



**Universitat**  
de les Illes Balears

## **MASTER'S THESIS**

# **INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: USE OF *THEY* AS THE SINGULAR GENDER- NEUTRAL PRONOUN FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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non-binary, transgender, *they*

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## **Abstract**

Generally speaking, Spanish students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tend to use expressions like “he or she”, “himself or herself”, etc. when they do not know the gender of the person they are referring to; in contrast, native speakers are more likely to use the neutral form *they* in these contexts. Although the former form is not ungrammatical, constantly repeating “he or she” in an essay, dissertation... may become a bit awkward for the reader. Moreover, nowadays *they* is also used as the neutral form when someone does not want to give information about their gender or for those people who not identify themselves as being male or female. The focus of the present dissertation will be the second context explained here. In other words, this dissertation aims at reducing gender stereotyping and discrimination through the implementation of *they* as the gender-neutral pronoun by presenting an educational proposal for EFL in a secondary school. After an analysis of the evolution of gender-fair language in society, this study will be divided into two parts, an empirical study, and a didactic proposal. Firstly, an experiment will be conducted in which a group of secondary education students will be tested on their knowledge of this pronoun for gender-fair purposes. Afterwards, the educational proposal will be introduced; it will consist of a project to make students aware of the importance of using gender-fair language and rejecting gender prejudices.

**Key words:** Inclusive language, exclusive language, gender-inclusive language, gender-neutral, non-binary, transgender, *they*

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## 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, *inclusive language* has gained popularity and supporters all over the world. However, this concept is still controversial and far from being implemented in our society (Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016).

Inclusive language can be described as “the language which is free from words, phrases or tones which show discriminatory views of certain types of people or groups” (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020, p.39). Hence, it refers to the diverse nature of society and is associated with making our interlocutor feel part of a given community, regardless of their circumstances and preferences (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). As a result, inclusive language comprises the avoidance of words and expressions which are full of stereotypes, prejudices, or are alienating, such as ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). A typical example of exclusive language is using words such as *manhood* or *mankind*, which might be considered to exclude women and people who categorize themselves as non-binary, which means they identify with neither or both male and female genders (Aparicio et al., 2018).

Thus, referring to people using offensive, derogatory, and judgemental language (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020) can negatively influence a person’s self-esteem and wellbeing within a certain group of people. Nevertheless, if words and expressions which promote people’s integration in a community are used, it has positive effects on these individuals. Therefore, the projection of respect and empathy empower the interlocutor as a valuable individual and is key for shaping public opinion about people (Clyne, 2005).

Furthermore, language is a powerful tool which can be used to mediate affective relations and facilitate social cohesion (Fusaroli & Tylén, 2012). Sadly, this is not fully potentiated by society, which is particularly evident in academic contexts, where language should be the means to boost learning. Consequently, if the design of the language included in schools is carefully managed and well-thought, students will benefit from a more inclusive way of learning and will be

able to communicate more effectively (Amorós et al., 2018). This way, inclusive language will become a bridge between people (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020).

Besides inclusive language, gender-inclusive language must also be mentioned in this work. This type of verbal communication is included as a type of inclusive language and it is aimed at reducing gender stereotyping and discrimination by a means of neutralization and feminization (Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016). Assuming that there are only two genders (male/female) is undoubtedly not inclusive, as many people, e.g., transgenders or non-binary, are ostracised from a language which only recognises the two traditional genders (Zimman, 2017).

To achieve a language which is inclusive and gender-inclusive, there is a need to change its grammatical and lexical composition. Thus, the current dissertation will focus on the introduction of gender-neutral pronoun *they* as the third-person singular for the English language. This use, although in some cases accepted and used amongst speakers, is still not completely implemented (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). Hence, the didactic proposal included at the end of this work will focus on accomplishing this purpose and make students aware of the importance and the effect which words can have on people, as well as introducing them to the non-traditional gender identities present in today's world.

## **2. Main Aims**

This dissertation consists of an analysis of the use of inclusive language, gender-inclusive language and its benefits for students in obligatory secondary education and for the society in general. It also includes a didactic proposal which focuses on emphasizing the importance of being inclusive, gender-inclusive and realizing that not all people categorize themselves in the gender dichotomy of male/female. The main solution presented in this work to achieve this is introducing the gender-neutral pronoun *they* as the third-person singular pronoun for the English language. Therefore, this paper aims to:

- Explain what inclusive language and gender-inclusive language are.
- Present the current situation with transgender people and students in secondary school.
- Present the different types of languages depending on how they express gender, focusing on the English language and its lack of a third-person singular neutral pronoun.
- Present the various options for inclusive pronouns in English, paying special attention to the pronoun *they* used for the third-person singular as a neutral pronoun.
- Discuss this pronoun's positive and negative points.
- Instil in the students the importance of being aware of people's identities, preferences, and way of life, and respect them, in such a manner that they can have an open mind which helps them grow as individuals.

Moving on to the objectives of the didactic proposal, it is aimed at:

- Instilling in the students that inclusive language is necessary for their daily lives.
- Make students realize the different gender-identity options existing nowadays and the importance of respecting them.
- Teach students about the use of pronoun *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun for the English language.
- Give visibility to celebrities who have proclaimed that they would like to be referred to with this pronoun. Moreover, do some research about their lives and what motivated them to choose this option.
- Teach students about transgender issues.
- Promote respect and tolerance and fight discrimination against people, particularly transgender and non-binary.



- Promote critical and autonomous thinking.
- Address the issue of gender as a transversal topic, involving different departments, such as arts, science, linguistic departments, and ICT.
- Develop key competences stated by the LOMCE (2013) as learning methods and as assessment criteria. Some of the competences developed during this project are consciousness and cultural expressions, the digital competence, initiative and entrepreneurship, learning to learn, the linguistic and the mathematical and science competences, and social civic rights.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Gender in language**

##### **3.1.1 The Importance of Gender**

Language is the principal method of human communication and it works by constructing categories which humans use to organize the world (Pershai, 2006). Once this process is done, humans somehow become incapable of seeing evidence which is not consistent within those categories. This is how, new words are methodically endorsed to old beliefs and are locked into principles that already exist, even if these are inadequate or false (Pershai, 2006).

Truthfully, gender discourses and practices cannot be avoided in daily life, as our thinking, acts and behaviours are established according to our gender roles or identities (Widodo & Elyas, 2020). One example of this is that it is widely recognized that domestic chores are assigned to women while men tend to do jobs where physical strength is essential. Thus, political, cultural, social, and economic changes, nowadays completely globalized, wield influence upon gender practices, relationships, and ideologies, even more beyond a male–female gender identity dichotomy (Widodo & Elyas, 2020). Likewise, globalized political, sociocultural, and economic geographies shape how men and women

from different ethnic, racial, and religious groups or communities manifest their gender identities (Pavlenko & Piller, 2008).

This is especially concerning when transgender terms are mentioned. Due to the lack of terms for this community, notions of sex, sexuality, and gender are put together with prefixes such as trans-, inter-, cross, to create semantic hybrids (Pershai, 2006). Consequently, this process leads to a situation in which humans are locked up by a language with a structure that demands that one has a sex/gender and only gives a limited number of categories for that sex/gender, which is almost always male or female (Paterson, 2020). As a result, grammar forces speakers to use the personal pronouns *he* and *she*, *his* or *her*.

Furthermore, it has been proven that a mismatch between pronoun choice and gender stereotyping (e.g., a cleaner with *he*) can take longer to process. Kennison and Trofe (2003) conducted an experiment precisely on this topic. They showed participants a set of sentences with gender-stereotyped nouns and mismatched pronouns. Once the study was finished, they found that the latter sentences took longer to process than the ones where the pronoun matched the gender stereotyping of the noun. Similarly, Foertsch and Gernsbacher (1997, p107) discovered that sentences like “A truck driver should never drive when sleepy, even if [she] may be struggling to make a delivery on time” also take longer to process than sentences where the gender stereotyping matches do. Additionally, another study carried out by Kerr and Underwood (1994) found that readers fixate longer on pronouns that mismatch their gender-stereotyped antecedent.

Taking all this into consideration, it can be stated that gender is deeply relevant today. Nonetheless, the question of why it is so significant arises. Indeed, it could be argued that, since the past, gender has been a huge part of humans' lives. Depending on one's gender, people led a completely different life, and their role in society was determined by it (Cameron, 2005). As a result, gender undoubtedly becomes a source of power, our identity, and what makes us belong in a group.

Still, since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other genders have surfaced, for example non-binary gender identities. These groups defend that being a man or a woman is a ridiculous definition of humanity and its diversity (Zimman, 2017). Yet, they are a kind of outcasts from society and its daily life language. For instance, when a speaker refers to a group of people, an audience, they usually use “Ladies and gentlemen” as a start. This, however, is not inclusive, and could be easily substituted by, for example, “honoured guests” (Zimman, 2017, p.97). All these non-inclusive languages presume that everyone is male or female, but never both or neither.

### **3.1.2 Transgender and Non-Binary in Language**

Before explaining transgender and non-binary people’s role in language, the difference between these two groups must be stated. The term *transgender* is used to describe individuals who have gender identities, expressions, or behaviours which are not traditionally connected to their birth sex (Aparicio et al., 2018). As for *non-binary*, this is a concept that refers to a person whose gender identity is outside of the gender binary of male/female (i.e., they identify with neither or both genders).

Over the last few decades, the legal situation of transgender people in Spain has improved but is still far from being normal (Aparicio et al., 2018). The Ley 3/2007, de 15 de marzo, reguladora de la rectificación registral de la mención relativa al sexo de las personas, BOE number 65, established the rights inherent in transgender people’s new legal condition, such as a change of name and gender without undergoing genital surgery nor forced sterilization, which was previously required. Nevertheless, a psychiatric diagnosis is still mandatory and transgender people must certify that they have experienced two years of medical treatment before being granted these previously mentioned rights. Even though the legislation recognises these community’s rights, social tolerance is still far from being a reality (Aparicio et al., 2018). In fact, a study published by the Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals, and Bisexuals indicated that 30% of young lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals had suffered bullying most frequently due to their sexual orientation and around 43% had thought about

suicide, 35% had planned it, and 17% had attempted it numerous times (Aparicio et al., 2018, p.2). Additionally, between 11% and 18% of young Spanish people believe it is acceptable and even right to treat people with disrespect because of their gender identity (Aparicio et al., 2018, p.2).

Seeing the importance that gender dichotomy has in society and the current circumstances, transgender and non-binary people are groups which are constantly eliminated from language. It is true that transphobia and cissexism (person who believes that everyone's sex is the one they were assigned at birth) cannot be eliminated only through changes in language; but if cissexist language is identified, then humans will be a step closer to vanishing the coercion that trans and non-binary people must suffer (Zimman, 2017). Moreover, a close examination of this language is advantageous to disclose sociocultural barriers which these people must face when it comes to gender recognition and validation. According to Zimman (2017, p.101):

Transgender experience is fundamentally grounded in language, and no account of contemporary trans politics would be complete without attention to the ways gender is constructed through language. Though the threat of physical violence looms large, it is language that serves as the most pervasive ground on which trans identities are delegitimised and transphobic violence is perpetuated. By the same token, it is also the ground on which trans identities can be affirmed, reclaimed and celebrated.

One point which transgender people and scholars have in common is that language is one of the main fields where gender is negotiated (Bershtling, 2014). Henceforth, language reflects a social meaning. This suggests people do not select linguistic forms that are feminine because they are women; instead, they are women because they constantly take part in practices that indicate femininity (Ochs, 1992). Furthermore, because we know that identity is a dialogic construction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), being represented as a woman linguistically also depends on how other people use language, such as their choice when attributing a gendered third-person pronoun. According to this affirmation, identities are achieved through everyday discourse (Speer, 2005). In this sense,

being trans or non-binary is not only about expressing one's gender through our clothing or other visual objects or materials which constitute our self-presentation, but also about linguistic performativity (Zimman, 2017). Even though most transgender and non-binary people would be hesitant to assume that one is a woman or man only if they are recognised as such by the others, it cannot be denied that their lives, their safety, and their wellbeing are all profoundly influenced by the acknowledgement, or not, they experience through others' language (Pflum et al., 2015).

However, one starts to wonder why there is a desire to give transgender and non-binary an unmistakable definition, to homogenize the category and know exactly whom one is talking to. Thus, what we humans cannot comprehend is the huge diversity that these terms contain, where common ground can scarcely be found (Pershai, 2006). Therefore, traditional names and definitions can be violent and offensive for them (Pershai, 2006). In their minds, being transgender or non-binary implies having the right to escape from labels of identity (Zimman, 2017). Yet, they are usually placed in an artificial and inadequate homogenization and common category, which is systematically generalized (Pershai, 2006).

Every day, transgender people must deal with different injustices that are detrimental to lead a satisfactory life. Firstly, gender labels are always present, e.g., gendered language which is presented using gender identity labels (woman, man, trans, non-binary, etc.), kinship terminology (mother, father, sister, brother), occupations (actor, actress, etc.) and pronouns (Zimman, 2017). This also applies to vocabulary used for genital and reproductive anatomy. Zimman (2017) suggests that it would be plausible to prioritise a person's style of dressing as a defining characteristic of their gender. For example, if someone is wearing a dress, then they should be referred to using feminine pronouns. Nevertheless, trans and non-binary communities argue that gender can only be determined by self-identification (Zimman, 2019).

As a result, if a person defines themselves as a woman, she is a woman, and if they want to be categorized as non-binary, they must be recognised as having a gender identity which is dissimilar from the traditional ones and must be referred

to with the pronoun *they* (Zimman, 2017). The dominant system for gender requires the speaker to know the interlocutor's gender, to assign them gendered language. Still, trans and non-binary people believe that every individual is entitled of deciding their own gender, and thus what language others should use when referring to them.

Also, usually people tend to focus on determining a person's sex rather than their gender identity (Stanley, 2014). This means that most of the times, a speaker would never ask the interlocutor about which pronouns they should use with them, as they are aware of their biological gender (Gustafsson, Bäck & Lindqvist, 2015). If this rule is followed, then the condition of woman or man must always be identifiable and asking them how they should be gendered is seen as offensive (Zimman, 2017).

In my opinion, asking someone about what pronouns they use before starting a conversation should not be considered as disrespectful. Instead, by using this strategy, pronouns would become like names, and the issue of gender would be less problematic. This means that the perception of gender would have to change, and no longer be a visual and stereotyped decision, but a condition which should be asked about. Still, this solution seems far from becoming a reality, as people's cognitive view and understanding of gender is still strongly clinging to traditional standards (Zimman, 2017). Another option which could be acceptable when the speaker does not know the interlocutor yet would be directly choosing the pronoun *they*. After using this pronoun, if someone felt uncomfortable, they could correct the situation by politely stating the pronouns which they would like to be referred with.

During the last few years, there have been celebrities who have admitted being non-binary and using pronoun *they* to be referred to (Zimman, 2017). This proves that non-binary pronouns can be shared during public spaces and cissexist assumptions can be corrected. Thanks to these initiatives, trans people and their issues come to public attention and, by sharing their experiences whenever they are granted with a space to express themselves, they gradually become accepted by the crowd (Garfinkel, 1967).

### 3.1.3 Inclusive Language in Education

In recent years, there has been much academic literature dedicated to document the supportive role of inclusive language, especially with self-identity choices (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). Inclusive language has been present in education since past and is well documented in the literature, for the educational process changes peoples' knowledge, opinions, and values for the better. Hence, the learning process is certainly an ideal moment for establishing inclusive language practices (Barcena, Read& Sedano, 2020). Also, it is important to mention that curricula content can accentuate the inequality of opportunities between the students (Hey, 2010). This occurs when stereotypes and marginalization of certain social groups and communities are strengthened by the transmission of existing inequalities (Hey, 2010).

Furthermore, gender discourses and practices are intrinsic in language education (Hey, 2010), which means that education plays a vital role in defining or imposing values, e.g., gender-related values like equality (Ariyanto, 2018). Thus, all educational institutions, from schools to universities, inculcate determined gender-related values depending on the institution's social, political, and economic view. Thus, in practice, teachers and students produce and consume gendered texts that represent gendered identities, discourses, and practices (Widodo & Elyas, 2020).

Regarding gender issues, Bacon and Finnermann (1992) pointed out that there is a significant difference relating to genuine involvement and exposure variables between men and women and their self-reports of beliefs, attitudes, and experience in language learning. Other studies (Beebe, 1996) looked at the presence of sexist language in English language teaching due to historical and cultural reasons. Henceforth, the necessity to raise awareness, first within the teaching staff and later within the student body, becomes obvious. A few years later, another study carried out by Koeser and Sczesny (2014), presented results which confirmed that if speakers are taught arguments endorsing gender-inclusive or inclusive language, they tend to be more in favour of using it. Furthermore, teaching politically correct language in the English class exposes

students to cultural issues and discussing issues of sexuality or discrimination promotes critical thinking (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020).

Consequently, teachers should use discourse strategically to encourage participation and make the students feel included in their group, without exceptions, and making them fit in the educational process (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). To achieve this, teachers would be provided with information about the use of inclusive language and gender variation (Ressler & Chase, 2009), so that students could develop a broader perspective of inclusion.

In second language learning, effective communication is needed in the group. Hence, qualities like empathy, extroversion, and assertion, which are reflected in inclusive language, facilitate the learning process (Brown, 1991). Moreover, Foolen (2015) stated the direct relation between emotion and language, which proves that negative emotions heighten a student's difficulties and negatively affect their learning process (Wlodkowski, 2008). Therefore, an affective tone and the quality of inclusive language potentiate a student's learning and help establishing the relationships that build social inclusion (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020).

Subsequently, there is a need for the society and the educational system to be updated to today's necessities, like language has constantly evolved and adapted to humans' current situation. A few years ago, schools started to focus more on transgender and non-binary issues and began to develop programmes which were aimed at helping students who were part of this community (Aparicio et al., 2018). In 2017, the General Management of Coordination of the Balearic Islands elaborated a strategic plan named "Pla Estratègic de Coordinació i Atenció a la Diversitat Sexual i de Gènere a les Illes Balears – Cap a la Igualtat de tracte i no-discriminació de lesbians, gais, trans\*, bisexuals i intersexuals (LGBTIQ+)", which was aimed at eradicating LGBTIQ+ phobia.

Finally, the main goal which schools want to achieve is creating a good environment for the LGBTIQ+ students, something key to contribute to their adequate development and that of their classmates. Therefore, the main



objective of using inclusive language is creating an educational environment where students can learn effectively, in a place where they feel at ease, have no emotional filters, and thereby find it easier to express themselves while making mistakes, taking risks, and stating their own entitled opinions (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020).

## **3.2 The Expression of Gender in Languages**

### **3.2.1 How Languages Express Gender**

Languages express gender differently from each other, which directly affects the construction and implementation of inclusive and gender-inclusive language in them. Regarding the expression of gender, languages are divided into three main groups: *grammatical gender languages*, *natural gender languages*, and *genderless languages* (Stahlberg et al., 2007). Firstly, in grammatical gender languages, such as German, Czech, and French, every noun has a grammatical gender which tends to express the referent's gender. Spanish is also an example of these languages because it expresses gender with the “-o” ending for masculine and “-a” for feminine (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). Secondly, in natural gender languages, for example Swedish or English, personal pronouns are gender-neutral (e.g., friend) and referential gender is expressed pronominally (e.g., he/she). Thirdly, in genderless languages such as Turkish or Finish neither pronouns nor personal nouns indicate gender. Thus, gender is expressed through attributes (e.g., male teacher) or in lexical gender words such as *mother* or *man*. Subsequently, gender is much more visible in the first group than in the third one (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001).

### **3.2.2 Masculine Forms as Standard**

In many languages, masculine forms have traditionally been used to refer to both women and men. However, a huge amount of empirical research (Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016) has found that the use of gender-inclusive forms has a significant impact on mental representations. As a result, masculine forms

used as generics lead to a male bias mental representation (Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016). For example, if we refer to *firefighter* in Spanish, we could use the word “bombero”, which is masculine. However, this would potentially make the interlocutor believe that this firefighter is a man. Thus, when learning a second language, for example, students are taught that the default gender and number in Spanish is masculine singular. Ideally, students should also be informed about the questioning of this practice in recent years.

Traditionally, the generic pronoun would be generic *he*, as prescribed from the eighteenth century onwards (Bodine, 1975). Although it could seem like an efficient solution, arguments about this use arise exponentially since, even though it is used to refer to men as well as a generic pronoun (i.e., to refer to both men and women), previous research conducted in the field has found that, in most cases, *he* is perceived as masculine and thus cannot be a true generic form (Balhorn, 2009).

Hence, *he* serves to obliterate women from discourse (Paterson, 2020). If *he* is used for generic and masculine references, feminine pronouns can only be used when the pronoun refers to a woman, and this promotes a patriarchal construction of the language. Likewise, generic *he* is excluding for women and thus influences them negatively (Paterson, 2020). A study conducted by Briere and Lanktree (1983) showed that women who read a text about psychology where generic *he* was used were less likely to see themselves working as psychologists in the future. Furthermore, generic *he* makes other gender forms vanish from discourse (Paterson, 2020).

In conclusion, while masculine forms activate more male representations, even if they are used in a generic sense, other solutions, such as using word pairs, that is, expressing a gendered word both in its masculine and feminine form, or using neutral pronouns, e.g., singular *they* in English or *elle* in Catalan, lead to a higher cognitive inclusion and visibility of women and transgender people (Stahlberg & Sczesny, 2010).

### **3.2.3 The Feminist Language Reforms**

Due to the inequality present in everyday discourse, for more than 30 years, the question of language reform has been fundamental to feminists (Pershai, 2006). Nowadays, this community sees current language structures as a male-oriented and sexist formation that excludes and oppresses women, as well as marginalizes other groups to make them invisible (Pershai, 2006). Hence, feminist language reforms aim to change sexist and exclusive language made by men into non-sexist language. Some projects, such as *The A–Z of Non-Sexist Language* by Margaret Doyle, suggest inclusive language as an alternative to exclusive language, which makes everyone visible and identifiable in adequate and respectful terms. Following that logic, it is possible to assume that inclusive language would give a space for transgender and non-binary experience (Pershai, 2006).

Nonetheless, some experts argue that the feminist language reform has its flaws (Pershai, 2006). Deborah Cameron, feminist linguist at Oxford University, pointed out in her work *The Feminist Critiques of Language* (1998) two problems about this reform: its lack of inclusiveness and its banality as a political goal. The reason for these statements is that the result of this project turned out to be a list of words which, instead of discussing meaning within the current feminist practise, simply avoids these issues.

In addition, Cameron argues that the inclusive language that this reform presents gives a space only for standardizing women, ignoring minorities of all types. Furthermore, in this inclusive language project, the issues of transgender are still erased and so is the repressive mandatory character of sex and gender. As a result, this reform proved to be insufficient and not truly inclusive, because, although making women more salient, it was no able to reach other oppressed communities.

### **3.2.4 Gender-Neutral Pronoun *They***

As mentioned above, English belongs to natural gender languages, in which gender is expressed only in third-person singular pronouns *he/she* (Horvath &

Sczesny, 2015). Therefore, finding a gender-inclusive substitute for these two would transform English into a more inclusive and gender-inclusive language.

Historically, as published in grammar guides and taught in schools (both in L1 and L2 contexts), speakers of English must decide between *he* and *she* when referring to any animate third-person singular referent (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). Most of the times, this choice is simple, but only if you know the binary gender of the referent. However, a problem arises when referring to general references (e.g., *someone*, *anybody*, *everybody*) or if the individual's gender we are referring to is unknown (Gustafsson, Bäck & Lindqvist, 2015).

Facing with this situation, using pronoun *they* as the third-person singular pronoun for all genders, both when the subject is unknown or to satisfy the speaker's desire to be more inclusive and escape the binary gender (Newman 1992), a use which the Oxford English Dictionary traces back to 1375 (Baron, 2018), became a solution which has reached the broader public and is also starting to be implemented in the speakers' discourse. Furthermore, its use with indefinite subjects such as *everyone* seems to be almost fully implemented (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997).

Yet, there have been other candidates to occupy this spot in the English grammar. One of these are combined pronouns, e.g., *s/he*, *he or she*, *he/she*). This use is an example of the non-sexist language reform associated with second-wave feminism in 1960s-1990s which had the aim of increasing women's visibility in discourse (Paterson, 2020). Sadly, the main issue is that these combinations support the traditional notion that gender is binary. Some feminist activist like Casey Miller and Kate Swift endorsed alternative pronouns, such as generic *she* and supported non-marked pronouns such as singular *they* (Jochowitz, 1982). For them, making women more salient in the literature was the goal.

Apart from their undeniably ugly aesthetic, the main issue with combined pronouns is that they do not actually include everyone (Paterson, 2020). Hence, they reinforce the idea that gender is binary and thus eliminate people who do

not wish to be addressed as neither *he* nor *she* (Paterson, 2020). Nowadays, having only two genders is deeply interiorized by Western societies (Motschenbacher, 2010), and so everyday discourses of gender draw it as a rigorously binary category (female/male), neglecting gender diversity (Paterson, 2020).

Additionally, it is also crucial to mention that the use of combined pronouns, despite being less inclusive than singular *they*, was aimed at increasing the visibility of women in discourse. Thus, these combined pronouns, unlike singular *they*, did not exactly challenge the gender binary, but opposed gender stereotypes and male supremacy (Pershai, 2006). This difference, then, should be considered when comparing which option is better, because one challenges the gender dichotomy and the other one undertakes equality between men and women. However, both goals could be combined using gender-neutral pronoun *they* for the third-person singular, as it could reduce discrimination and bias in social situations and lessen the mental burden on the person being gendered (Hanna et al., 2019).

Although English has been a language which has promoted the progressive exclusion of sexist language to avoid sexual distinctions (Farrelly & Seoane, 2012) by focusing on the endorsement of combined pronouns or gender-neutral pronouns, the reality is that these gender-inclusive language uses are relatively rare amongst English speakers, native and non-native (Paterson, 2014). It has been argued that combined pronouns are rare because they are difficult to pronounce, and they make texts burdensome (LaScotte, 2016). As for singular *they*, people do not seem to identify it as a gender-neutral pronoun and even correct it, thinking it is a mistake (Paterson, 2020).

If we focus on English teaching, students are taught that every sentence needs a subject, and they are given a list of options in which *they* is said to be used to refer to more than one person (Pershai, 2006). Yet, that does not always work like that. In fact, Merriam Webster chose singular *they* as word of the year (Steinmetz, 2019), arguing that it was convenient when referring to an unknown subject in a gender-neutral way, much more than constructions like *he or she*.

Later, generic *they* began to spread through mass media because it seemed that using it made life easier for readers and writers (Steinmetz, 2019).

In 2015, the American Dialect Society chose *they* as their word of the year, having seen how people were starting to use it to “[transcend] the gender binary.” In 2017, singer Jennifer Lopez became a focus of attention when she used singular *they* on Instagram to refer to a family member (Steinmetz, 2019). And this year, singer Sam Smith announced that “My pronouns are they/them” (Steinmetz, 2019). Later that year, the AP Stylebook included singular *they* in its pages, where it was addressed to as “acceptable in limited cases as a singular and-or gender-neutral pronoun” (Hare, 2017: online). However, while some institutions accept its use as a non-binary pronoun, singular *they* as a generic pronoun is still dispreferred. By contrast, combined pronouns, despite often being described as cumbersome or even clunky, have been promoted for this use (Paterson, 2020).

Even so, the promotion of these pronouns is vital to encourage democratization in the English language, expressing greater equality and solidarity (Farrelly & Seoane, 2012) by, for example, rejecting male-as-default forms of language. Moreover, Farrelly and Seoane (2012, p.393) claim that “people alter their use of language in response to social change and people influence social change through their use of language”. This means that if we purposely include all the other genders in a group of professions which are usually attributed to men, we are modifying the perceptions of who can fill the role and expanding them to broader understandings. Thus, more women and transgender people may stand for a certain job. This way, stereotypes, prejudices, gender inequality, and power asymmetry are directly challenged (Paterson, 2020).

### **3.2.5 Against Singular *They***

In spite of the solutions explained above, not all transgender and non-binary people agree with being addressed to with a gender-neutral pronoun. According to transgender experts Alex Hanna, Nikki Stevens, Os Keyes and Maliha Ahmed

(2019), gender is a very important part of a person's life. Additionally, gender is deeply valued by those who have suffered discrimination due to their sexual preferences or gender reassignment. Consequently, being able to express it freely is a privilege which they are not willing to sacrifice (Hanna et al., 2019: online). According to these experts:

A move toward gender-neutral pronouns ignores the important work that gendered pronouns perform in everyday life. For many trans/GNC people, gender is an important part of their identity and actively avoiding the act of gendering manifests as another form of violence—a violence that trans/GNC people have been fighting against throughout the long history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and two-spirit (LGBTQIA2S) experience. Furthermore, this proposal is embedded in a particularly Western approach to language. Languages that don't have gendered pronouns are still riddled with strong gendered norms.

The problem, however, is that there are no terms which can be used to accurately refer to and describe transgender people. The reason for this is the lack of vocabulary related to this group and the ignorance on its features. As a result, transgenders are doomed to suffer from some sort of linguistic inadequacy at any point in their lives (Pershai, 2006). The reality is that nowadays terms which can effectively describe transsexuality, genderqueer, cross-dressing, etc., do not exist. There are two main causes which motivate this situation: 1) transgender is very diverse and cannot fit into traditional categories of a world designed for men and women only; and, 2) language presents a limited set of terms of gender-related identities (Paterson, 2020).

One could argue that the most democratic solution would be to “eliminate” gender by using singular *they*, as this pronoun is gender-neutral and removes the issue of gender (Strahan, 2008), because by using it, the speaker does not need to choose a gender. Therefore, pronoun *they* seems to be the solution which is more inclusive, as it includes people from all different groups and communities. Yet, it does not satisfy everyone.

Finally, what cannot be denied is that gender is relevant, and visualizing it as something which we should get rid of is not the solution. Consequently, schools should focus on emphasising the aspects of gender which are essential (Zimman, 2017). To achieve this, teachers and academic staff must be confident when speaking about issues such as body parts, sexual preferences, sexual relationships, etc., rather than using euphemisms. The ideal situation, then, would be to identify when a speaker is truly including trans and non-binary people in their ideas and when they are not (Zimman, 2017), and using the pronoun *they* constitutes a way to achieve this.

## **4. Research Study**

The following part of this dissertation will be conducting a study which is aimed at analysing the use of inclusive and gender-inclusive language. More specifically, it will focus on the use of pronoun *they* as the singular third-person singular and gender-neutral pronoun for the English language, specifically among secondary school students. This experiment is believed to also be useful to analyse the presence of gender discrimination and prejudices amongst these participants.

### **4.1 Methodology**

#### **4.1.1 Research Questions**

As previously mentioned in the literature review of this dissertation, the use of the pronoun *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun for the third-person singular in the English language is a solution which has gained popularity within the last few decades (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). However, despite being accepted as a non-binary pronoun, it has been labelled as “dispreferred” when used as the generic pronoun (Paterson, 2020). In other cases, such as when the subject is neutral (*someone, no one, someone, somebody*, etc.) or their gender is unknown, its usage has generated a lot of controversy and conflicting views (Hanna et al., 2019). Also, other options such as using combined pronouns (*he/she, he or she*,



s/he, etc.) have also become more and more common amongst English speakers (Paterson, 2020). Hence, two research questions are presented in this study:

*(1) Is singular they used amongst Majorcan secondary students?*

*(2) Do they use it with all types of subjects?*

*(3) Are students aware of the importance of being inclusive and using gender-inclusive language?*

#### **4.1.2 Participants**

This study was tested in the secondary school IES Guillem Cifre de Colonya from Pollença, a small town located in the northern part of Majorca. There were 35 participants in total, 19 women, which constitutes 54.3% of the total, and 16 men, which represents 45.7% of our sample. Even though the option of “Other” was included in the questionnaire for the gender variable, no-one selected it. The participants’ age ranged from 13 to 18. More specifically, 7 were 13 years old (20%), 7 were 14 (20%), 11 were 17 (31.4%) and 10 were 18 (26.6%). As for their mother tongue, 11 stated it was Spanish, 15 said it was Catalan, 3 Majorcan, 3 Catalan and Spanish, 1 English, Spanish and Catalan, 1 German and Catalan, and 1 Polish and Spanish. Regarding educational levels, the study was decided to be conducted in two different groups, second year of obligatory secondary education (2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO), where 14 participants participated, and second year of post-obligatory secondary education (2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato), where 21 participants were involved. As the high school was not very big and the restrictions due to COVID-19 were still in force, the groups were smaller than usual. However, the turnout for both groups was almost 100%, as only two students, one for each group, did not take part in this study due to personal reasons.

Finally, these 2 groups of participants were strategically selected for comparing a lower-level course with a higher level one. Also, all the participants admitted having been studying English for at least 5 years.

### **4.1.3 Procedure**

The participants were asked to answer the questionnaire (see annex 1) during one of their English lessons. In 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO, it was done within the last 15 minutes of class, whereas in 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato within the first 15 minutes. The questionnaire was created with Google Forms to make sure it was easy for participants to access. A link was provided through the app *Classroom*, which is used by the schools' teachers to send homework or other interactive and online resources, and to communicate with students in general. Participation in this study was completely anonymous and voluntary and permission to do it was granted by the tenured professor a week before conducting the survey.

### **4.1.4 Research Material**

To gather the required data to conduct this study and compare it to the previous information detailed in this dissertation's theoretical framework, a questionnaire was elaborated. This questionnaire began with 4 brief questions which referred to the sociolinguistic information of the participants; all of them were specified as mandatory due to their relevance for this study. These questions were the following:

(1) *Gender (the options provided were 'male/female/other/prefer not to say')*

(2) *Age (open question)*

(3) *Mother tongue(s) (open question)*

(4) *Course in high school (open question)*

Then, the actual questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, participants were shown a set of three images (see annex 2), and each one depicted a person. The first and third image showed two people who, according to traditional standards, were identified as a girl and a boy, respectively. As for the second or middle picture, it was the image of a person who did not appear to be clearly male nor female, which means they could be associated with a non-binary condition. These photos were obtained from a previous experiment

conducted by Lindqvist et al. (2018), although the procedure followed in the current experiment was completely different. In Lindqvist's experiment, the participants had to read descriptions of certain individuals who were supposed to be applying for college or university. Later, they had to choose photos (like the ones included in this study) which they believed represented the person they had read about. In these descriptions, applicants were referred to as *they/he/she/ze/the student*, a choice which was randomly made.

In the present study, on the other hand, the participants did not have to read about these applicants, they simply had to look closely at the pictures and subsequently were asked to write at least 3 sentences describing these people. Furthermore, the subjects were offered the possibility to write not only about physical appearance or clothing, but also about their general impressions about the people shown in the photos. The aim of this first part was making the participants use both gendered nouns such as *boy*, *girl*, *man* or *woman*, and pronouns, either gendered pronouns or neutral pronoun *they*.

As for the second part of the experiment, the students saw 6 different sentences which had a gap, and they had to fill in those gaps with one of the options provided. Therefore, it constituted a multiple-choice question which, unlike the one included in the first part of the study, did not have an open answer. In these sentences, 2 variables were incorporated, as well as 2 replicas of these variables and 2 distractors. Regarding the first variable and its replica, they featured a neutral subject, specifically *everyone* and *someone*. The sentence for this first variable was the following:

(V1) *Everyone said what \_\_\_\_\_ knew about the problem.*

As for the sentence used for the first variable's replica, it was:

(R1) *Someone said \_\_\_\_\_ liked playing football.*

Then, in the second variable, the subject was a gender-stereotyped profession, i.e., an occupation which was usually and traditionally attributed to

either men or women, in this case, *firefighter* and *nurse*. The sentence for the second variable was:

(V2) *The nurse tells me \_\_\_\_\_ will cure the patient.*

Regarding the sentence used for the second variable's replica, it was:

(R2) *The firefighter says \_\_\_\_\_ will extinguish the fire.*

Finally, the 2 sentences included as distractors in the experiment were:

(D1) *Peter says \_\_\_\_\_ has never been to France.*

(D2) *My dog thinks \_\_\_\_\_ is a person!*

As for the answers, participants were asked to provide one that agreed with the subject. This way, they were forced to use a specific pronoun depending on the subject of the sentence. They could choose from 6 different options which were ordered as follows:

(O1) *He*

(O2) *She*

(O3) *He or she*

(O4) *They*

(O5) *S/he*

(O6) *Not know / Not sure*

The selection of these answers was made to provide a range of possibilities and uses, not only the one which is emphasised in this dissertation. There were the traditional gendered pronouns *he* and *she*, neutral pronoun *they*, and, as for combined pronouns, 2 combinations were chosen, which in the end were *s/he* and *he or she*. As for other gender-inclusive pronouns such as *ze* (Bradley et al., 2019), they were not included in this study due to the participants' lack of knowledge about these more modern additions to the language. Lastly,

the option of *Not know / Not sure* was also included to make sure the subjects did not randomly select an option which could affect the results.

#### **4.1.5 Data Analysis**

As previously mentioned, this questionnaire was elaborated using the latest version of Google forms. The data gathered with this web-based app were stored in a spreadsheet, and the results were analysed using histogram charts and pie charts. Moreover, figures were shown in percentage form and answers for the first part of the experiment were evaluated individually for each participant. Finally, the sentences which were more relevant for the study were analysed more in detail.

## **4.2 Results and General Discussion**

In this study, the focus was discovering whether students from secondary school knew about inclusive and gender-inclusive language, as well as gender identity terms such as non-binary. To analyse this in the ESL class, the emphasis was put on the use of *they* as the third-person singular pronoun, both when the subject is neutral and when it is a gender-biased profession. As a natural gender-language, English only expresses gender through gendered words such as *woman*, *father*, or *waitress*, and pronouns *he* and *she*, thus, using pronoun *they* as singular could help to eliminate gender stereotyping in this language (Horvath & Sczesny, 2015).

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted into 2 different groups from 2 different courses, 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO and 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato. Starting with the lower-level group, in the first part of the experiment, the focus must be the 2<sup>nd</sup> picture, where a person with androgenous features was depicted. Overall, 10 participants from this course used the gendered noun *boy* or *man*, as well as its matching gendered pronoun *he* to refer to this person. Only three participants referred to this person as a *girl* and used the pronoun *she*. This means that, as Zimman (2017) mentioned in his study, it would be plausible to prioritise a

person's style of dressing as a defining characteristic of their gender. Here are some examples:

(1) *In the second picture the boy has one cap, he has a jacket, he has earrings\*.*

(2) *In the 2 picture is a boy with earrings and is bisexual\*.*

(3) *In the second picture, there is a girl with black and short hair. I think she is nice people\*.*

Something which is interesting to mention in example (2) is that this participant seemed to realise that this person was somewhere in between men or women, which is why she decided to state that they were bisexual. Thus, this participant associated this person's androgenous look with a determinant sexual preference.

As for pronoun *they*, none of the participants used it in this part of the experiment. If we look at the gender variable, it appeared to be irrelevant for this first part of the study, as the number was compensated; 6 males and 4 females chose to refer to this person as a boy, and 2 females and 1 male referred to it as a girl. The difference is very subtle and does not indicate gender as a relevant factor which could influence the results.

Regarding the second part of the experiment, in the sentence for the first variable, featuring subject *everyone*, all the students from the lower-level decided to choose option *they*, which contradicts Gustafsson, Bäck, and Lindqvist's study (2015), where it is stated that this use is problematic when the subject is a general reference. As for the replica of this first variable, featuring subject *someone*, responses were slightly more diverse; more particularly, 7 participants used *he* or *she*, 4 used *they*, 2 used *s/he* and only 1 chose *he*. In this case, pronoun *they* was not the first choice for the participants; instead, combined pronouns were more prominent. As for the gender variable, it again proved to be irrelevant, as there were approximately the same number of males and females for each

answer. Concretely, the results with subject *someone* are displayed in the following table:

	<i>He or she</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>S/he</i>	<i>He</i>
Males	2	2	2	1
Females	5	2	-	-

Focusing on the second variable, which featured a gender-biased profession as subject (*firefighter*), most participants succumbed to gender stereotypes, and chose pronoun *he*, specifically, 6 of them. As for the rest of the subjects, 4 used *he or she*, 2 used *they*, 1 used *s/he*, and 1 responded with *Not know / Not sure*. Once again, gender was not relevant in this variable. Finally, regarding the replica for the second variable, featuring the subject *nurse*, 6 participants chose *he or she*, 4 used *she*, 2 used *they*, and 2 chose *he*. In this case, *they* was once again not the pronoun of choice for the majority, and again combined pronouns *he or she* was the most selected option. In addition, in this case, less participants succumbed to gender stereotypes and used the feminine pronoun. In general, the use of pronoun *they* for 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO students was more prominent with neutral subjects than with gender-biased professions.

Moving on to the second set of participants, which includes those from the higher level, specifically 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato, the results were quite diverse from those of the participants from the lower level. On the one hand, regarding the first part of the experiment, most participants used gendered noun *boy* and its matching pronoun *he* for the second image depicting the androgenous person, concretely 16 participants, 8 males and 8 females. Only one female participant referred to this person as a girl. Also, unlike the participants from the lower course, there were 4 subjects from 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato, 3 females and 2 males, which identified this person as non-binary or even genderfluid, which refers to someone who has a fluctuating gender identity (Alfrey & Winddance, 2016). Examples (4) to (6) below show some of the answers given by these participants:

(4) *In the second pic there's a person, I can't really relate it's gender, it might be a male or a female. It could be a fluitgender person, I don't really know which pronouns has this person\*.*

(5) *(I don't know if this person is a female, male, non binary or another gender) The person is wearing a cap and diamond earrings.*

(6) *In the second picture, there is a person wearing a hat and a jacket.*

Here, several relevant points can be observed. In example (4), this participant noticed that the person depicted in the photo could be categorised as non-binary. However, instead of using pronoun *they*, which is the non-binary pronoun, or even use combined pronouns, she decided not to write anything and simply state that she did not know which pronouns to use. As for examples (5) and (6), the participants used what could be described as a “sneaky” option, which is using the gender-neutral word *person* and no pronouns at all. This confirms that the pronoun *they* is still not completely implemented in the English language, specially, as proven by Gustafsson, Bäck, and Lindqvist's study (2015).

On the other hand, if we focus on the second part of the experiment, most of these higher-level participants also used *they* with the subject *everyone* in the first variable, concretely 14 participants, 8 females and 6 males. However, 4 participants, 2 females and 2 males, opted for the option *he or she*, 2 females for option *she*, and 1 male for option *s/he*. In this case, gender also proved to be irrelevant, as there were approximately the same number of males and females for each answer. As for the subject *someone* in the first replica, most participants chose option *he or she*, which also coincides with the results for the subjects from 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO. In this case, 14 people, 8 females and 4 males, chose option *he or she*, 4 (2 females and 2 males), used *they*, and 3 (2 females and 1 male), opted for *he*.

Regarding the second variable featuring subject *firefighter*, once again the most common option was *he or she* with 11 choices, followed by pronoun *they* with 8 choices, 1 with *he* and 1 with *she*. Finally, in the second replica with subject



*nurse*, 11 participants chose *he or she*, 8 chose *she*, and only 2 opted for pronoun *they*. Here, it can be observed that with profession *firefighter*, participants opted to be more gender-inclusive using combined pronouns. Nevertheless, with profession *nurse*, there was an increase in the use of its gender-stereotyped pronoun *she*, although combined pronouns were still the preferred option overall. Henceforth, as previously mentioned in studies conducted by Kennison and Trofe (2003), Foertsch and Gernsbacher (1997), and Kerr and Underwood (1994), speakers still tend to relate a gender-biased profession with its matching gendered pronoun.

Hence, the general results for this study were the following. Most of the participants did not identify the person in the first part of the experiment as non-binary, and, if they did, they did not use pronoun *they* or any pronouns to refer to them. Instead, they opted for avoiding the problem by using constructions such as “the person”. This agrees with Motschenbacher’s work (2010), where it is explained that in Western cultures, having only two sexes is deeply interiorized. Additionally, the fact that nobody used pronoun *they* in this first part is also significant, a fact that agrees with Foertsch’s and Gernsbacher’s study (1997), which proved that this use was still not fully implemented. As for the second part, the most selected option in general was *he or she*, thus, as Paterson (2020) argues in her work, combined pronouns are widespread. As for neutral subjects, *everyone* was almost always paired with pronoun *they*, while *someone* was often paired with *he or she*. A possible explanation could be that *someone* refers to only one person, whereas *everyone* refers to a group of people and could be more easily identified with a traditionally plural pronoun such as *they*. Regarding variables with gender-biased professions as subject, *firefighter* was tied with *they* and *he or she*, but more participants chose this second option. And, with *nurse*, the tie was between *he or she*, or simply *she*, but the second option was the most selected. This could imply that female gender-biased professions are still intrinsically and strongly established in our cognitive use of language, even more than male-biased professions. Finally, one of the key results is that *they* is more present in the second part of the experiment, but it still does not surpass combined pronouns *he or she*. Furthermore, option *s/he* was proven to be even

less known, as it was almost never selected. Even though some participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato did detect the aim of this survey, the overall results show that gender stereotypes are still present in both groups, with a slightly higher rate within the lower level one, especially when referring to gender-biased professions. While 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO students chose more *he* for *firefighter* and less *she* for *nurse*, the participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato were more gender-biased with subject *nurse*. This, however, could be because the number of participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO was inferior to the one from 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato.

In conclusion, as for research question 1, singular *they* is used by some secondary students, although the majority of them have not implemented this change into their everyday discourse. We have also observed that the subject does determine the choice of pronoun, which answers research question 2. Hence, neutral subject *everyone* is almost always associated with *they*, while *someone* with *he or she*, and gender-biased professions with *he or she* or its matching gendered pronoun. Thus, we could conclude, answering research question 3, that some students are aware of the importance of using gender-inclusive language, but not all of them.

### **4.3 Limitations and Future Research**

In spite of the preliminary nature of this study, we are aware of certain limitations which should be solved in future studies. First, despite the decent number of participants, it would be advisable to expand it to improve the generalizability of the results. Secondly, the participants were not informed about the purpose or content of this questionnaire, so that they would avoid being biased and change their answers purposely. Nonetheless, some of them detected the aim of this study whilst answering the questions in the survey, and, for this reason, they could have been influenced by this. Ultimately, the purpose of this experiment was to analyse what participants would say in a completely spontaneous situation, thus, one could argue that a written task, which offers more time to think, would not reflect the true answers. As a result, to provide more accurate

responses to this study, the experiment could also be performed orally. Thirdly, as the questionnaire was sent online, some of the students did not fill it out, as they did not have access to the *Classroom* app which was used to provide the link for the survey. This means that the study would potentially leave out everyone who does not have Internet access or an electronic device. Fourth, the participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO had a rather low level in English, so their answers were not as elaborated as would have been desirable for the questionnaire. Moreover, the amount of spelling mistakes was very significant, and it somehow disturbed the aim of this first part. Related to this, we noticed that, for students in 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO, the questionnaire was rather difficult to understand, therefore they spent too much time focusing on understanding it than in writing their answers. Furthermore, the participants from 2<sup>nd</sup> of ESO generally had less consistent answers, i.e., they sometimes flipped between combined pronouns, *they* and gendered pronouns. On the contrary, students from 2<sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato had more coherent answers. For example:

	<i>Everyone</i>	<i>Someone</i>	<i>Firefighter</i>	<i>Nurse</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> of ESO participant	<i>He</i>	<i>He or she</i>	<i>He</i>	<i>She</i>
2 <sup>nd</sup> of Bachillerato participant	<i>They</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>They</i>

Fifth, there were several inconclusive answers which had to be discarded from the study. This could imply that some students were not able to fully understand what they were asked to do, and thus their answers could not be included in the present study. Finally, this study only included 2 variables and 2 replicas, which means that it does not cover a huge range of options. Consequently, elaborating a broader questionnaire would be advisable in future studies. In conclusion, future research is needed to continue advancing in this quite controversial subject.

## 5. Didactic Proposal

### 5.1 Introduction

The following educational proposal is aimed at promoting the use of inclusive and gender-inclusive language in the classroom. As shown in previous studies, the use of this type of language helps eliminate prejudices, reduces gender-stereotyping, makes everyone feel part of a given community or group, and encourages respect for diversity of all kinds. More particularly, this proposal focuses on the implementation of pronoun *they* as a singular generic and gender-neutral pronoun in the English language.

Nowadays, gender identity is a quite controversial topic, as the expansion of new gender preferences and ideas seems to be unstoppable. Additionally, every year, the number of students, especially in secondary education, who choose a non-traditional gender identity or sexual preference is increasing. Furthermore, students who are transgender and start their transition during high school are numerous and this requires projects like the one which is presented in this dissertation to promote tolerance, respect, and acceptance between classmates.

Finally, the following section is divided into three parts, excluding the introduction. In the first part, there is a small description of the high school where I did my internship, which is also the one used to create the present educational proposal. In the second part, the proposal is explained, dividing it into different stages. Finally, in the third part, the implementation of this proposal is expounded.

### 5.2 High School Internship

The high school<sup>1</sup> where I did my internship is IES Guillem Cifre de Colonya, which is located in Pollença, a small town in the Northern part of the island of Majorca.

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<sup>1</sup> Extracted from the *PEC (Projecte Educatiu de Centre)*, available on <https://sites.google.com/iesguillemcifre.cat/iesguillemcifre/informaci%C3%B3/documents-de-centre/pec-part-general?authuser=0>.

This is a relatively small school, with about 600 students in total. Most of these students live in Pollença, although there is also a small percentage which comes from neighbouring towns such as Sa Pobla, Port de Pollença or Alcudia, but only sporadically.

As for their family background, about 72% of the parents are heterosexual married couples who live together and only 25% are divorced. Amongst the male parents, 24% have university studies, 12% completed post-obligatory studies and 10% have basic studies. Regarding the females, 39% have university studies, 16% have bachillerato and 11% have basic studies. Furthermore, fathers often have jobs related to the construction or work in the tourist sector. As for mothers, most of them have jobs related to tourism. Only 3% of each group is unemployed.

Hence, teenagers in this school live in a rather traditional ambience. Despite being born in a coastal town with lots of tourism, which often helps to open their minds and see other ways of living, their family structure is quite old-fashioned, and this could affect their ideas and beliefs. Living in a small town means that everyone knows each other, and this can sometimes be both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, if students know each other, they are more likely to bond and create a relationship, which means they could help each other as well. On the other hand, however, living in a small town, where there is a lot of older people who are more traditional, can also promote gossiping, and restricting people's freedom by judging them unfairly for their life choices.

Related to this, since last year the IES Guillem Cifre de Colonya has a Transgender Student Protocol [my translation]. Thus, transgender students were not legally considered until quite recently. This means that there is still a lot of work to do in this respect, and the present educational proposal is believed to be a good start to reach gender tolerance and eliminate harassment. At the time when I did my internship, there was one student who was undergoing the transition and, as a result, was included in this protocol. Nevertheless, one could argue that, if the school gave more visibility to these people, using, for example, inclusive and gender-inclusive language, which are not mentioned in any of the

school's documents, there would be more students who would open up and accept their feelings.

Lastly, the rules of convivence<sup>2</sup> should be considered to make this proposal successful. Firstly, they state that students must treat each other with respect and consideration; secondly, they must be tolerant and respect other people's freedom, leaving any kind of discrimination, due to age, physical or psychological disability, religion, origin, or gender, aside; thirdly, students must not perform any violent act, such as insulting, threatening, coercion, vexation, or physical aggression; and, finally, students must resolve their differences and problems through dialogue, respecting all opinions. Thus, these considerations will be reflected in this didactic proposal.

### **5.3 Didactic Proposal: *They Can Fly***

#### **5.3.1 Introduction**

As previously mentioned, this educational proposal aims at reducing gender discrimination and gender-stereotyping, while promoting non-traditional sexual preferences and gender identities. The focus to achieve this is implementing the use of *they* as a singular pronoun, both as a gender-neutral pronoun and a generic one. This constitutes a way of promoting tolerance and respect towards people who are different from us.

Hence, this proposal is named *They Can Fly*, in honour to the song used in its last stage, and is thought to last about 5 weeks, considering that students have three EFL lessons per week. It was created for a 4<sup>th</sup> of ESO group of about 22 students, who would be divided into groups of 4 to perform the various activities presented in the different stages. The selection of this group was made so that students would have a high enough level of English, which would allow them to carry out the activities successfully. This proposal, however, could be

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<sup>2</sup> Extracted from the *ROF (Reglament d'Organització i Funcionament)*, available on <https://sites.google.com/iesguillemcifre.cat/iesguillemcifre/informaci%C3%B3/documents-de-centre/rof>.

adapted to fit other levels, such as 3<sup>rd</sup> of ESO or 1<sup>st</sup> of bachillerato, although it would be advisable to use it in higher-level groups. In addition, depending on the school's features, the proposal would also have to be adapted to meet the students' necessities and capacities.

As for the stages, the proposal is divided into 8, which not only involve the EFL subject, but also other subjects. These stages have different activities which engage the different key competences stated by the LOMCE. In each one of these activities, students must work collaboratively to solve a problem that has been posed to them. In this case, the challenges will be in the lack of inclusiveness and gender-inclusiveness in today's society, an issue which leaves different groups of people outside of our speech and, subsequently, originates a breach between us humans.

This proposal could be developed at any time throughout the academic year. Nevertheless, it was thought to be carried out during the last month of school, between May and June. The reason for this is that due to the LGBTIQ+ friendly composition of this proposal, it would be great for students to relate it to the LGBTIQ+ Pride Day, which is celebrated on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June. Thus, mid-June would be the closest time to complete the plan.

Finally, this project has different activities which will be assessed once it has been finished. The students will get a group mark and an individual mark, and extra points if they implement the singular pronoun *they* in their speech. Nonetheless, it must be stated that the mark is not the most relevant aspect of this project. Therefore, this proposal should serve to promote the use of *they* in the students' daily life, and, more importantly, make them understand why inclusive language must be present in everyone's discourse.

### **5.3.2 Interdisciplinarity**

Inclusive and gender-inclusiveness are transversal topics, thus, several subjects must be included in this educational proposal. Interdisciplinarity is necessary to make sure that students have a meaningful and complete learning process and assimilate the new concepts entirely.

Hence, this proposal, despite being focused on the EFL subject, also involves other subjects from different knowledge areas. These subjects are Spanish, History, ICT and Art. If it were necessary, this could also be adapted to other content subjects. The activities for this proposal were designed to put into practice the key competences included in the LOMCE and are consequently aimed at developing such competences. Tasks like designing and giving a presentation or making a video will allow students to use their knowledge while learning in a cooperative way.

### **5.3.3 Stages**

As previously mentioned, this educational proposal is aimed at promoting inclusive and gender-inclusive language in the EFL subject, focusing on the use of singular pronoun *they* to eliminate gender-stereotyping, gender discrimination and encourage tolerance towards people with non-traditional sexual preferences and gender identities. Thus, this proposal is divided into eight stages and it is thought to last a total of five weeks, depending on the number of hours per week that the school staff would decide to invest in it. The sequencing of the sessions is also provided, although this could change depending on the group. Each stage has one or more activities which endorse the objectives stated above and develop all the key competences:

#### 1) Stage 1: Questionnaire and Elicitation

This first stage is divided into two parts, which are carried out in two different sessions from the EFL subject.

In the first session, the teacher will copy the link of the questionnaire included in the Research Study on the school's digital platform (in this case, the app is called *Classroom*). Then, the students will be asked to complete this questionnaire, preferably during the first or last fifteen minutes of class. However, if needed, the teacher could spend more time on this activity. Once they complete it, they must send it so that the teacher can see the results.



In the second lesson, the teacher will show the results to the students, and they will analyse them together. As the questionnaire was divided into two exercises, the analysis will also have two parts. In the first exercise, the teacher will make the students focus on the androgynous person depicted in the second photograph. The concept *non-binary* and the possibility of this person identifying with both or neither genders will be mentioned, and the teacher will explain the use of pronoun *they* as a singular non-binary pronoun. This analysis will make the students realise the importance of using the right pronouns. Next, in the second exercise, the teacher will emphasise neutral words such as *everybody* and *someone*, which are both singular, and explain the use of *they* in these cases. Finally, the teacher will also point out the ignorance of gender in *firefighter* and *nurse* and explain the use of singular *they* as a gender-neutral pronoun. Once the elicitation is complete, the teacher will proceed to explaining the project based on the use of inclusive and gender-inclusive language, focusing on the use of the pronoun *they* as singular. The teacher will explain the different activities briefly, how they will be assessed, their deadlines, and the duration of the project. Lastly, the students will form the groups and they will also have to select a spokesperson.

## 2) Stage 2: Concepts

During the third session of this project, in the EFL subject, the students, in groups, will access a Padlet which the teacher will share in the app *Classroom*. On this Padlet, the students will see different concepts related to the topic of this project (*gender, sex, identity, gender identity, inclusive language, exclusive language, gender-inclusive language, binary, non-binary, male, female, etc.*). Then, they will have to look for information about these terms, define them and explain any other interesting point regarding these that they consider to be important for the topic.

Once all the groups have gathered the required information, the teacher will open a debate. The students' answers will be analysed, and they will have to discuss different aspects related to the previously mentioned concepts. With this activity, the students will hopefully acquire relevant knowledge related to this project's main topic and learn to keep their mind open to new possibilities.

### 3) Stage 3: A Walk Through LGBTIQ+ History

This stage will be carried out in two different subjects, Spanish and History, and will occupy three sessions.

First, in the Spanish subject (this will be the fourth session of this project), the students will watch a video called “La historia LGTB explicada por el colectivo” (see annex 3 for the link and transcription), which talks about the history of this collective from the year 1969 with the Stonewall riots, where a series of demonstrations by members of the LGBTIQ+ community caused an uproar in the city of New York, to the year 2019, when the video was made. After watching the video, the students, in groups, will discuss the evolution in this collective’s history and, finally, a debate with the rest of their classmates will be conducted at the end of the session. The students will have to discuss what their thoughts about the video are and what they think about the situation of LGBTIQ+ members in certain countries nowadays.

The second part of this stage will be carried out in the History subject (this will be the fifth session of the project). First, the teacher will show the students a timeline with all the events explained in the previous video. Then, they will ask the students, in groups, to choose two of these events to elaborate an 8-10-minute presentation describing it in further detail. Finally, they will have the rest of the session to work on it and ask the teacher questions, if necessary. As this stage is made together with the Spanish class, the presentation will also have to be in Spanish.

Lastly, in the following Spanish lesson (the sixth of this project), the students will share their presentations with their classmates, and all of them will have to participate. After this, the rest of their classmates, as well as the teacher, will be allowed to ask questions, make comments, or give feedback to the group which has presented. This exercise is very useful for the students, as it helps them to improve and become aware of their mistakes. However, these observations must always be made from a positive and constructive point of view, so that they do not affect the students negatively.

#### 4) Stage 4: Exclusive Language Surrounds Us

This stage is again carried out in the EFL classroom and is divided into two different parts, which constitute the seventh session of the project.

In the first activity, the students will start thinking about examples of exclusive language in their daily lives, also, the teacher will give them other examples to help them get some ideas, i.e., they will be doing a brainstorming task together. After sharing some of their ideas, the students will gather in their groups and the teacher will proceed to show them some sentences where exclusive language is used (see annex 4). Then, they will have to correct these sentences and turn them into examples of inclusive language. In this case, the teacher will encourage students to use the pronoun *they*. Before moving on to the second part, the whole class will discuss the students' answers.

Once this is finished, the teacher will show students a video called "Sharing Your Pronouns" (see annex 5 for the link and transcription), where the protagonists refer to the possibility of sharing the pronouns by which one goes for before starting a conversation. The idea is to wear a pin which indicates your pronouns.

After watching this video, the students will have to analyse it, first in their groups and later together with the rest of the class. This way, they will start a debate where they will have to share their thoughts about this option. The students will be asked to answer whether it is feasible or not, and, if they believe it is not feasible, they will have to provide other alternatives. This task is designed to make students realize that there is a lack of a gender-neutral pronoun in the English language, and, although they may not need it, some people do.

#### 5) Stage 5: Pins

The fifth stage of this project will be completed in the Arts class, during the eighth session of the project. However, we must bear in mind that in 4<sup>th</sup> of ESO, this subject is optional, thus, not all the students will be able to do this part. This means that, when making the groups, at least one student for each group must

do the Arts subject, so that each group has a representative in this class who can share their work with their teammates. Basically, the students will be asked to make pins like the ones that appear in the video “Sharing Your Pronouns”. As previously explained, these pins will have to state which pronouns the students want to be named by. They will also be given the possibility of making pins for their friends and family, or even make them for other students in the school and hand them out at the school’s entrance.

#### 6) Stage 6: Let’s Talk About Jules

During the sixth stage of the proposal (ninth session of the project), the teacher will start the EFL class with a video called “Jules’ Past” (see annex 6 for the link and transcription). Jules is a character from the Netflix series *Euphoria*, she is a teenager and transgender. First, the teacher will put the students into context and explain them who Jules is and what their circumstances are (also, if a student knows about the series, they can also explain it instead of the teacher). Then, the teacher will show the students a photo of Jules when they were 11 years old and one at 16 years old, to see how they have changed. Next, the teacher explains that they will now watch a video where they show what “solution” Jules’ mother took after discovering that her child wants to change their gender (she forces them to enter a mental hospital). Also, the teacher states that Jules prefers to be treated with the pronoun *they*.

We must also state that this video was cut from minute 1:45.54 to 2:00.84 and 2:19.34 to 2:28.55, due to the sexual images and offensive language, which were not adequate for the students.

After watching the video, in groups, the students will have to answer the following questions related to what they have just seen, giving a proper explanation:

1. What is your opinion about the mother’s behaviour?
2. Do you think she is doing the right thing? Why?
3. Would you be able to understand her at some point? Why?

4. What would you do if your child went through a situation like Jules'?

5. What would you do to help the mother?

6. What do you think is the problem of society with transgender people and those with a non-traditional sexual identity?

Before finishing the class, the students, all together, share their answers with their classmates. The main objective is making them aware of the reality which people like Jules must go through, no matter if they are transgender, homosexual, non-binary, etc. This way, they will be able to understand that inclusive language can help these people become accepted.

#### 7) Stage 7: We Are All Jules

In the 10<sup>th</sup> session of this project, the goal is to show the students that there are many people out there who are like Jules, and they want to be referred to with the pronoun *they*. For this reason, the teacher will show the students fourteen celebrities who have publicly admitted that their pronoun is *they* (see annex 7)<sup>3</sup>. All of them have different backgrounds and sexual identities.

Next, in groups, the students will have to select two of these celebrities and make a presentation about them. They will have to explain these famous people's biographies and focus on why they chose to be referred to with the pronoun *they*. They will also be allowed to include any additional information that they believe is interesting for this topic. The presentation will last 8 to 10 minutes and all the members of the groups will have to participate.

During the 11<sup>th</sup> session of the EFL subject, the students will work on their presentation for the whole class. This way, they will be able to ask questions to the teacher, if necessary. Finally, in the 12<sup>th</sup> session, the students will make their presentations, which will probably take the whole 55 minutes of class, although this may vary.

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<sup>3</sup> Extracted from <https://www.insider.com/9-celebrities-who-identify-as-gender-non-binary-2019-6#janelle-mone-came-out-as-non-binary-on-twitter-2>.

## 8) Stage 8: *Bird, You Can Fly*

In this last stage of the didactic proposal, two subjects will be involved, EFL and ICT.

First, in the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the ESL subject, the students will listen to the song called *Bird, You Can Fly*, by singer Eyemèr (see annex 8 for the link and lyrics), which defends freedom of sexual identity (non-binary). This title is the one which was used to inspire the name of this project, *They Can Fly*. Before listening to the song, the teacher will hand out its lyrics, so that the students can follow it easily. Above all, the main objective is that everyone understands the purpose of the song and grasps its symbolisms. After listening to it, the teacher will point out its most important parts and all the class will participate in a debate to discuss their thoughts.

Once this is done, the teacher will proceed to explaining the final project: recording a videoclip like the one which appears in Eyemèr's song. In this case, the videoclip shows people with big signs where words like "uniting", "safety" or "creating space" are written.

To conclude this project, during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> EFL sessions, the students will record themselves in any of the school's facilities to make the videoclip. Then, for sessions 16 and 17, which will be carried out in the ICT subject, the students will edit the videoclip with the teacher's help. It is not mandatory for them to copy Eyemèr's videoclip (showing signs with keywords written on them); they can be original and suggest new ideas.

### **5.3.4 Assessment**

In this didactic proposal assessment is necessary, both to determine whether students have acquired the knowledge and to detect which objectives were not successfully accomplished. Thus, the assessment, despite not being the most relevant part of this proposal, is important to guarantee that the students have progressed in their learning. As several subjects are involved in this proposal, each subject will have a different mark based on the department's assessment

criteria. The teachers in each department will decide which percentages they should give to the tasks performed during the project and will have to keep in mind the number of hours invested in it.

Regarding the EFL subject, this project will stand for 30% of the final mark of the third term. According to the IES Guillem Cifre de Colonya's assessment criteria for the EFL subject, this percentage would fit and complement the other percentages, which are 60% exams (two of them in each term) and 10% attitude, which is based on the students' behaviour in class, their participation, and their homework. This project is carried out during the third term, which means if the students pass it, they may not only obtain up to three points for the final mark, but they will also pass the previous two terms automatically. For this reason, the tasks must be thoroughly assessed, valuing the students' work in a fair but also strict manner. Furthermore, as the key competences are very relevant in the curriculum of obligatory secondary education, they will also be considered when assessing the different tasks included in the educational proposal.

### **5.3.5 Key Competences**

The key competences detailed in the *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa* (LOMCE)<sup>4</sup> are essential in any didactic proposal which is carried out in ESO. These seven competences are indispensable when performing any of the activities included in the stages of this project. Now, these different competences and how they are incorporated in this didactic proposal will be described.

The first competence is linguistic communication, which uses the language as a means of oral and written communication and as a tool to regulate thinking, emotions, and behaviour. It also contributes to the development of a positive self-image and helps consolidate a relationship with others. This didactic proposal develops this competence because, through collaborative work and the debates, it establishes links with others. It also helps with conflict resolution when

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<sup>4</sup> Extracted from this law, which can be found in <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2013/BOE-A-2013-12886-consolidado.pdf>.

discussing with the teammates and classmates to reach an agreement and with learning to co-exist peacefully while respecting other people's opinions. Furthermore, students must create oral and written language in different contexts, both in the questionnaire, the production of sentences like in stages 2 and 4, or answers to questions such as in stage 6.

The second is the mathematical competence, which focuses on promoting the use of basic mathematical operations, and different types of mathematical expressions to produce and interpret information. This competence is developed in stage 1, where the students must create a questionnaire and analyse its results. These results are shown in percentages which give them an idea of what the situation with inclusive language and the use of the pronoun *they* is.

The third type is the digital competence, aimed at teaching the students how to search for, obtain, process, and communicate information using ICT tools. This competence is key nowadays, as technological resources are becoming more and more present in our daily jobs. Moreover, with the large amount of data that we have within our reach, it is important to show the students how to keep a critical attitude when evaluating the different sources. In this project, the digital competence is developed quite a lot in all the stages, when developing questionnaires (stages 1), when looking for information (stages 2, 3 and 7), and finally when using digital tools to introduce the topic (stages 4, 6 and 8).

As for the fourth competence, which is learning to learn, it involves beginning to learn and being able to continue to learn autonomously, looking for answers. This way, the students learn to organise their learning by themselves. In this proposal, all the stages involve autonomous work and learning, as the students must solve the problem which they are presented with working collaboratively with their teammates. This is a great way of starting to give students more freedom and independence, without guiding their work entirely.

Moving on to the fifth competence, it is called social skills and citizenship. As its name suggests, it enables the students to become part of the society they live in, understand how it functions and play a part in it, like democratic citizens.



This competence implies putting oneself in the place of others, accepting differences, being tolerant and respectful, and accepting diversity. In my opinion, this competence is the base of the current didactic proposal, as this project is aimed at reducing stereotypes, promoting tolerance, respect and acceptance of people who are different from us, but who must have the same rights as everyone else does. For this reason, it is key that students understand the social situation they live in, and learn about its problems, something which is the focus of this whole project, but which is especially emphasised in stage 6, which shows how transgender people are sometimes treated.

The sixth competence is autonomy and personal initiative, which involves making choices following one's own criteria, taking responsibility for one's decisions. In this didactic proposal, the students must share their opinion continuously, as there are a lot of debates and sharing of knowledge and opinions. Thus, the students must reflect on their answers before communicating them to the rest of the class.

Finally, the seventh and last competence is the cultural and artistic one, which implies knowledge, appreciation, understanding and critical evaluation for different cultural and artistic manifestations. In this project, stage 5 is entirely dedicated to performing a creative activity as a way of applying the theory learnt in class. In addition, in stage 8, the final project is based on using a form of art, which is a song, and elaborating an original, visual, and artistic proposal to show the world important social values, such as tolerance and respect.

### **5.3.6 Limitations and difficulties**

This educational proposal presents some limitations which could be improved in a future project. First, it could be advisable to perform it throughout the year; this way, students would have a greater opportunity to assimilate the introduction of *they* in their speech. Secondly, this use of the pronoun *they* could quickly vanish from the students' discourse, as, depending on their teacher, this use could not appear, or even be considered incorrect. Third, despite promoting the use of pronoun *they* as a singular generic and gender-neutral pronoun, this project does

not provide a follow-up on the students' use of this pronoun, thus, it would be necessary to continue this project in the following courses. Fourth, due to the LGBTIQ+ friendly nature of this proposal, which encourages non-traditional gender identities and sexual preferences, some parents could be against it, and this could put the school in a difficult position. Furthermore, some centres could reject this proposal to avoid problems and controversy. And, finally, this proposal requires some electronic devices, such as computers and a video camera, as well as an editing program for the last activity. This means that not all the schools could access it due to monetary reasons.

Lastly, due to the short duration of my internship, which lasted about two months and was half observation, this didactic proposal could not be implemented in the school. However, the staff allowed me to pass the questionnaire, which, apart from being included in the research study, is also the first activity featured in this educational project. Hence, as previously mentioned, the first step was successfully completed, as students showed that the use of singular *they* was not implemented in their everyday discourse.

## **6. Conclusions**

The present dissertation was aimed at encouraging students to be more tolerant and respectful towards people who have non-traditional gender identities and sexual preferences. As the subject I am specialising in is EFL, the focus of this proposal is on making the English language more inclusive and gender-inclusive by using the pronoun *they* as the singular gender-neutral pronoun. Nowadays, there is a huge diversity, and our language should reflect this. However, without noticing, we normally use a certain kind of speech which potentially leaves out people who do not fit into the traditional categories, such as *man* or *woman*. In schools, the number of students undergoing a gender reassignment is increasing steadily, and the need to answer to these learners' necessities is an issue which cannot be ignored. This increase in transgender, non-binary, and other gender or

sexual identity groups has presented new linguistic challenges which we, as teachers, must face.

As previously mentioned in this dissertation, inclusive language helps create a significantly more peaceful and respectful environment for people, and, in schools, it builds up a place where the students feel comfortable and safe (Barcena, Read & Sedano, 2020). Thus, it is essential to take this into account, as, if we want to achieve a more open-minded society, we must teach our young generations to be inclusive. Currently, stereotypes are still deeply rooted in our society, and inclusive language is just starting to be implemented in our everyday discourse. However, there are still many contrarians who believe that using gender-inclusive language are a way of depriving people of a very important part of their identity. For this reason, the present dissertation offers a didactic proposal based mainly on the EFL subject. This project includes different activities to elicit answers from the students, making them become more inclusive by mainly using the pronoun *they* as singular. After conducting the research study, to discover whether the students knew about this use or not, our results indicate that they hardly knew anything about it. This was helpful while proposing the exact approach for the proposal. Basically, the students had to be taught about this use so that they could become aware that language is a very powerful tool which can make someone feel part of a given community or, unfortunately, quite the opposite.

In conclusion, I believe that there is still a long way to go to achieve a truly tolerant and accepting society, full of people who understand each other and who do not treat someone differently just because of their sexual preference, their gender identity, or other differences such as ethnicity, age, etc. Some may probably think that this society is nothing more than utopia, but, with effort, patience, and love, it can become a reality. In just a few decades, humankind has certainly advanced in some respects. Nonetheless, we are still far behind in others. Finally, our language is a precious treasure which we are all given from the moment we are born. Consequently, we must take good care of it and adapt it to our current necessities, so that we become a strong and united community.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: Questionnaire (research study)

#### Questionnaire

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScPuYg1qxn5M75O1vXYqaBRUaRcDL1C6rRwbjCMUD\\_tKYXVyw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScPuYg1qxn5M75O1vXYqaBRUaRcDL1C6rRwbjCMUD_tKYXVyw/viewform)

### Annex 2: Three images (part one of the research study)



Image 1



Image 2 (focus)



Image 3

### Annex 3: Video “La historia LGTB explicada por el colectivo”

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIIIsri68MM4>

#### Transcription:

Omai: Hola, soy Omai y soy bisexual.

Melo: Hola, soy Melo y soy lesbiana.

Alejandro: Soy Alejandro Reina y soy gay.

Ra: Soy Rad y soy un chico trans y bisexual.

Irene: Soy Irene y soy bisexual.

Omai: La historia del movimiento LGTB+ moderno empieza a través de los disturbios que comenzaron en Stonewall el 28 de junio de 1969.

Melo: Antes de eso la homofobia no estaba normalizada en la sociedad. Muchos bares impedían la entrada a gente LGBT. En muchos países como Canadá, la homosexualidad estaba tipificada como delito.

Alejandro: La noche del 28 de junio, en el bar Stonewall, en Nueva York, la tensión entre la policía y el colectivo LGTB estalló.

Irene: Desde ese día en adelante, cada 28 de junio se celebra el orgullo LGTB, para recordar lo que el colectivo ha de luchar día a día.

Alejandro: Ese mismo año, en el 69, comienzan a desencadenarse los efectos de la lucha del colectivo LGTB.

Ra: En España, en 1970, se aprobó una ley para encarcelar durante 5 años a todas las personas homosexuales o internarlas en un psiquiátrico.

Omai: Como consecuencia, se crea, de manera clandestina, la primera asociación LGTB de España, el Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual.

Alejandro: En 1971, en Amsterdam, se publica el conocido manifiesto gay.

Omai; En 1972, Suecia es el primer país del mundo en permitir que las personas trans cambien legalmente su género, además de proporcionar tratamiento hormonal gratuito. En el 73, algunas instituciones de Nueva Zelanda, Australia y Norte América eliminan la homosexualidad de la lista de enfermedades y trastornos. En 1978 tiene lugar en Madrid la primera manifestación LGTB de forma legal.

Melo: Al año siguiente, hace solo 40 años, se elimina la homosexualidad como delito penal en España.

Omai: Entre 1981 i 1982, el Tribunal Europeo de Derechos Humanos obliga a Irlanda del Norte a despenalizar la homosexualidad.

Irene: En ese mismo año, Noruega es el primer país del mundo en aprobar una ley contra la discriminación de personas LGTB.

Alejandro: En el 83, en España se modifica la ley franquista de escándalo público para evitar que se use para perseguir a personas homosexuales.

Omai: Ese mismo año, Polonia inicia la acción Jacinto, una operación secreta que consistía en registrar en una base de datos a todas las personas homosexuales del país. En el 88, los Emiratos Árabes aprueban la pena de muerte para las personas homosexuales.

Irene: El 27 de mayo de 1989 Dinamarca se convierte en el primer país del mundo en aprobar la unión civil entre parejas homosexuales.

Alejandro: En 1990, la OMS elimina la homosexualidad de la lista de enfermedades sexuales.

Omai: En el 93, un reverendo dice públicamente que el SIDA es un castigo de Dios a los homosexuales y a las personas que los toleran. Ese mismo año, Alemania deroga el artículo 175 que registró a más de 140.000 hombres por tener relaciones homosexuales.

Omai: También ese año Israel reconoce por primera vez a una mujer lesbiana como madre legal del hijo biológico de su pareja, es decir, dos madres legales.

Melo: En el 1 de abril de ese año, los Países Bajos se convierten en el primer país del mundo en legalizar el matrimonio homosexual.

Irene: En 2001, los territorios de Reino Unido que quedaban por despenalizar la homosexualidad lo hacen. En 2002, Suecia legaliza la posibilidad de adopción en parejas homosexuales.

Omai: Un año después, Estados Unidos deroga las leyes que quedaban contra la homosexualidad. El 2 de julio de 2005, se aprueba en España el matrimonio homosexual.

Ra: Y ese mismo año, Alemania incluye las identidades de género.

Omai: En 2010, Australia se convierte en el primer país del mundo en reconocer de manera legal el género neutro.

Alejandro: En Rusia, aún en 2010, se autoriza la primera marcha del colectivo LGTB.

Irene: Ese año, en Malasia, se abre un reformatorio para curar la homosexualidad.

Irene: Ese año se aprueba en Honduras la ley de identidad de género.

Melo: En 2012, se prohíbe en California el uso de tratamientos para cambiar la orientación sexual en menores.

Alejandro: Ese mismo año, el Partido Popular trató de tirar abajo el matrimonio homosexual en España.

Omai: En 2013, se aprueba en Rusia la estricta ley que prohíbe cualquier tipo de propaganda homosexual. Se detienen a más de 20 activistas.

Irene: En 2015, Estados Unidos fuerza a todos los estados restantes a legalizar el matrimonio homosexual.



Omai: En 2016 tuvo lugar el atentado de odio homóforo en Orlando, en una discoteca gay, donde 50 personas murieron y 53 resultaron heridas.

Irene: En 2017, se descubre que Chechenia, una república rusa, tiene varios campos de concentración, donde retienen, torturan y asesinan a personas LGTB.

Ra: En 2018, la OMS quita la incongruencia de género de las enfermedades mentales y las deja en el apartado físico.

Omai: En 2018, el Tribunal de Justicia de la UE declaró que todos los países miembros debían reconocer el matrimonio homosexual de países que los permitían por ley. Aunque siga prohibido en algunos países de Europa.

Alejandro: El 28 de junio de este año (2019) se cumplen 50 años de los disturbios de Stonewall. Hoy en día, hay 70 países donde el matrimonio homosexual sigue siendo ilegal.

Omai: Por lo menos 32 países han impulsado medidas para limitar la libertad de expresión del colectivo LGTB.

Rad: 26 países reconocen el matrimonio homosexual y 27 la unión civil.

Irene: 72 naciones tienen leyes que protegen a personas LGTB de ser discriminadas en el trabajo.

Alejandro: 39 países castigan la incitación a odio por la orientación sexual.

Melo: En 28 países es legal que personas LGTB adopten.

Irene: En 6 países la pena es capital y en otros 7 la pena es de muerte.

Alejandro: A día de hoy, los campos de concentración de Chechenia siguen activos.

## **Annex 4: Exclusive language sentences (stage 4 of didactic proposal)**

1. Ladies and gentlemen, the show will be starting soon.
  
2. Please, boys and girls, sit down.
  
3. Women typically need access to cervical cancer screenings. (Zimman, 2017, p.99)
  
4. Emily said there was an accident this morning. The truck driver lost his way and crashed into a wall.
  
5. My house is such a mess; I should hire a cleaner. I am sure she will be of great help!
  
6. I do not know Mary very much, but she always looks lonely. I think she should get a boyfriend.
  
7. A person should think carefully before putting himself in danger.

## Annex 5: Video “Sharing Your Pronouns”

Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb\\_We13\\_QTA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb_We13_QTA)

### Transcription:

Akeem: Hey, here’s an article about people sharing their names and also their... pronouns? What’s up with that?

Yasmin: Well, a lot of my friends have started sharing their pronouns, and actually I have too.

Akeem: Oh... but I don’t get it. What’s the point?

Yasmin: Look, you can’t always assume a person’s gender or pronouns from that person’s name or appearance. Those assumptions aren’t always right. You know that don’t you?

Akeem: I guess... so, you mean, like, transgender people?

Yasmin: Well, yeah, sometimes, I guess. But you can’t tell who’s transgender or who isn’t based on appearances, and sometimes women with short hair and well, a whole lot of other people have assumptions made about them.

Akeem: I get that.

Yasmin: And some of my friends are neither men or women – they’re non-binary. And some simply go by some pronouns you couldn’t guess.

Akeem: Sure, but for most people I can guess, and I’ll guess it right.

Yasmin: Listen, that sends a wrong message that you have to look at certain way to go by certain pronouns.

Akeem: Oh, so people share their pronouns because you can’t always tell by their appearance?

Yasmin: Yeah! And sharing invites other people to share so you don’t have to just guess.

Akeem: Oh! Ok, that makes sense.

---

Sika: My name is Sika and my pronouns are she, her, and hers.

Nic: And I’m Nic and I go by they and them pronouns.

Sika: Sharing pronouns is a lot like sharing your name. We expect that people won’t guess at our names and make up names for us that we don’t want.

Nic: In English, pronouns are sometimes used in place of a person’s name.

Sika: Many people go by *she/her/hers* or by *he/him/his*. However, others go by *they/them* or some other set of pronouns. For instance, Nic goes by *they/them*. “They are a colleague of mine. I work in the office next to them.”

Nic: Asking me my pronouns is not the same as asking my gender. Pronouns are publicly used to refer to me even if the details of my identity are private.

Sika: A great way to avoid assumptions is to share your own pronouns and then invite others to do so as well. But remember not everyone will feel comfortable sharing their pronouns, or what they share today in this space might not be the pronouns they will go by in other spaces or in the future.

---

Akeem: So, how do you do it?

Yasmin: Do what, share your pronouns? Well, I would say my name's Yasmin and I go by she/her pronouns.

Akeem: Ok. I and I can say my name is Akeem and I go by he/him pronouns.

Yasmin: Exactly!

Akeem: Oh! That wasn't so hard.

## Annex 6: Video “Jules’ Past”

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNDnfeWJxsM>

### Transcription:

Jules: I don't understand why we have to drive seven hours to see a psychiatrist.

Jules' mother: Because we want the best care possible for you.

Rue (*narrator*): When Jules was 11 years old, her mother took her on a road trip.

Jules: Wasn't Dali like a sexual predator?

Psychiatrist: Was he? I never heard that before. Would you like me to take it down?

Jules: No, it's a cool painting.

Psychiatrist: It is a cool painting.

Rue (*narrator*): It was actually really sweet though. They talked for over an hour and only later did Jules realize that she hadn't lied once. After the session, they wanted to give her a tour of the unit.

Jules: But what's the unit?

Doctor: Think of it like a second home where children can learn how to feel better about themselves.

Jules: Ok...

Doctor: Let me give you a tour. So, this is our common area where we have good sessions, watch movies, play games, have art class... On Tuesdays we have dog therapy, err, Thursdays we have music therapy... Usually there's two to a room depending on how many patients are with us.

Jules: So, I have to live here?

Doctor: For short periods of time... and this is the quiet room.

Rue (*narrator*): It was around then when Jules thought she had just had enough of the tour.

Jules: I wanna go home.

Rue (*narrator*): And that's when Jules realized this wasn't a tour at all. It was an elaborate plan to admit her to a [\*] psychiatric hospital.

Jules: Mom? Mom? No, no, no, nooooo, nooooo!!!!

Rue (*narrator*): During the ensuing Jules accidentally scratched an RA across the face which she felt really guilty about. But quickly that guilt turned into anger, and that anger into defeat.

## Annex 7: List of celebrities who use pronoun *they*

1. Janelle Monáe



2. Sam Smith



3. Brigette Lundy-Paine



4. Jonathan Van Ness



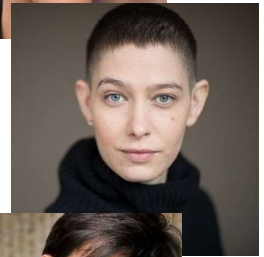
5. Amandla Stenberg



6. Ruby Rose



7. Nico Tortorella



8. Asia Kate Dillon



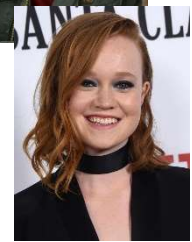
9. Tommy Dorfman



10. Bex Taylor-Klaus



11. Indya Moore



12. Lachlan Watson



13. Liv Hewson



14. Demi Lovato



## **Annex 8: Song *Bird, You Can Fly* by Eyemèr**

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cscnph9-Mmw>

### Lyrics:

So the time has come  
For your soul to finally belong  
Stop the façade  
Though the world is not ready for you and I

You're starting your life  
From this moment now  
Bird you can fly  
Bird you can fly  
You're breaking out  
Out of your shell today

You're starting your life  
From this moment now  
Bird you can fly  
Bird you can fly  
You're breaking out  
Out of your shell today

Kid, you'll be fine  
You're not a girl  
You're not a boy  
Nor am I

Kid, you'll be fine  
You're not a girl  
You're not a boy  
Nor am I

Kid, you'll be fine  
You're not a girl  
You're not a boy  
Nor am I

Kid, you'll be fine  
You're not a girl  
You're not a boy  
Nor am I

Kid, you'll be fine  
You're not a girl  
You're not a boy  
Nor am I