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**THE USE OF GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS
IN ENGLISH DURING TEACHING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**ПИТАННЯ ВИКОРИСТАННЯ ГЕНДЕРНО-НЕЙТРАЛЬНИХ
ЗАЙМЕННИКІВ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ
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ABSTRACT

The use of language is important in pedagogy, especially teachers' appeals to students, because they work with a large number of people and it depends on them how they will treat each other in the future, they set an example and create a favorable atmosphere in the group. Later, students also reproduce this in everyday life and in interpersonal relationships. So in the 21st century, they began to pay more attention to this and be tolerant, polite to each other, appreciate personal space and choice of sexual orientation and gender. The study was conducted by an anonymous survey of 300 foreign students (mostly from India, Nigeria, Morocco and Zambia) 1st and 2nd year students of Zaporizhia State Medical University studying in English and 15 teachers of the same university (from different departments) teaching in English. The study found that teachers have a low level of awareness of gender-neutral denominators in English. The reason may be that English is not a native language and is not their main subject and object of increased interest. Also, teachers have mature male or female roles, being psychologically and socially mature. Most students, on the other hand, are not only aware of gender-neutral pronouns, but are also ready to use them in class and in everyday life. Also, most students agree that teachers play an important role in cultivating gender-neutral language. In conclusion, it is proposed to organize courses for teachers and develop methodical recommendations, review materials for classes to use gender-non-deterministic language. In addition, teachers should be encouraged not only to use gender-neutral language but also to inspire students to do so, for example by starting an introductory class on a course by introducing themselves and pronoun that reflects their gender status and asking students about their names and pronouns they wanted to be addressed by.

Key words: *gender-neutral pronouns, English language, teachers, equality, international students.*

Introduction. Language is a powerful tool in today's reality. In fact, words can solve a wide range of problems if people are able to speak correctly, express their thoughts, point of view and position. But this is a two-way process: while one expresses his/her/zir/zirs thoughts, the other must listen, pay attention, hear what the interlocutor says. Many problems in the world could be avoided if all these conditions were met in practice. When a child is born, it is brought up, told and explained, it becomes a person. But first there is the effect of copying: it concerns habits, pronunciation, words, style. All parents become educators and teachers for their children. Improper behavior can be harmful in the future: improper treatment, oppression or vice versa, such as dislike, focus on things, human characteristics. Everyday language can be both a product and a driver of societal changes. Personal pronouns and honorifics are the words that most directly allow us to define who we are and how we wish to be regarded in the world [4].

Teachers are leaders of personal characteristics, knowledge, skills, abilities, etc. They skillfully juggle the process; they are addressed in a difficult moment. Most often, students leave their homes, parents and families when they come to the university, so if they need help, they turn to their mentors, whom they see every day. This person comes to the institution not yet formed and the elders help in this. It is generally accepted that the senior – and therefore wiser, but in practice not always, but still more experienced, have

already experienced many similar moments and may already have mistaken to learn from.

It is especially important for teachers to use it correctly in regard to students, because they work with a large number of people and it depends on them what attitude they will have in the future, they set an example and create a favorable atmosphere in the group. Later, students reproduce this in everyday life and in interpersonal relationships [2]. So, in the 21st century, they began to pay more attention to this and be tolerant, mutually compliant with each other, appreciate personal space and choice. Students from all over the world come to Zaporizhzhia State Medical University. However, most students come from India, Nigeria, Morocco, and Zambia where English is not their mother tongue, which sometimes worsens comprehension. International students spend most of their time at the university, because their family is far away and everything is unfamiliar, they came to study, so they attend classes or go to the library to prepare for couples or there are various interest groups that have been introduced, and all this time. students copy and reproduce the language of the locals. In practical classes, most of the classes is taught by the teacher, who explains the material and is the conductor of student interaction, discussions, etc. Teachers help to adapt to the culture, climate and peculiarities of the new country. This is observed in the first years of education.

At the age of 17-18 the first relationships, love, personality formation take place. At this time, the first relationship appears, and the question arises - is the choice of a partner of sympathy. At first, he may be frightened that he likes the same sex, then there is acceptance of himself, and then an attempt to convey it to others. First, parents will be responsible for this, then the school and friends. The key role in this issue is given to the teacher, he can help in relations with parents, in conversation and explanation, the formation of a person in group relations. But society is already beginning to treat people better who choose the same sex that they are, but this has not always been the case, decades ago it was treated negatively. This was shown through the attitude of the people, the prohibition of relations and total oppression, rejection of the situation as a whole. In fact, the fact that a person likes the same sex or different ages, other features, there is nothing wrong with that, as long as a person knows how to express emotions, be human, not to be abusive to others, not to express toxicity. Share the good and the whole world will answer you as well.

In addition, it is impossible not to take into account the peculiarities of their culture, it is generally believed that one sex is superior to another, and among themselves, they may degrade the other sex. They have different religious and mental habits, where often the opinion of some is not taken into account at all, women can be educated only to be a more desirable wife, but not to become a better professional and the like, there are cases where after graduation a student never will work in the specialty. This has been the case for a long time until today, but now people have become more experienced to change something and do a better «tomorrow» for our future. Our country is freer in its visions and habits, clothing and other expressions of themselves

as individuals. Therefore, it is very helpful to address in a gender-equal language, there is no special attitude or infringement of the rights of the teacher [3]. But later, other participants began to behave differently with others. It helps everyone to feel comfortable and create a favorable atmosphere in the audience. Therefore students began to prepare even better for these classes. In the classroom, they reproduced the habits and manners of the teacher's language and were tolerant of each other, listening and complementing. And later they did all this without a teacher.

Another equally important reason is which pronoun a person considers himself and how he/she/ze feels [5]. Pronouns are defined as a word that, when used by itself, refer either to a participant within a conversation, or to someone mentioned elsewhere in a conversation. A person's pronouns may, or may not, align with their gender presentation [8]. In many countries, it is forbidden to even think about something that starts to break personality, he can not understand which pronoun and with the help of all legal prohibitions loses his identity. Recently, in Western countries, children have been treated in an average way, until she identifies herself as an individual.

In the Ukrainian language there is a polite address in the plural, which can help, because it is neutral and does not identify gender, but distinguishes different relationships in society, such as how close the relationship, in English one address «you», which does not distinguish the degree of communication. between people. It is considered impolite to talk to a stranger or in a business relationship somehow not on «you» (Ви). «You» as «ти» is used only for family and friends. When translating or initially in the language, students do not know this feature. But then, it can help build a student-teacher-student relationship. However, other words are more focused on gender. This causes inconvenience in still undeveloped individuals, the age of students is usually 17-18 years, when the end of adolescence, the formation of sexual characteristics, which will be unusual at first, there are changes in appearance, human development in society and eventually human development, I am like a person. Therefore, it is very important to pay attention, help in the formation of a person, not to separate gender and to treat all people with respect. Every wrong word used at a young age can impress and change further perceptions, harm or help in the future, but in any case, all our actions are reflected in the future. It is better to reflect good deeds.

Pronouns in English (unlike in many European languages, as well as Ukrainian) differentiate gender only in the third-person singular, «he» and «she» and their attendant cases: him, his, her, and hers. However English language, as one of the most dynamically developing languages, undergoes significant changes, which are influenced by cultural and social changes. Therefore, in many western societies, the phenomena of gender fair language have been drawing more and more attention. The question of singular they is widely used as an epicene pronoun in present-day English to refer to a gender-neutral third-person generic entity, such as everyone, someone, a child, a student, or every teacher. Consequently, they have been officially accepted as an epicene pronoun in the manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), the Modern Language Association (MLA) handbook, and the Chicago Manual of Style. This is due to the fact that it can

accommodate all people and writers can use it without worrying about the gender of the referent entity. As far as gender-neutral language is concerned in English, a problem arises with respect to the pronoun that refers to a non-gendered third-person entity that is singular in form but generic in meaning. A number of novel forms of gender neutral personal pronouns have been proposed. Each has problems, which have deterred widespread use. They seem hard to learn, hard to pronounce consistently, feel awkward, violate grammar rules (e.g., use of they as a singular pronoun), and do not resemble standard pronouns sufficiently; none have been accepted by any influential group or have been used consistently [6]. The following table presents the list of neopronouns widely used.

Table 1.

Widespread English gender-neutral pronouns

English gender neutral pronouns				
HE/SHE	HIM/HER	HIS/HER	HIS/HERS	HIMSELF/HERSELF
zie	zim	zir	zis	zieself
sie	sie	hir	hirs	hirsself
ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
ve	ver	vis	vers	verself
tey	ter	tem	ters	terself
e	em	eir	eirs	emself

There English gender-neutral pronouns are third person singular pronouns to refer to either males or females, or to both males and females, and more recently, to refer to transgender or gender nonconforming persons as well.

People say, «treat others as you would like to be treated». This applies to all human actions and relationships. So, let's set an example for each other, not judge others' choices, and be polite. The boomerang effect is sure to return. So, let's share the right words, listening to each other, so that all good things come back to you.

Materials and methods. The research was performed by offering an anonymous questionnaire to 300 students of 1st and 2nd course of Zaporizhzhia State Medical University who study in English (students come mainly from India, Nigeria, Morocco, Zambia). 58% of respondents were males, and 42% – females. Another questionnaire was offered to 15 teachers who teach in English at the same university (from department of Histology, Cytology, Embryology, department of Medical Biology, Parasitology and Genetics, and department of Medical Physics, Biophysics and Further Mathematics). A survey questionnaire was used where the respondents were asked to rate pointed statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The first question was designed to evaluate acknowledgment of pronouns which were introduced by the LGBT community and are already used in English language. Further statements of the questionnaire sought to gain insights of the respondents' attitudes towards the use of new pronouns. Data was analyzed using mean % of responses from the questionnaires. It should be noted that questionnaire was first offered to teachers and they attended a mini lecture on gender equality after responding. Only after that, all teachers introduced themselves with pronouns and offered a questionnaire to students.

Results and discussion. The results from table 2 showed that most of students are aware of gender-neutral pronouns (73%) and feel comfortable using them when appealing to other people (59%). They can be explained by rapid development of LGBT culture and increasing promotion of it via social media. However, 5.3% of respondents don't feel comfortable referring to others as gender neutral. These students may belong to those, who never heard about implementation of gender responsiveness of the language used. It should be considered that for most students English is a second language. So, teachers have to fill in this gap of knowledge during introductory class. In order to create a comfortable study space which a guarantee of high activity of students in classroom and extracurricular activities for those 2.6% student who can apply gender-neutral pronoun to themselves and who would prefer to be called by various gender-neutral pronouns teachers should implement gender fair language in classes. Most respondents (61.7%) noted that teachers play a major role on promoting development of gender identity. It is due to the fact that most written material used is gendered. Gender identity of each person is formed in the process of education based on the awareness of gender-role identity, it is required to pay attention to the areas of life that influence the establishment of stereotypes about femininity and masculinity, such as communication at the university. Therefore, gender-bias materials should be revised to consciously factor in gender responsive language and linguistic inclusiveness, i.e. inclusion in the language and culture of all gender groups and identities in materials they use [8]. Another fact that affects gender identity in a classroom is obviously the way teacher and students refer to each other.

Table 2.

Results of student's responses

Item	Strongly agree, %	Agree, %	Neutral, %	Disagree, %	Strongly disagree, %
I am aware of gender-neutral pronouns	64.7	8.3	2.4	17.4	7.2
I can apply gender-neutral pronoun to myself	1	1.6	3.2	12.3	81.9
I feel comfortable to use gender-neutral pronouns to other people	42.8	16.2	35.7	1.7	3.6
I feel respected when people ask what pronouns I use	2	0.6	94.6	2.5	0.3
I prefer to attend classes where teachers support usage of gender-neutral pronouns	0.6	1	92.7	5.7	0
Teachers play major role in cultivating gender-neutral language	52.3	9.4	20.7	3.5	14.1

Results from table 3 indicate that most teachers are unprepared to enhance gendered language, moreover they lack knowledge, skills and abilities to perform gender-neutral education sessions. English, as one of the

most dynamically developing languages, undergoes significant changes nowadays, which were determined by changes in the public sphere. But there is no tool that our staff can track these changes by. Ukrainian teachers are almost not affected by international mass media like TV, magazines and social media. Although information about LGBT is spreading drastically throughout the world, there have been no known attempts to create gender-neutral pronouns in Ukrainian language. Traditionally Ukrainian language is gender-bias, whereas English does not have a grammatical category of gender. Linguistic sexism (or gender asymmetry in language) often depicts male dominance in various spheres of human life, which is due to the belief that man is the primary and female – the secondary. According to the established stereotypes, a man is usually given a role leader, and the role of women as progenitors and guardians of the household [7]. Although it should be noted that in past few years most of professions gained femininize endings as well. As such pronouns are not peculiar to the Ukrainian language, even translators use concretization (translation with a word that has a narrower meaning) by replacing the general-neutral pronoun with the Ukrainian masculine equivalent [3]. It is not surprising that barely few teachers were aware of them as most of the current work on gender inequality in general and gender inequality in language, as well as the basics of gender linguistics originated in the United States.

Table 3

Results of teacher's responses

Item	Strongly agree, %	Agree, %	Neutral, %	Disagree, %	Strongly disagree, %
I am aware of gender-neutral pronouns	20	0	0	20	60
I can apply gender-neutral pronoun to myself	0	0	0	33.3	66.6
I feel comfortable to use gender-neutral pronouns to other people	20	0	80	0	0
I feel respected when people ask what pronouns I use	0	0	93.3	6.6	0
Teachers play major role in cultivating gender-neutral language	13.3	6.6	80.1	0	0

None of respondents from university staff could apply gender-neutral pronoun to themselves. It can be explained by the fact that as psychologically and socially mature they have adopted masculine or feminine roles and their language includes the stratification characteristics of our society and reflects the mentality that has become entrenched in society through historically established customs and attitudes. That is also a reason why almost all teachers don't care about pronouns they are referred to. Staff of Zaporizhzhia

State Medical University also agreed that teachers play major role in cultivating gender-neutral language and is willing to use such pronouns during conversations with other people and students.

So, to enforce gendered language during both formal and informal interactions with students we offer teachers to participate in trainings on use of gender-neutral language. We also suggest rewriting methodical recommendations and guidelines which can be used by all Ukrainian educators who teach in English. This is not a new idea. Increasing interest in this issue in the academic environment required changes in the educational process and administration of universities, where specially formed committees and working groups developed rules for corporate «equal opportunities policy». At their initiative, a gender examination of the language and titles of courses, textbooks, manuals and university documents was conducted. In the mid-1970s, after a mass debate on the issue of language sexism in the press and academia, the question arose of the need to introduce gender-correct language in the statutes and codes of professional associations, federations and unions [5]. However, current changes in pronouns should be also taken into account by worldwide academic environment.

Another point we would like to mention is that teachers should to inspire students to respect each other's sexual orientation and point of view on gender. In our research we as teachers have made one tiny step to that – started introductory classes on courses by introducing ourselves and pronoun that reflects our gender status and asking students about their names and pronouns they wanted to be addressed by. In the «broad» sense, we are talking about the neutralization of sexism in the language: initially it was said that a gender-neutral language would work for inclusion for women, giving them equal opportunities with men for linguistic (self-) expression [1]. But as long as the idea of an inclusive language has extended to non-binary identities, providing equal linguistic means for transgender and intersex people, special vocabulary for non-binary groups began to be created, for example, special transgender pronouns in English -xe, ze, using they in the singular, etc., we offer to use this tool as well.

Gender neutral language is another way of promoting inclusivity. Gender-neutral way of addressing an audience is «Hello everyone» or «Hello students». Through a small change in phrasing, anyone who doesn't identify with male or female genders feels respected.

Another point pro using gender inclusive language arose based on the fact that the main goal in teaching students of higher educational institutions is the training of highly qualified specialists. It can be argued that an important component of their training is the ability to integrate into the multicultural environment that exists in modern realities. Thus, for the effective implementation of intercultural communication, both graduates and teachers of universities need to be properly aware of the ways of using gender-neutral language.

However, question about providing gender-equal education to Ukrainian students who perform education using local language remains

unsolved until gender-neutral pronouns are developed for this language which may become the issue for our further study.

We consider this document an important step in moving our education towards worldwide standards.

Conclusions. Language is consistently evolving, and academic society should account for this to provide genuinely inclusive systems of education. Based on our observations, teachers, who teach in English lack knowledge, skills and abilities to perform gender-neutral education sessions. They need to participate in an educational course or training on use of gender-neutral language. Teaching staff also have to check all study material which they use in classes in order to use gender fair language. Also, teachers should be encouraged not only to use gender neutral language but also to inspire students to do so to create a favorable atmosphere for education.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Важливе значення в педагогіці має використання мови, а особливо звертань учителів до студентів, адже вони працюють з великою кількістю людей та від них залежить, яке відношення один до одного буде в подальшому, вони подають приклад та створюють сприятливу атмосферу в групі. У подальшому студенти відтворюють це також у повсякденному житті та в міжособистісних стосунках. Тож у 21 сторіччі почали більше звертати на це увагу та бути толерантними, взаємно ввічливими, цінувати особистий простір та вибір сексуальної орієнтації й статі. Дослідження проводилося шляхом анонімного анкетування 300 іноземних студентів (в основному з Індії, Нігерії, Марокко та Замбії) 1 та 2 курсу Запорізького державного медичного університету, які навчаються англійською мовою, та 15 викладачів того ж університету (з різних кафедр), які викладають англійською мовою. За результатами дослідження виявилось, що викладачі мають низький рівень обізнаності про гендерно-нейтральні знаменники в англійській мові. Причиною може бути те, що англійська мова для них не рідна і не є їх основним предметом та об'єктом підвищеного інтересу. Також викладачі мають сталі чоловічі чи жіночі ролі, будучи психологічно та соціально зрілими. Більшість студентів навпаки не тільки обізнані про гендерно-нейтральні займенники, а й вже готові їх використовувати на заняттях та в повсякденному житті. Також більшість студентів згодні з твердженням, що викладачі відіграють важливу роль у розповсюдженні гендерно-нейтральної мови. Як висновки, запропоновано організувати курси для викладачів та розробити методичні рекомендації, переглянути матеріали до занять задля використання гендерно-недетермінованої мови. Крім того, слід заохочувати вчителів не лише використовувати гендерно нейтральну мову, а й надихати на це учнів, наприклад, починати вступне заняття на курсі зі знайомства з вказанням займенника, який відображає їх гендерний статус та запитувати студентів про їх імена та займенники, за якими вони б хотіли щоб до них звертались.

Ключові слова: гендерно-нейтральні займенники, англійська мова, викладачі, рівність, іноземні студенти.