure the latter, simple metrics such as the usage rate of morphologically-singular *themself* as opposed to *themselves* (cf. Conrod, Schultz & Byron 2022) were employed. Preliminary results suggest a significantly higher rate of gender-

inclusive language among pronoun declarers than among their non-declaring counterparts, marking a step towards understanding the sociolinguistics of gender-inclusive language. My results are contextualized with a series of accompanying statistics and qualitative commentary that shed light on who is declaring their pronouns in what way and to what purpose on Reddit.

10.30-11.00am: Coffee break

Chair: Claudine Raynaud (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

11.00-11.30am: (**online**) **Lena Mattheis,** University of Surrey, UK:
"GENDERNONCONFORMING PRONOUNS IN LITERATURE"

Abstract: Queerly reshaped pronouns, forms and narrative strategies are flourishing in contemporary non-binary, trans and queer literature. From singular 'they' to 'it' to neopronouns to the collective voice of 'we', gender-transgressing narratives mark themselves as such through narratorial perspective, queer(ed) and trans(ed) pronoun use and other(ed) elements of form. Gendernonconforming pronoun use in literature allows us to see how nonbinary or unusual pronouns not only play a part in respecting gender identities, they also belong to rich queer and trans literary histories, as well as to a thriving contemporary literary landscape. Unusual pronouns are used in poems, novels and stories, not despite being 'cumbersome', but because they are beautiful and fulfil aesthetic functions.
In this talk, I therefore want to present a few interesting examples of queerly used pronouns from literary history and contemporary writing and explore some of the implications queer, trans and gendernonconforming pronoun use has for LGBTQIA2S+ narratives. To better understand how queer points of view affect other elements of form, I want to think about queer pronoun use in texts such as Rae Spoon's *Green Glass Ghosts*, which uses generic singular they, *Hijab Butch Blues*, which uses 'They' for god, and Sara Taylor's *The Lauras*, which leaves gender ambiguous by avoiding pronouns and by using the ungendered 'I'. I am interested in how gender-nonconforming protagonists queer and trans language, structure and narrative voice and what the implications of transgressive pronouns and formal strategies might be. The differences between genderneutral, genderambiguous and nonbinary or nonconforming pronoun use are at the centre of my thinking about these texts.

11.30-12.00pm: (**in person**) **Justyna King** and **Elijah King**, Universität Bern, Switzerland:
"PRONOUNS IN MOTION: PRONOUN VARIABILITY AMONG SWISS NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS"

Abstract: Variability in gendered language choices (including pronouns) can extend beyond alignment with one's gender identification, as evidenced by the construction of a "true transexual" (Borba, 2019), the adoption of "closet pronouns" (Conrod, 2019) or shifting pronoun preferences during transition (Zimman, 2019). Pronoun flexibility can be even more intricate for non-binary individuals who do not always place themselves within the binary pronoun system. These practices may not be understood or respected by their interactants, and a failure to use chosen terms can have a strong impact on their mental health (e.g. Testa et al., 2017; Ott et al., 2017). Our paper aims to explore pronoun practices and flexibility among Swiss non-binary individuals, by elucidating the factors influencing the pronoun usage of Swiss non-binary people, discerning the implications of this flexibility for our understanding of hegemonic pressures, and exploring the real-life impacts of modern pronoun-sharing practices on the lives of non-binary individuals. To address these objectives, we designed an online survey, gathering responses from 55 Swiss non-binary people. This allowed for the collection of quantifiable data on pronoun variability while also serving as a participant recruitment tool for subsequent focus groups. Three focus groups were conducted to facilitate in-depth discussions regarding pronouns. Survey responses and focus group discussions were coded into three overarching categories: (1) factors influencing pronoun usage, (2) the

perceived (non-)inherent nature of pronouns and (3) the impact of modern pronoun-sharing practices. Unlike previous literature that shows that pronoun variability only occurs in unsafe situations, our data shows that another prominent reason for pronoun variability is the amount of effort non-binary people have to put into coming out. This focus on effort shows that the limited societal understanding of the existence of non-binary people is a form of hegemonic pressure that forces non-binary people to be more flexible with their pronoun choices. Due to this need for pronoun variability, modern pronoun-sharing practices that are seen as more permanent and conspicuous (e.g., pronoun rounds) are generally evaluated negatively while practices with less permanent outcomes (e.g., adding pronouns on Zoom) generate more positive feedback. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of experiences related to pronoun use and sharing practices, offering valuable perspectives for enhancing inclusivity, particularly beyond English-speaking realms.

12.00-1.30pm: Lunch at university

Chair: Lynn Blin (Université Paul-Valéry, France)

1.30-2.00pm: (**online**) **Katie Slemp**, York University, Canada: **""WAIT, WHAT ARE YOUR PRONOUNS, SORRY?": CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF PRONOUN REQUESTS IN COMEDIANS' CROWD WORK ON TIKTOK"**

Abstract: Comedians on TikTok frequently show videos of their crowd work, where they ask questions to the attendees. While this is not part of their structured stand-up, it allows for spontaneous interaction (although the videos might be edited, censored, and/or captioned on TikTok), which may contain 'trouble sources' and opportunities for linguistic repair (e.g., Kitzinger, 2012). In the video from Zelnick (2023), there is seemingly a 'subject-side' (e.g., Stokoe, 2011) concern of being gender-aware, or to use Zelnick's word, an "ally," seen in the text over the video, such as "throwing my water bottle out of poor allyship" (Zelnick, 2023, 1:27).

1	Lucas:	Are you, (um:) goth? Is that correct? (.)
2		Did you have to come out? Like, how did you know?
3	Raven:	My parents named me Raven and I just like leaned into it.
11	Lucas:	You know what is annoying about your mom? = If she doesn't want you
12		to be trans why the fuck did she give you a sick trans name? hhh
13		(.) My apologies madame
14	Raven:	It's the other way.
15	Lucas:	(.) Wait? What are your pronouns, sorry?
16	Raven:	He/him.
17	Lucas:	He/him. FU::CK! NO::::::!

In this example of other-initiated repair, which is less preferable than self-initiated (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Zelnick responds by shouting profanity, upset that his "allyship" has been challenged. This marked repair, where the speaker includes a repair solution and an apology, provides overt clarity with a correct category. It is interesting that the initial questions (lines 1-2) are similar to a pronoun request, but the pronoun request occurs much later in the interaction (line 15), as part of the repair. The gender category of the participant takes lower precedence than an aesthetic categorization, and the investigation of pronoun requests from the stage provides insight into conversation analysis involving humor, and repair in response to challenged allyship.

| 2.00-3.00pm: | (**in person**) Plenary: **Claudine Raynaud**, Université Paul-Valéry, France: **"PRONOUNS, PAST STRUGGLES, NEW PRACTICES: POLITICAL CONTINUITY OR RADICAL CHANGE?"** |

Abstract: I would like to compare two second wave French feminists' thought and LGBTQIA+ theorizing and practice regarding pronouns and ponder their possible interactions. My focus will be the work of Luce Irigaray (1930-) and Monique Wittig (1935-2003) in the 70s-80s. These two French feminist thinkers have been chosen among others notable French feminists (for example Beauvoir, Cixous, Kristeva) for their incursion into and reflection upon language and subjectivity. According to them, language, run through patriarchal power, cannot speak/write the female subject, the lesbian subject, the "I" of speech and writing.

Luce Irigaray is first and foremost a philosopher. Her training in psychoanalysis, psychology, linguistic and literature, as well as her writing, singles her out as one of the most incisive theorists on the question of language (hence on the use of pronouns). Unconscious and pre-conscious structures determine speech: consequently, *To Speak is Never Neutral* (1985). Monique Wittig belongs to another school of feminism: radical materialist feminism. A co-founder of the MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes), Wittig is historically one of the most prominent thinkers of heterosexuality and lesbianism (*La Pensée straight,* [1978] 2001). Her reflection on pronouns and her practice of a language that reflects her theoretical insights led her to use of the third person feminine plural: "*elles*" = they in *Les Guérillères* (1969), and to a deconstruction of "*je*" into "j/e" in *Le Corps lesbien* (1973).

While the contemporary conversation and polemics around the use of pronouns may be traced to the history of feminist thought on language, its inscription in a ritual of self-naming, its claim for a different civic identity, play out on a different arena (to take up Wittig's phrase, the title of the 2024 anthology of her writings, *In the Enemy's Arena*). It is this difference and the echoes between these two political moments that I wish to investigate.

3:00pm: **END OF CONFERENCE:** Wine, fruit juice, biscuits, fruit

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