

Genderqueerness in Polish: A Survey-Based Study of Linguistic Strategies Employed by Genderqueer Speakers of Polish

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Abstract : The genderqueer (or gender non-binary, both terms referring to those individuals who are identified as neither men nor women) community has been gaining greater visibility over the last few years. This includes legal recognition, representation in popular media, and inclusion of non-binary perspectives in research on transgender issues. Another important aspect of visibility is language. Gender-neutrality, often associated with genderqueer people, is relatively easy to achieve in natural-gender languages such as English. This can be observed in the growing popularity of the 'singular they' pronoun (used specifically with reference to genderqueer individuals) or the gender-neutral title 'Mx.' (as an alternative to 'Ms./Mr.'). 'Singular they' seems to have become a certain standard in the genderqueer community. Grammatical-gender languages, such as Polish, provide for a greater challenge to genderqueer speakers. In Polish, every noun is inherently gendered, while verbs, adjectives, and pronouns inflect for gender. Those who do not wish to settle for using only either masculine or feminine forms (which some genderqueer Polish speakers do choose) have to somehow mix the two, attempt to avoid gendered forms altogether, or turn to non-standard forms, such as neuter (not used for people in standard Polish), plurals (vaguely akin to English 'singular they'), or neologisms (such as verb forms using the '-u-' affix). The following paper presents the results of a survey conducted among genderqueer speakers of Polish regarding their choice of linguistic strategies. As no definitive standard such as 'singular they' has (yet) emerged, it rather seeks to emphasize the diversity of chosen strategies and their relation to a person's specific identity as well as the context an exchange takes place. The findings of the study may offer an insight into how heavily gendered languages deal with non-normatively gendered experiences, and to what extent English influences this process (e.g., the majority of genderqueer poles choose English terms to label their identity), as well as help design good practices aimed at achieving gender-equality in speech.

Keywords : genderqueer, grammatical gender in Polish, non-binary, transgender

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