

At the Intersection of Language and Gender: Spanish-English Bilingualism and Nonbinary Identity

As the rate of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary rises, the public's awareness and understanding of diverse gender identities are expanding (Jones, 2022). Many of those who do not identify as a man or woman, often self-identifying as nonbinary, gender non-conforming, or genderqueer, feel that binary language such as the pronouns "he" and "she" don't reflect their identities accurately. This presents a linguistic challenge for most languages. In English, we have the controversial but somewhat accepted, "singular they" pronoun. Although disputed by some, this use of "they" in a singular sense has been in use since the 14th century (OED, 2022). Therefore, the shift towards gender-neutral language in English has been easier than that in languages where gender is more deeply embedded such as Spanish.

Spanish uses a system called grammatical gender. It is a system utilized by about half of the world's languages (Corbett, 2013). It assigns nouns, pronouns, and adjectives to categories based on their "gender," a grammatical value that can be related to the meaning of the noun (*la mujer* [woman]: feminine), but can also be arbitrary (*el libro* [book]: masculine). Languages can have any number of genders, up to twenty, but Spanish has only two: masculine and feminine (Corbett, 2013).

In light of the growing queer community, Spanish speakers face a dilemma. There is no option to refer to someone in a way that is simultaneously grammatically correct and gender-neutral. Some solutions to this challenge have been proposed, but few have gained significant traction in Spanish-speaking communities and many have caused controversy (Salinas, 2020). The two most widely used innovations are the "neomorphemes" -e and -x (López). These are used in place of the -a and -o morphemes that typically denote grammatical gender in Spanish. The -x is used virtually only in academia and activist spaces, as some argue that it is difficult to pronounce, impractical, and out of touch (Salinas, 2020). Some, like activist James Lee, argue that the -e is more rooted in the Spanish language and already exists in gender-neutral words such as "estudiante" (2021).

The lack of a neutral mainstream form leads to constant misgendering. Misgendering occurs when one refers to someone as a gender that they don't identify with. It's a form of "identity misclassification," an experience that has been shown through past research to have negative psychological effects on its victims because it undermines the human needs for belonging and coherence (McLemore, 2013). Highly influential scholar on language and gender, Judith Butler, has argued in their work that gender is a performance, not a natural fact, and that we use language to construct our performance of gender (1990). Considering language's clear impact on identity formation, the question of the nonbinary subject becomes even more pertinent.

Even outside of the realm of language, nonbinary people must cope with the delegitimization of their identities often because of "the pervasive societal perception that there are only two genders — male and female —" (Hernandez, 2022). This delegitimization can be even worse for those who are Hispanic. Due to the traditionally conservative and family-oriented

religious and cultural values of Latinx culture (Akerlund, 2000), some research has suggested that “Hispanic sexual minorities have the highest number of negative reactions from parents regarding their sexual orientation” (Richter, 2017).

Despite the many harmful linguistic and cultural factors that impact Hispanic nonbinary people, research on Hispanic LGBT people is severely lacking and research on nonbinary Hispanic people is practically nonexistent. I would like to remedy this deficit by investigating the lived experiences of nonbinary Hispanic people through detailed interviews. I plan to interview five participants via Zoom and inand discuss their experiences with identity construction, language innovation, and acceptance, in both Spanish and English. They will be compensated with a \$30 Visa gift card for their time. I believe that everyone deserves their existence to be validated and to feel seen and heard. With this research, I aim to learn from the practices that nonbinary Hispanic people employ to help them to feel visible and comfortable.

Works Cited

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Timeline

October 2022

- Develop interview questions and protocol

November 2022

- Submit for IRB approval (11/2)
- Begin searching for participants

December 2022- January 2023

- Complete literature review
- Conduct interviews

February 2023- April 2023

- Conduct analyses and synthesize results
- Present research at Undergraduate Research Conference and Thesis Forum

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Budget Narrative

I am requesting \$164.75 for my project. I would like to provide an incentive to participants to help with recruitment. I believe that \$30 per person is fair compensation for an hour to an hour and a half of an interviewee's time.

Description	Details	Quantity	Cost
Participant Compensation	A \$30 reward for interviewees	5	\$150
Gift Card Fee	Visa gift cards have a \$2.95 fee	5	\$14.75
Total Cost			\$164.75

SKILLS:

- Fluent in conversational Spanish (8 years of education)
- Customer service communication
- Cash handling (2 years experience)
- Fluent in Academic/ Technical writing
- Extensive artistic background

WORK EXPERIENCE:

Cashier and Curbside- H-E-B Grocery Store February 2020 - May 2022
(Austin #28 and San Marcos #1, respectively)
Provided a friendly and efficient checkout for customers and delegated responsibilities during peak hours. Shopped and organized orders for curbside pickup. Worked on average 20 hours per week.

EDUCATION:**Texas State University**

Expected Graduation: December 2023

BA in Anthropology (in progress)

GPA: 4.0

BA in Spanish (in progress)

Honors Studies Minor (in progress)

Honors College

Fall 2020- Present

Dean's List

Fall 2020- Present

Placed 2nd at Undergraduate TXST Anthropology Research Conference

May 2022

James Bowie High School - Austin, TX

August 2016 - May 2020

High School Diploma

- Ranked 93rd out of 665 - top 15%
- Active on Lacrosse Team and Spanish and Art Honor Societies