

## Neopronoun agreement in languages with grammatical gender and nominal concord

**Background:** Neopronouns are 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular pronouns that individuals who identify as trans, non-binary, agender, gender fluid, etc. use to represent their gender identities. Much of the discussion of neopronouns has taken place in English (Kirby 2022; Rose et al. 2023; Bradley 2023; Evans 2023). However, English lacks nominal concord, where we would find evidence for gender features. English is not particularly well-suited to explore the grammatical structures of neopronouns, because in English neopronouns may not be pronouns at all (Norris 2017). For example, we expect that a neopronoun should have  $\phi$ -features that trigger such concord in adjectives or determiners. An easy place to detect these features is in predicate adjective constructions, as this is where a pronoun can agree with an adjective. This project adds to the literature on the formal properties of neopronouns (Kirby 2022, Konnelly et al. 2023, Bjorkman 2017) by soliciting neopronouns in predicate adjective constructions in a wide variety of languages with nominal concord in order to infer the formal features of the pronoun. We predict that neopronouns will be underspecified for gender, which means that they will surface with whichever gender is unmarked (masculine in most languages in our survey).

**Preliminary results:** The first language we have preliminary results for is Canadian French,

1. a. J'ai un chat noir. where predicate adjectives agree for number and gender with the subject of the sentence (1a, b). Canadian French speakers were asked to produce these utterances with a masculine pronoun (*il*), a feminine pronoun (*elle*), and a
- 1SG.have 3M.SG.indef cat.M.SG black-M.SG  
*I have a black cat.*
- b. J'ai une souris grise.  
1SG.have F.SG.indef mouse.F.SG grey-F.SG

neopronoun (*iel*). They are also asked to produce an equivalent of English singular 'they' (Bjorkman 2017) if possible within their grammar (2a-d). Preliminary results yielded two outcomes: 1) As predicted, the neopronouns default to masculine agreement, suggesting that masculine is indeed underspecified for gender and thus allows gender-neutral pronouns.

2. a. John est mon ami. Il est gentil.  
John be.SG poss.M.SG friend.M.SG 3M.SG be.3SG kind-M.SG  
*John is my friend. He is kind.*
- b. Mary est mon amie. Elle est gentille.  
Mary be.SG poss.F.SG friend.F.SG 3F.SG be.3SG kind-F.SG  
*Mary is my friend. She is kind.*
- c. Jessie est mon ami(e). Il/elle est gentil(le).  
Jessie be.SG poss.M(F).SG friend.M(F).SG 3M/F.SG be.3SG kind-M(F).SG  
*Jessie is my friend. They are kind.*
- d. Jessie est mon ami. Iel est gentil.  
Jessie be.SG poss.M.SG friend.M.SG NEO.SG be.3SG kind-M.SG  
*Jessie is my friend. Iel is kind.*

2) Some speakers who are not used to using neopronouns or unspecified gender have ineffability in such constructions. This suggests that neopronouns do not have the  $\phi$ -features with which to agree are therefore not real pronouns within their grammatical architecture. This is especially interesting we do not even find a default, as we would expect with any novel nominal. If we find these results in other languages, it calls into question the reality of a default or underspecified gender in feature hierarchies such as described in Harley & Ritter (2002).

## Works Cited

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