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Can I Call You “They”? Pronoun Preference and Linguistic Ideology of Gay Language Teachers

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Abstract

This study focused on examining the pronoun preferences of gay language teachers. The generic pronoun “he”, the nonbinary pronouns “he or she” and “they”, and the neopronouns “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze” were included. The participants ranked them from their least preferred pronoun to their most preferred pronoun. This set of data was analyzed through the use of frequency count. The results showed that most of the participants preferred the pronoun “he or she”. In addition, their linguistic ideologies were also drawn out based from their attitude expressed toward pronouns. They were analyzed using the mean scale and frequency count was utilized for the descriptive statistics. The results revealed that most of the respondents are leaning towards having LGBTQ affirmative ideology. However, the data also showed that there are respondents who are leaning towards having two linguistic ideologies instead of only one.

Keywords: Generic Pronouns, Nonbinary pronouns, Neopronouns, Linguistic Ideology.

1. Introduction

Pronouns have remained to be a fascinating inquiry in linguistics. In grammar, the main purpose of a pronoun is to replace a noun. In speech or writing, if you keep on using the same noun, it would appear to be redundant or unnatural; hence, a pronoun is also used to refer to a noun that has already been mentioned. It may also refer to a noun that is not specifically named. Beyond the linguistic side, pronoun choice or preference can be a means of identity, a symbol of linguistic rights, or a basis for an ideology.

1.1 Generic and Nonbinary Pronouns

Conventionally, the generic pronoun “he” is used to represent a typical male referent. For example: John remembered that he left his leaves in the car. For a typical female referent, we use the pronoun she. For example: Jessica mentioned that she will process her admission requirements. On the other hand, issues arise when the referents have a neutral gender or an unknown gender. For example: A student said that ___ wants to go out of the classroom. Spender (1980) mentioned that in general, men will most likely to advocate the use of masculine generic pronoun to protect and secure their socio-economic gains and maintain their superiority, both socially and economically. This means that based on the given assumption, most men may use the generic pronoun he to complete the sentence. On the other hand, feminists would argue that there is a lack of women representation in this explanation. Feminists view masculine generic instances as a “discriminatory, gendered-practice” rather than being “a neutrally arbitrary grammatical convention” (Silverstein, 1985). For this reason, they would choose to use nonbinary pronouns “he or she” and the singular “they”. This means that feminists would rather have “he or she” or “they” to complete the given sample sentence earlier.

Relevant studies revealed a variety of results with regard to pronoun usage and preference. In the study of Earp (2012) wherein 64 participants were asked to write about “The Moral Individual”, the results revealed that “he” and “he or she” were among the most used pronouns. On the other hand, LaScotte (2016) noted that in his study, the singular “they” is the most commonly used pronoun. This conclusion was made after 38 participants completed

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the survey about “The Ideal Student”. Even though scholars have provided arguments that the singular pronoun “they” have been used by many renowned writers like Chaucer and Shakespeare (Balhorn (2004); however, traditionalists still view it as ungrammatical and inappropriate because its conception as a non-binary pronoun is relatively new (Wayne, 2005).

In response to this kind of dilemma, the seventh edition of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association 2019 (APA) has endorsed the scholarly use of the singular pronoun “they” when referring to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context. “They” may also be used when referring to a specific, known person who uses “they” as their pronoun. APA (2019) mentioned that the use of the singular “they” promotes inclusivity of all of all people and helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender. However, using the singular pronoun creates a confusion. APA (2019) set a guideline that the pronoun “they” still takes a plural verb. This is exemplified in the following sentence: A student wanted their project to be returned immediately. They think it needs to have immediate feedback from the teacher. This usage creates confusion in grammar and meaning.

More interestingly, the issues on pronoun do not end with the lack of women representation or the legitimacy of the singular pronoun “they”. A more recent issue on linguistic rights specifically pronoun representation is anchored on the LGBTQ community. Calvente (2018) stated in his study that language has the power to create new pronouns, words and concepts, but at the same time, to construct identities. Likewise, language has the power to create more visibility for individuals outside of the norm. In 2019, British singer and song writer Sam Smith has changed his pronoun on Twitter to “they”. This has caused a boost of acknowledgement of the nonbinary people and the LGBTQ in general. Greene (2019), on the other hand, mentioned that there is a presence of irony in it. If “they” is meant to designate a nonbinary person, then the use of “they” significantly biases the reader about the subject’s sex. Moreover, if the pronoun “they” is considered to be inclusive of all people, then it is not particularly useful for helping nonbinary people or people identified as LGBTQ.

1.2 Muted Group Theory

Edwin and Shirley (1975) proposed The Muted group theory (MGT) as stated in Bertulfo (2019). MGT focuses on how marginalized groups are muted and excluded via the use of language. The “muted” group or subordinated group is relative to the dominant group. At the start, MTG highlights the traditionally muted voices of women in research, a consequence of men conducting the majority of social scientific studies and not intentionally seeking out women’s voices when gathering information (Forst, 2015). Recently, MTG has widened its scope to include other marginalized identities, such as race, class, and sexual orientation (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). In fact, MTG has been used to include the LGBTQ community. In her study, Bertulfo (2019) stated that the gist of MGT is that language serves its creators better than those in other groups who have to learn to use the language as best they can. The term “mutedness” refers to a group’s inability to express themselves due to this inequity. The theory describes the relationship between a dominant group and its subordinate group(s) where the dominant group contributes mostly to

the formulation of the language system, including the norms and vocabulary, and members from the subordinate group have to learn and use the dominant language to express themselves. It might be observed that there have been modifications on the acceptance of some nouns to promote gender neutrality or gender inclusivity; however, there are still some lexical categories that need adjustment to accommodate the needs or linguistic rights of the “muted” groups.

1.3 Neopronouns

The demand for equal linguistic rights for LGBTQ people who are considered a muted group has caused a movement to popularize and further legitimize the novel pronouns called neopronouns. Neopronouns might still be unheard of or might appear as new in some contexts because it still has to reach a certain level of mainstream usage. Blevins (2018) defined neopronouns as new categories of pronouns in replacement to “he or she” or “they” especially when referring to LGBTQ people. Blevins (2018) added that like all pronouns, neopronouns are personal to each individual who uses them, but they all share one thing in common: people who use neopronouns do so to feel comfortable and have their humanity acknowledged and respected. Examples of neopronouns are ey, ne, ve, xe, ze (Blevins, 2018). The University of North Florida LGBTQ Center (2019) listed these neopronouns: xe, ey, zie, ve, per, sie, ne. According to Elverson (1975), for other neopronouns might seem to be new; however, the “ey/em/eir” was created in 1975 by Christine M. Elverson to replace “he/him/his” and “she/her/hers.” In fact, it was published by the Chicago Association of Business Communicators as the winning entry in a contest looking for an alternative to the gendered pronouns. McGaughey (2020) explained that Elverson described this set as “transgender pronouns” and came up with the three words by dropping “th” from “they/them/there.” McGaughey (2020) added another historical account for neopronouns. He mentioned that the neopronoun set “ne/nis/nir” originated in the 1850s; however, the record on this brief experiment goes silent not until the recent months that these pronouns have gradually regained its popularity and usage.

Fortunately, recent studies about neopronouns specifically acceptance and preference have contributed to the dearth of data available about LGBTQ pronoun usage, preference, attitudes, and acceptability. In the study of Bradley et al (2019), the results of an online survey participated by 96 participants showed that the use of singular “they” is rated more grammatical compared with the neopronoun ze. Approximately 80% of 136 participants from the study of Lund Eide (2018) reported the willingness to use nonbinary pronoun “they” while only about 50% were reportedly willing to employ neopronouns “xe”, “zie”, “ze”, and “ey”. Based on the study of Parker (2017), the LGBTQ participants rated the singular pronoun “they” more natural than the neopronouns; however, nonbinary participants rated neopronouns more natural than other participants. In the context of the Philippines, a study by Bertulfo (2019) on the acceptance of neopronouns revealed that 45% of the respondents who were third year Teacher Education English majors felt the need to add new sets of pronouns specifically neopronouns “ne”, “ve”, “ey”, “xe”, “ze” while 25% felt there is no need to add new pronouns and 30 % of the respondents are undecided. In addition, Bertulfo (2019)

also inquired whether the participants showed the willingness to use a new pronoun to refer to themselves. 25% of them said yes while 35% stated that they do not agree, and 40% were undecided. 30% percent were willing to use new pronouns to refer to others while 35% were not willing to use new pronouns in referring to others, and 35% of the participants were undecided. Moreover, 45% of the participants felt that the use of gender-neutral pronouns obstruct meaning while 20% said that it will not, and 35% were undecided.

1.4 Linguistic Ideology

In the lens of sociolinguistics and language teaching, these issues on pronouns present a clear gap that need to be filled. Anchored on pronoun issues like linguistic right, pronoun preference is a diverse set of linguistic ideologies. Linguistic ideology has recently become a central topic in social sciences including linguistics (sociolinguistics) and linguistic anthropology among several other fields (Abudalbah, 2012). Language ideology as broadly defined by (Kroskrity, 2004:496) as “thoughts about language in relation to social context” was classified by (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Kroskrity, 2004) in terms of the primary emphasis they place on speakers’ agency and awareness, interest group, or the relationship between linguistic and sociocultural systems.

As far as pronouns as concerned, the study of Abudalbah (2012) has observed two distinct yet not sharply defined language ideologies. One linguistic ideology is the traditional-prescriptive ideology that advocates for the use of masculine or generic pronoun “he” for generic and epicene reference. This is exemplified in the following set of sentences. The student passed his project on time. He even exceeded the required number of pages.

Another linguistic ideology mentioned in the study of Abudalbah (2012) was fair language ideology. People who advocate for this ideology would most likely to use “he or she” or “they” for an inclusive language. “He or she” may be used to a generic antecedent like what is exemplified in the following sentence. One has to promise that he or she will follow all the rules of the committee. Hernandez (2020) provided clear contexts for the use of “they”. One is the generic context wherein “they” is used to refer to an antecedent whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. An example would be: Someone mentioned that they will provide all the food. Another is the queer context wherein “they” is used to refer to an antecedent who prefers to use “they” and whose gender is identified as LGBTQ. An example would be: Sam said that they will personally give a huge amount of donation. In this context, Sam is identified as gay and chooses to use the pronoun “they”.

Proponents of fair language ideology regard the use of masculine generics as untrue, unfair, or both (Cameron, 1990). Pauwels (1988) highlighted that fair language is of

great importance in terms of women empowerment and their visibility in the society. This is a solid proof that the people who rally behind this ideology are not people identified as LGBTQ. They are feminists or women in general driven by Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Muhlhausler & Harre, 1990).

Beyond these two linguistic ideologies is another linguistic ideology closely related to a “muted group” LGBTQ. Having only these two ideologies while there is a rise for the inclusion and legitimacy of LGBTQ seems to present a setback that needs to be addressed. While there are no current studies distinctly mentioning LGBTQ affirmative ideology to refer to the willingness and advocacy of using neopronouns to represent the genders beyond male or female, previous studies mentioned the entries of LGBTQ and general participants showing the willingness to use neopronouns and the need to recognize them. Kroskrity (2004) argues that linguistic ideologies “are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker”. Kroskrity (2004) added that linguistic ideology provides an alternative tool to culture “for exploring variation in ideas, ideals, and communicative practices.”

The LGBTQ affirmative ideology is also supported by the current movement that originated among transgender and queer activists and linguists in the 1990s. This movement is not an exclusive inquiry that merely focuses on how language enables the representation of the female gender, but also in a range of gender identities within the sphere of LGBTQ (Zimman 2017). There is now an active promotion of the use of gender-neutral pronouns as a way of diminishing the gender-dichotomy implied by the existing pronominal system. Wayne (2005) revealed that the movements spearheaded by members of the LGBTQ community claims that pronominal system of the English language still highlights gender bias for the reason that there is a lack of gender-neutral pronouns to express a gender identity outside the male/female binary. Therefore, Wayne (2005) further argues that the current English pronominal system prevents people identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer to have appropriate and legal self-representation which leads to enabling the instances of “mis-gendering”. This may result to negative psychological implications for these individuals. Consequently, it is of great importance to continue doing substantial inquiries that would specifically dig deeper into the issues and gaps as regards the pronominal system for the peopled identified as LGBTQ. The LGBTQ affirmative ideology upholds the use of the neopronouns for the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and queer.

This study selected four most popular and most used neopronouns “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze” based on the previous researches. In sentences, they can be used as stated in the following examples shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Neopronouns and Sentence Samples.

Neopronouns	Sentence Sample
ey	Ey does not want to play.
ne	Andy said that ne will be here tomorrow.
xe	Xe can fix the broken cabinet.
ze	Toni promised that ze will pay.

Each neopronoun in Table 1 was used in a sentence. They can be the subject of the sentence or a pronoun to refer to

an antecedent that is identified as LGBTQ. This study only covers neopronouns as subject pronouns; hence, other cases

like objective and possessive cases were not included.

Taking into account the theoretical framework of linguistic ideology and the the researches of Bertulfo (2020), Bradlet (2019), Hernandez (2020), and Parker (2017), the study classified the three linguistic ideologies presented in Table 2. traditional-prescriptive ideology highlights the use of the

generic pronoun “he”. The fair language ideology advocates for “he or she” or the singular pronoun “they”. The proposed LGBTQ affirmative ideology makes use of neopronouns. In this study, the neopronouns used for this ideology are “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze”.

Table 2: List of Pronouns for each Linguistic Ideology.

Traditional-Prescriptive Ideology	Fair Language Ideology	LGBTQ Affirmative Ideology
he	he or she, they	neopronouns (ey, ne, xe, ze)

1.5 Gay Language Teachers

In this study, a gay language teacher is defined as a male language teacher who is emotionally, physically or sexually attracted to another male. The reason for choosing gay language teachers as participants is mainly to contribute to the lack of researches regarding the pronoun preference of language teachers who belong to the sphere of LGBTQ. People identified as LGBTQ qualifies to be a part of muted group. They are muted and excluded via use of language specifically in the context of pronoun options. As of now, there are no legitimate and widely accepted pronouns for the people identified as LGBTQ. Even the pronouns “he or she” and “they” do not provide the adequate representation for them. In fact, Wayne (2017) mentioned in her study that trans-activists suggest that the pronouns “he or she” linguistically enforce a normative two-sex system through assumptions that the trans-subject does and ought to fit into one side of this binary opposition. Wayne (2017) added that a failed match between pronoun and person is treated as a defect of the person, for it is blamed on the individual's failure to express proper sex and/or gender identity instead of being seen as a deficiency of the restrictive pronoun system.

Although there is no official statistics providing the data for the total number of gays and gay language teachers in the Philippines, the country is deemed to be an LGBTQ-friendly country. One reason for this is the liberty and the enjoyment that Filipinos have when watching gay beauty pageants and gay talent shows and going to a variety of gay bars. Some of the contestants and entertainers are also gay professionals and even gay language teachers. On a report by Tubeza (2013) in Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippines earned its worldwide ranking as one of the few countries that are considered gay-friendly. Of the 39 countries covered by a global survey, only 17 countries had majorities that accepted homosexuality, with the Philippines ranking at number 10 among the 17. This remarkable standing of the Philippines emerged despite the fact that the country is considered highly religious.

Having gay language teachers as participants of this study would provide a substantial first-hand information about the pronoun preference of gays as representatives of the LGBTQ community and at the same time the linguistic ideologies of language teachers.

1.6 Research Questions

The issues, concepts, and gaps regarding pronouns create another dilemma in the teaching of English. There are still teachers who might still be prescriptive while there might be teachers who are embracing the singular pronoun “they”. There might be teachers who would consider the

legitimacy the novel pronouns. The gaps and linguistic queries mentioned in the previous parts of this paper were the main reasons why the researcher pursued to conduct research about the pronoun preference and attitude and linguistic ideologies of gay language teachers. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions: 1) What are the pronoun preferences of the the gay language teachers? 2)What linguistic ideologies can be drawn out from the attitude expressed by the gay language teachers toward pronouns?

1.7 Hypothesis

Aligned with the research questions and based on the previous studies mentioned, these hypotheses were formed: 1) In choosing a pronoun, gay language teachers would choose nonbinary pronouns specifically “he or she” or “they”; 2) The attitude expressed by gay language teachers toward pronouns would reflect gender fair language ideology because of the heavy criticisms from the use of generic “he” and the less common usage of the neopronouns.

2. Materials and Method

2.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 22 gay language teachers in Iloilo City. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. The criteria: 1) at least 21 years old; 2) language teacher; 3) openly gay individual; and 4) speaks English as a second language were considered. An informed consent was given to them to understand the depth of the research and their specific participation.

2.2. Data Collection

This quantitative inquiry made use of a survey originally designed by the researcher. The survey instrument was validated by three language experts from three distinguished universities in Iloilo City. It consists of two parts. Part 1 is about the pronoun preferences of the respondents. They were tasked to rank the pronouns “ey”, “he”, “he or she”, “ne”, “they”, “xe”, and “ze” according to their preference. These pronouns are arranged in alphabetical order. Specifically, the participants were asked to rank the pronouns from 1 as their least preferred pronoun to use when referring to them and 7 as their most preferred pronoun to use when referring to them. The part 2 of the study focused on the linguistic ideology of the gay language teachers based on their attitude expressed toward pronouns. A five-point Likert Scale was utilized to analyze the participants' linguistic ideology based on their attitude toward pronouns. 1- Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Neutral; 4-Agree; 5-Strongly Agree. 15 statements dealing

with pronouns were included in this part. Five statements were leading to the traditional-prescriptive ideology. An example of which is: The pronoun “he” should be used when referring to a noun with no definite gender. For example: My student said HE will bring some plants to school. Five statements were also leading to fair language ideology. An example of which is: “He or she” and “they” should be used when the gender of the noun is irrelevant or unknown. There are also five statements leading to LGBTQ affirmative ideology. An example of which is: It is appropriate to use any of the neopronouns when referring to a person identified as LGBTQ. For example: John’s gay friend Michele stated that XE will support the school’s event. Another example: His gay colleague Tony promised that EY will be present tomorrow. These statements were arranged in random order. The survey was conducted online using Google Forms. The links were sent through the emails of the respondents and the data was collected anonymously.

2.3 Data Analysis

To determine the pronoun preferences of the participants, the first part of the survey was analyzed through the use of frequency count. This method of data analysis presents the least preferred pronouns and the most preferred pronouns of the participants. To analyze the linguistic ideology of the participants based on their attitudes expressed toward pronouns, the mean or the arithmetic average set of data was utilized. In addition, frequency count was also employed in part 2 to pave the way for the descriptive data analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

All of the respondents completed the survey questionnaire within the given timeline. Part 1 of the survey responds to Research Question 1: Out of the 22 respondents, the results of the study showed that 9 gay language teachers or 40.91% of the participants prefer to use “he or she” when

referring to them. It is noteworthy to mention that this data emerged despite the recent endorsement of APA (2019) for the scholarly use of the singular pronoun “they”. The result of this study is also in contrary to the findings of the study by LaScotte (2016) wherein the singular pronoun “they” is the most commonly used pronoun. The current study also showed a different result from the research of Blankestijn (2020) wherein the singular “they” is the ultimate pronoun choice when referring to genderless antecedents for most participants, regardless of age or gender, in both free-response and forced-choice situations. Especially in the case of non-specific antecedents, singular “they” is used extensively. The results also venture to suggest a link between ongoing social changes and an explicit awareness that leads participants to use singular “they” as a gender-neutral singular pronoun (Blankestijn, 2020). On the other hand, the finding of this research is supported by the work of Earp (2012) wherein “he or she” emerged as most used pronoun together with the generic pronoun “he”. Based on the data from Table 1, the generic pronoun “he” did not emerge as the most preferred pronoun by the gay language teachers, yet it was not also their least preferred pronoun. The singular pronoun “they” emerged as the second most preferred pronoun by the participants. In this study, it should also be noted that there are 5 gay language teachers or 22.72% of the participants prefer to use the pronoun “they” when referring to them. Meanwhile, 9 gay language teachers or 40.91% of the participants considered “ze” as their least preferred pronoun to use when referring to them. On the one hand, the study of Bertulfo (2020) wherein neopronouns were ranked based on the preference of students, “ze” emerged as the most preferred pronoun of the respondents. According to McNabb (2017) “ze” is one of the most common neopronouns. This finding in the study of McNabb (2017) might be true in some chosen contexts but Hakanen (2021) argues in his corpus study that “ze” was less popular than “xe”.

Table 3: Frequency Count of the Pronoun Preferences Ranked by the Gay Language Teachers.

Pronouns	Frequency Count of The Rank						
	(1 as the least preferred pronoun and 7 as the most preferred pronoun)						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
ey	3	3	11	0	3	0	2
he	3	14	1	0	1	1	2
he or she	0	2	1	4	2	4	9
ne	3	0	3	3	7	5	1
they	2	0	2	2	4	7	5
xe	2	1	2	10	2	4	1
ze	9	2	2	3	3	1	2

Table 3 provides the data of the results and observations of the first part of the survey. Based from the data in Table 3, the pronoun “he or she” gained the top spot. This is followed by the pronouns “they”, “ne”, “xe”, “ey”, “he”, and the pronoun “ze” was ranked the lowest.

Aside from the pronoun preference of the gay language teachers, their linguistic ideology based on their attitude expressed toward pronoun was also examined. Part 2 of the survey responds to Research Question 2: What linguistic ideologies can be drawn out from the attitude expressed by the gay language professionals toward pronouns? Interestingly, Table 4 presents an observation that some respondents are more inclined to only one linguistic ideology; however, there are respondents that actually

leaning towards two linguistic ideologies. If the highest scale is considered as a basis for a respondent’s ideology, it can be observed that most of the gay language teachers 45.45% or 10 over 22 of the respondents are learning towards the LGBTQ affirmative ideology. This promising result is believed to be a start of the the acknowledgement and acceptance of the use of neopronouns to refer to people identified as LGBTQ. This is evidence that almost half of the gay language teachers who participated in the study highly consider neopronouns as appropriate pronouns to represent people identified as LGBTQ. More importantly, this can also be a starting point to navigate further about other concepts, issues, and pivotal inquiries regarding the pronoun preferences, ideologies, and language use of the

LGBTQ. Aligned with this ideology is the movement that neopronouns are needed to promote gender inclusivity of all gender identities. Hekanaho (2020) supports this finding. 62% of the transgender participants in the study of Hekanaho (2020) considered the neopronouns acceptable. On the other hand, this current study revealed that only 4 out of 22 respondents (18.18%) have a traditional-prescriptive ideology. This means that 4 language teachers still consider the generic pronoun “he” as the legitimate and appropriate pronoun to use when referring to a subject or a noun that is not definite in gender, or a subject or a noun whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. This result is also parallel to the studies of Abudalbah (2012), Bradley et.al (2019), and Hekanaho (2020) which gained low turnout of the use of the generic “he” to refer to an a subject with an indefinite gender or a person identified as LGBTQ. Indeed, the movements, issues, and vast studies regarding the generic pronoun “he” makes it now less popular or even obsolete in terms of usage; hence, this is an indication of the acceptance of other pronouns when referring to subject with unknown gender or beyond the male and female gender dichotomy. Furthermore, another analysis from this data revealed that respondents who are inclined to have traditional-prescriptive ideology believe that the pronouns “he or she” and “they” create grammatical ambiguity when used to refer to a subject or a noun that is not definite in gender, or a subject or a noun whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. They expressed unwillingness to have the need of adding new pronouns such as neopronouns “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze” to represent people identified as LGBTQ. Similarly, another 18.18% of the respondents or 4 gay language teachers who participated in the study have a fair language ideology. This means that they are comfortable in using the pronouns “he or she” and “they” to refer to a subject or a noun that is not definite in gender, or a subject or a noun whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. Participants having this ideology also consider “he or she” and “they” as pronouns that can represent people identified

as LGBTQ. This discovery contradicts the study of Bradley et. al (2019) when they revealed that the pronoun “they” is more viable pronoun to refer to subjects with indefinite or nonbinary gender than the pronouns “he” or the neopronoun “ze”. It was further explained in the study that “they” appeared to be gender-neutral, which could represent a difference between the younger and perhaps more progressive sample of their participants. This specific finding of the current study is also a good point of inquiry in comparison to the results of the first part of the survey wherein the participants chose “he or she” and their most preferred pronoun to use when referring to them, and the pronoun “they” emerged as the second most preferred pronoun. These pronouns belong to the fair language ideology, yet based on the early discussions of the second part of the survey, most gay language teachers are into the LGBTQ affirmative ideology which recognizes the use of neopronouns “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze”.

As a matter of interest, an unexpected data emerged from the results. It was noted that there are 4 respondents or another 18.18% of the respondents have both the traditional-prescriptive ideology & fair language ideology. This means that 4 gay language teachers who participated in the study consider these ideologies as something mutual. These four participants find the convenience of using “he or she”, “they”, and the neopronouns, “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze” when referring to a subject or a noun that is not definite in gender, a subject or a noun whose gender is unknown or irrelevant, and a subject or a noun identified as LGBTQ.

Table 4: Mean Scale of the Respondents’ Linguistic Ideologies.

Respondent No.	Traditional-Prescriptive Ideology	Fair Language Ideology	LGBTQ Affirmative Ideology
1	4.6	4.2	4.2
2	3.8	4	4.4
3	2.8	4.4	3.4
4	2	2.2	3.8
5	3	3.2	4.6
6	1.8	2.2	4.2
7	3.8	4.4	5
8	3.6	3.6	3
9	3.4	4.2	1
10	3.2	3	4
11	1.8	1.8	3.8
12	4	3.2	2.2
13	4	4.2	3
14	2.4	3	2
15	3.4	3.4	3.2
16	5	4.4	2.2
17	3.4	2.4	4.8
18	4	4	2.8
19	4.2	4.2	3
20	4.6	3.6	2.2
21	2.4	3.4	3.6
22	3.2	3.4	3.8

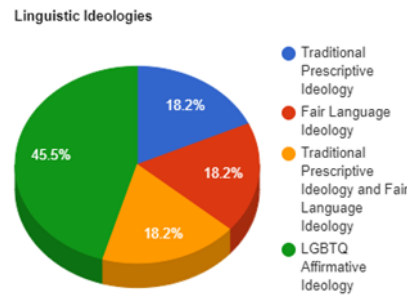


Fig. 1: Pie Chart of the Respondents' Linguistic Ideologies.

Table 4 provides definite details regarding the linguistic ideologies of the gay language teachers while Figure 1 shows that a big percentage of the participants having LGBTQ affirmative ideology.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the pronoun “he or she” was the most preferred pronoun to use by the gay language teachers who participated in the study, and the least preferred pronoun was the neopronoun “ze”. On the other hand, most of them were into the LGBTQ affirmative ideology highlighting that neopronouns “ey”, “ne”, “xe”, and “ze” provide enough representations for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and queer. This research simply sets the stage that pronouns really matter, and neopronouns may actually lead to a gradual acceptance and use if they are backed up by a considerable number of studies. The data also provides evidence that neopronouns are gaining popularity and acknowledgement in the context of the Philippines.

This study could also be a starting point for another sociolinguistic inquiry that covers a wider scope of investigation having a bigger number of participants. It would be of great interest to look into the attitudes of the all-gender identities from sphere of LGBTQ along with the cisgender, straight, and heterosexuals. Other factors like age, social status, education, language exposure, and religion might provide further significant evidences and additional arguments regarding pronouns. Corpus studies might also be of great relevance especially when all possible neopronouns are included to further analyze their usage and acceptability among a variety of language users. Other considerations would be an inquiry about the other cases of neopronouns namely: objective case and possessive case. Aside from pronouns, other related studies like the preferred honorific titles of people identified as LGBTQ could provide a substantive contribution to queer studies.

If the data collected from this study would be augmented by other parallel or similar researches, there would be a solid basis for crafting language policies and language programs not only in the academe but also in the general public. This is a way of doing advanced-thinking as far as language is concerned knowing that language continues to evolve and would certainly affect communication, identities, ideologies, and linguistic rights.

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