

Final Report: They, Hirsself, Em, and YOU: Nonbinary pronouns in theory and practice

They, Hirsself, Em, and YOU: Nonbinary pronouns in theory and practice (THEY 2019) took place from June 11-13, 2019, at Queen's University. The topic of the conference was the use of nonbinary pronouns in English, and the work presented spanned descriptions of current use of and attitudes towards nonbinary pronouns, prospects for future change, and advocacy regarding public education.

The conference was a great success, spurring conversations across disciplinary lines, and prompting smaller working groups on a range of non-scholarly outputs, to be developed through the 2019-2020 academic year.

In terms of the conference itself, the three days included four keynote presentations (open to the public, and held in Speaker's Corner of Stauffer Library), 17 regular research presentations across 6 sessions, and 3 working sessions on post-conference outputs. The peak in-person attendance was 45 (on Wednesday June 12); the conference was also webcast online via Zoom, and the peak remote attendance was 22. Attendees included Queen's faculty, staff, and students (graduate and undergraduate), as well as students and professors from other institutions, and participants from outside the academy.

The four keynote talks were given by invited junior scholars (two currently PhD students); the talks were open to the public, and were consequently held in the Speaker's Corner in Stauffer Library, a space that is more easily found by members of the public than many other spaces at Queen's.

More information on the conference, including the full conference program, can be found at <https://educ.queensu.ca/they2019>

To make the conference as a whole more accessible, we chose to make it possible to attend remotely. To this end we purchased a one-month subscription to Zoom (zoom.us), and a peripheral webcam. Remote attendees received a link to a Zoom meeting for each conference session; a conference discussion forum was set up using the workplace service Slack (slack.com). Feedback from remote participants was highly positive: people who were unable to travel to the workshop for personal or financial reasons reported that the combination of a webcast and a meaningful forum for discussion resulted in valuable conversations, both on Slack and on Twitter (where several participants, remote and in-person, livetweeted the conference using the hashtag #THEY2019).

Also with an eye towards accessibility, the conference provided breakfast and lunch on all three days of the conference, and provided limited housing for student presenters (via shared rooms in the Queen's Residences summer accommodations). We had hoped to instead accommodate student presenters via billets, but due to a lack of billet hosts we ended up paying for accommodations for 4 presenters (2 rooms).

During the conference, there was extended opportunity for planning and discussion of conference outputs. These fall into two categories:

1. Scholarly output: We are planning two special journal issues, bringing together research presented during the conference. The venues for these issues will be finalized by the end of August 2019.

2. Non-scholarly outputs: A major goal of the conference was to create useful resources on nonbinary pronouns. It was not possible to finalize these products during the conference, and so working groups were established for each of the following projects:
 1. Group 1: Slide deck and teaching resources on NB pronouns for an introductory undergraduate Linguistics course
 2. Group 2: Slide deck and teaching resources on NB pronouns for ESL/EFL classes
 3. Group 3: MOOC for those seeking to develop fluency in singular they/them for a known person
 4. Group 4: MOOC for those seeking to change pronouns for someone in their life
 5. Group 5: FAQ / fact sheet about NB pronouns (etc.)
 6. Group 6: Tactical tips for speaking with refusers / advocating for NB pronoun use (e.g., when dealing with a prescriptivist or referentialist)
 7. Group 7: Tactical tips for maing 'top-down' vs. 'bottom-up' NB language change in your space
 8. Group 8: Tips for classroom pronoun practices

These groups are in coordination via email, via a listserv created after the conference. We plan on 4 larger virtual meetings over the coming year, with representatives from each of these sub-groups, to coordinate progress. We also aim to create a website “clearinghouse” for the various resources being created by the groups.

While there is a remaining balance (\$875.89) on the conference budget, we expect this to be spent in the coming year on expenses relating to the conference outputs. Projected expenses include graphic design, creation of a central website, and editing.