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Poles' Attitudes Towards Gender-Neutral Language

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**Postawy Polaków
wobec języka neutralnego płciowo**

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Streszczenie

Celem pracy jest zaprezentowanie postaw Polaków wobec języka neutralnego płciowo oraz wobec lingwistycznych problemów, które kontrastują z dzisiejszym dążeniem do inkluzywności czy poprawności politycznej związanej z płcią. W polskim społeczeństwie temat ten jest stosunkowo nowy, jednak braki w języku zdają się nagłać, biorąc pod uwagę dyskryminację, z jaką zmagają się osoby niebinarne. Mimo że feminizm lingwistyczny zdaje się być coraz bardziej akceptowany przez Polaków, problem języka neutralnego nie został jeszcze dostatecznie zaprezentowany. Badanie przeprowadzone w tej pracy ma na celu zbadać nastawienie Polaków do danych rozwiązań językowych używanych przez osoby niebinarne. Wyniki wskazują, że wiele ludzi nie uważa języka polskiego za dyskryminujący, jednak większość nie wyklucza opcji używania języka neutralnego, gdyby został oficjalnie wprowadzony.

Słowa kluczowe: język neutralny płciowo, inkluzywność płciowa, postawy wobec mowy nieheteronormatywnej, rozwiązania neutralne płciowo w języku polskim

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1. Introduction

The way we perceive people and their genders reflects our reality and the way we speak. While it may be viewed as a simple matter, cultural changes show the constant need to adjust languages to people's needs. One of the challenges with which some languages are faced is the notion of grammatical gender and how it moderates our understanding. For ages our society revolved only around two genders: male and female. Nevertheless, that does not mean that nonbinary people were absent during these times. The way we perceive the notion of genders is grounded in the grammatical rules of our native language, which is the tool that forms us (Gygax et al., 2019). However, the Polish language, which is highly gendered, may occur to some as discriminative not only with regard to male and female but also in the gender-neutral field. In today's world there emerges the omnipresent notion of gender-inclusivity which incites some countries to address this issue officially, e.g., France and Sweden. Languages like Polish particularly need to adjust to the modern needs of gender-inclusivity so as not to be behind the curve.

While the subject of gender-neutral language (GNL), also known as non-gendered language, gender-inclusive language or inclusive language, started gaining attention in the mid-1960s, it was only recently that it sparked heated debates and gained visibility in public discourse, mass media and social media (Bonnin & Coronel, 2021). GNL is an important matter because it reduces discrimination and stereotyping. It diminishes gender asymmetries in society and make all people representant (Sczesny et al., 2016). In many languages, as in Polish, masculine gender used to refer to people of all genders, which influences the way we view reality and as a result distorts the idea of linguistic feminism, a philosophy which concerns introducing feminine forms as an opposition to the "false gender-neutral" masculine forms (Saul et al., 2022), and gender-inclusivity, as the form introduced represents predominantly males (Formanowicz & Sczesny, 2016). Essentially, nowadays masculine gender is proven not to be interpreted as entirely gender-neutral (Szuba, 2019). Therefore, the lack of presence of all people and genders in the linguistic sphere stresses the need and pushes the boundaries of languages so that new solutions are introduced.

Although in some countries the attitude towards GNL is positive and neutral forms are widely accepted, in Poland the debate is ongoing and still very recent. Many languages have already adapted to the new reality and have accepted new sets of rules. Some other languages, like Chinese and Persian, are already gender-neutral since they do not assign a gender to nouns or

already have a gender-neutral form for people by default (Berger, 2019), but in Polish, it is not a standardised matter.

Thus, this thesis presents the results of a survey conducted in April 2022 on attitudes towards GNL in Poland. Through this research, I would like to examine people's acceptability of and willingness to use gender-inclusive solutions, as well as which solutions are the most accepted by Poles.

2. Gender marking in languages

Gender is the main determinant of the noun's particular morphological form and its adjectival modifier or determiner, as well as the form of the personal pronouns(s) substituting for the noun (Mańczak-Wohlfeld & Willim, 1997, pp. 103-106). "Gender marking is a way of signalling that a linguistic expression refers to masculine, feminine or neuter" (Doleschal, 2015, p. 1159). Various linguistic means serve to mark it, e.g., attributive adjectives, conjugated verbs or pronouns. As stated by Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2012), there are three groups of languages: *genderless languages* (e.g., Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian) which do not use grammatical gender, *natural gender languages* (e.g., English, Swedish, Norwegian) in which nouns are gendered according to the biological sex of their referents, and *grammatical gender languages* (e.g., Spanish, Italian, German, Polish). Gygax et al. (2016, 2019) add two more types to the aforementioned ones: *genderless languages with a few traces of grammatical gender* in which most personal nouns as well as personal pronouns are used without (in most cases) distinct linguistic forms indicating the sex of referent (e.g., Oriya, Basque) and *languages with a combination of grammatical gender and natural gender* which have a grammatical distinction for inanimate nouns and a few personal nouns, while the rest of them are of natural gender (e.g. Dutch). These types of gender marking used in speech conveys "hidden message" that creates an idea of people in society and influences our understanding of certain matters connected to genders (Doleschal, 2015, pp. 1159-1162).

2.1. Gender marking in English

The English language is one of the natural gendered languages; therefore, its concept of grammatical gender corresponds to the biological sex of the referent (Maciuszek et al., 2019). As described in Mańczak-Wohlfeld and Willim (1997, pp. 103-106), gender is not reflected in inflectional morphology; however, some nouns might have derivational affixes, therefore the notion of genders is reflected in some nouns. For example, some feminine nouns are derived with the suffix *-ess*, as in *waitress*, the prefix *he-* marks nouns with a male referent, as in *he-goat*, and analogically the prefix *she-* marks nouns with a female referent, as in *she-wolf* (Baron, 1986, p. 16). Some nouns are of dual-gender, hence referring to both female and male, such as *student* or *parent*. Another type of gender is a *common gender* that may use all of the gender markings and be personalized. Examples of such nouns may refer to a country or a ship, which occasionally may be called *she*.

For many years, grammarians have treated the masculine gender as the most important one. They assumed that it was the normal, or unmarked, gender and that all English nouns were masculine unless specially marked. This doctrine justifies the usage of masculine nouns and pronouns to stand for both sexes (Baron, 1986, pp. 20-23). Nonetheless, nowadays, gender-neutral language and pronouns such as *they/them* are more and more frequently used when the gender of the referent is unknown.

2.2. Gender marking in Polish

Polish is a much more gendered language than English. The grammatical gender system is based on three main gender categories in the singular (masculine, feminine and neutral), conveyed with the help of personal pronouns (respectively *ten/on*, *ta/ona*, *to/ono*). In the plural, there are two genders – masculine personal (*ci/oni*) and non-masculine personal (*te/one*) (Maciuszek et al., 2019, p. 2). Animate referents can be described using the pronouns mentioned above, and they usually correspond to the natural sex distinctions, with an exception of nouns denoting the young of the species (e.g., *szczenię* [En. “puppy”], *dziecko* [En. “child”]) or a diminutive (e.g., *chłopcę* [En. “young boy”]) and augmented forms (e.g., *babsko* [En. “virago”]) which are all of neuter gender. The natural gender is marked with the determiners *ten*, *ta*, *to* standing in front of a noun (Mańczak-Wohlfeld & Willim, 1997, p. 105). Inanimate objects can use any of the grammatical genders, e.g., *the tomato* is *ten pomidor* [masculine], *the berry* is *ta jagoda* [feminine], and *the apple* is *to jabłko* [neuter]).

Nevertheless, the concept of gender is often arbitrary due to its dependency on morphological considerations on the basis of the aforementioned exceptions concerning animate nouns as well as discrepancies among inanimate nouns. Some objects denoting one idea may have more than one gender depending on the word used – e.g., the words *house* and *hut* in Polish can be either masculine – *dom* (En. “a home”), and feminine – *chalupa* (En. “a hut”). Polish has derivational suffix marking, for example feminine nouns usually end with *-a* (*kanapa* [En. “sofa”]), *-ka* (*aktorka* [En. “actress”]), *-yni* (*dozorczyni* [En. “doorkeeper”]), *-ica* (*siostrzenica* [En. “niece”]); masculine has suffixes such as *-or*, as in *aktor* (En. “actor”).

Other parts of speech following or preceding a noun which have to be in agreement with its gender are demonstrative pronouns, adjectives, verbs and numerals. Gender influences declension and conjugation. For this reason, gender-neutral language in Polish is a complex matter as it is almost impossible not to use any gender markings in daily speech. One would

have to take precaution not to be gender-exclusive or be mindful of the existence of gender-inclusive linguistic solutions used by non-binary people.

Nonetheless, this subject is still relatively new to Polish people; therefore, not many of them know that some may view gendered speech as discriminative. The use of a generic masculine as a way to not state gender highlights the asymmetry and the existence of the problem with the Polish language. This obviously reduces the availability of genders other than male in society, thus people's understanding of reality, not only of women but also of non-binary people (Formanowicz & Szczesny, 2016).

3. Gender-inclusivity in languages

Gender-inclusivity still raises heated debates; however, more and more people start to see importance in language choices, as they influence their understanding of society. While at first research focused on the language used to refer to women, currently many languages are entering into a new realm which is gender-neutrality.

In Poland, gender-neutralization was a preferred strategy after the Second World War, as communist rules encouraged an egalitarian view on every person. However, it was not the same, as the language currently spoken by non-binary people. Poles believed that using masculine nouns to refer to or address women raised their status (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019; Woźniak, 2014, as cited in Kielkiewicz-Janowiak, 2019, p. 145). Yet, nowadays, the use of generic masculine is not apt in many situations (e.g. political sphere, formal meetings), as it diminishes visibility of people of other genders (Stahlberg et al., 2007, as cited in Szczesny et al., 2016, p. 7). Awareness on the subject has been growing in Poland for decades, nevertheless, the matter has not been met with official statement from a competent authority.

The subject of actual gender-neutrality is a new debate in the Polish language; however, in other languages, neutrality has become omnipresent officially or semi-officially (e.g., Swedish introduction of gender-neutral third-person pronoun *hen*, or a recent introduction of the pronoun *iel / ielle* by the dictionary *Le Robert*).

3.1. English

In English, the matter of the “preferred pronoun” has already become a reality in many institutions, especially universities (Parks & Straka, 2018). Even though for instance at Harvard University, non-binary people’s visibility is apparent (1% of 4,000 students have declared to be using gender-neutral pronouns [Binkley, 2015]), gender-inclusive language choices have faced resistance among staff, faculty and students (Darr & Kibbey, 2016).

First gender-neutral solutions date back to more than 200 years. The earliest gender-neutral pronoun in English discovered by researcher Denis Baron (2017) was noted in 1792. It was proposed by economist James Anderson, who thought that English would benefit from 13 genders instead of two. Nevertheless, his solution has not been acquired into English (Baron, 2017, p. 5).

Another pronoun that is now widely recognised as gender-neutral is singular *they*. While its usage is widespread and most guidelines and dictionaries accept it as an inclusive form (e.g. included in the APA Publication Manual, seventh edition [*APA Publication Manual: 7th Edition*, 2020], and in the dictionary Merriam-Webster [*Singular ‘They’*, n.d.]) (LaScotte, 2021, p. 86). Even though singular *they* is commonly used in academic writing, it is not widely recognised in the sphere of English as a second language (ESL) grammar books. Therefore, while singular *they* is a correct form, student books fail to introduce this subject to non-native English learners (LaScotte, 2021, p. 86). However, a study undertaken by LaScotte showed that even if students are not taught the use of singular *they*, they are likely to be exposed to it outside of academic circles. The only problem is that some non-native students are prone to misinterpret the usage of the pronoun, therefore further education on the matter is needed.

3.2. French

Even though French is a gendered language, and its speakers are slow to linguistically adjust (Ashley, 2017, 2019; as cited in Knisely, 2020, p. 851), there seems to be a change in the language. Recently, in May 2022, the leading French dictionary *Le Petit Robert* has included the pronoun *iel* in its paper version for the year 2023. It is a gender-inclusive revolution against l’Académie française, since they still do not approve of such a change, calling sarcastically this “insurgence” an act of “wokeism” (Collins dictionary definition: informal. often derogatory: “the behaviour and attitudes of people who are sensitive to social and political injustice”¹) or in French *le wokisme*, which denotes far-leftists belief and frequently as negative connotations².

However, it is crucial to mention that even though the pronoun has entered the semi-official realm of language, no gender-neutral form of conjugation nor gender agreement in terms of nouns or adjectives has been presented. Therefore, to firstly get official approval of Francophones of the pronoun *iel* and define a new set of rules in terms of the agreement, a French-speaking person must still wait some time.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/singular-nonbinary-they>

² <https://www.linternaute.com/actualite/societe/2577392-wokisme-woke-quelle-est-la-signification-de-ces-termes/>

3.3. Swedish

Sweden is one of the most tolerant countries in Europe towards LGBTQ+ people. In the annual review *Rainbow Europe*, Sweden ranked #9 of 49 countries (*Gay Rights in Sweden*, 2022). The linguistic change makes Sweden one of the first countries in Europe to introduce a new gender-neutral pronoun. Therefore, the rapid acceptance of a new gender-neutral pronoun *hen*, composed as an alternative to the masculine *han* and feminine *hon*, is not surprising. The pronoun has first been suggested by linguist Hans Karlgren; however, it had not become official until 2015, when the pronoun was added to the official Swedish dictionary³. Its introduction was advocated for “practical reasons” (Rothschild, 2012). It first appeared unofficially in a children’s book in 2012 and later has been accepted officially.

However, the introduction of the new solution was opposed by some, who claimed that gender-neutral pronouns are difficult to process or distracting in communication (Vergoossen et al., 2020b, p. 9). Nevertheless, as stated in a study conducted by Vergoossen, Pärnamets, Renström and Gustafsson Sendén (2020a), Swedish people are familiar with *hen*. They supported the outcome with the fact that one-third of study participants reported encountering the pronoun in their everyday life. Another study shows that over time, the resistance that people have initially shift to positive attitudes, therefore, the pronoun has since been acclaimed by Swedish people and is being used on a daily basis (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015).

3.4. Spanish

Just like the previously mentioned French, Spanish has a binary gender system with masculine and feminine as the two genders. The language is highly gendered, which results in low adaptability of the language to gender-neutrality. Masculine is often marked with the suffix *-o*, and replaced with *-a* for feminine (e.g. *compañero/compañera*), or if the masculine form ends in a consonant, the feminine suffix is added (e.g. *doctor/doctora*). There are three majorly used solutions in the Spanish language to employ a gender-neutral form: suffixes *-e*, *-x* and *-@*. The suffix *-@* is a visual representation of both normative suffixes *-a* and *-o*; and the suffixes *-e* and *-x* are new alternatives. The most frequent word with the alternation *-x* can be found in the word *Latinx*, which sparked heated debates on its appropriateness. The term,

³ <https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/hen-med-i-ordlistan/>

as Latine people call it, is an American intervention into their language, which implements imperialist connotations, as nonwhite people used to be marked with an “x” during colonisation times (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018, p. 384). Moreover, only 2% of American Latines want to be called Latinx (NBC News, 2021), and 50% of Hispanic people believe this term is offensive (The Real Daytime, 2021). The term is “caught between gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, and Spanish and English languages. Therefore, [it] has now become ambiguous and convoluted in academic and activist spaces, subsuming various forms of social identities” (Salinas, 2020, p. 165).

What is more, the pronunciation in Spanish of the letter *x* is ambiguous; therefore, the term *Latinx* is not necessarily phonetically possible for Spanish speakers. Authors have different opinions on how to pronounce the word. Engel (2017, p. 198) believes that the word can be both uttered in English as “Latin-X, La-teen-X, and La-tinks” and in Spanish as “Latin-equis or Latin-sh”, however the form is highly Americanised, and the term is virtually unpronounceable. Trujillo-Pagan (2018, p. 396) accepts Spanish pronunciations such as “La-ten-ex, La-teen-ex, La-tinks, or even Latin-equis”, while Guidotti-Hernández (2017, p. 187) talks about the Spanish pronunciation as “Lat-een-ecks”.

Contrarywise to -x, suffixes -@ or -e are much more natural to the nature of the Spanish language, and can be easily adapted to the normative rules. While the suffix -@ is used more in writing, suffix -e is readily used in both oral and written form, due to its facility to pronounce. Therefore, the sentence “*Mis abueles son muy divertides*” (En. “My grandparents [n.] are very funny [n.]”) which describes people of both genders in a gender-neutral form may be an interesting alternation to the heavily gendered Spanish.

4. Issues in the Polish language

In Polish, a number of expressions show asymmetries between the use of feminine and masculine gender. The generic masculine is favoured, which diminishes the visibility of women as well as non-binary people. Thus, the unfair representation of people maintains sexist practices, leading to further linguistic discrimination.

Practices were applied in different languages to accord to the growing need of the society to feel equally represented. One of the them is a specification (e.g., in German or French) which aims to include all of the gender identities missing. In Polish, this method is used mainly in written form, especially in formal documents (such as “*Umowa pomiędzy Panem/Panią [...], legitymującym(q) się dowodem osobistym*” [Eng. “Contract between Mr/Ms [...] who is a holder [m.(f.)] of an ID card”]). Nonetheless, this practice does not include non-binary people, and overused orally might be tiring for people listening.

The other gender-inclusive solution is neutralization, which aims to neutralize the language so that it removes gender-specific markings in generic contexts. However, in the case of the Polish language, where the neutral reference is not available, there appears the generic masculine use (Kielkiewicz-Janowiak, 2019). In the previously conducted research it was found that the type of pronoun (masculine or feminine) used by a person is a reflection of the person’s sexist attitudes (i.e., preferring one gender over another);(Sczesny et al., 2016, p. 6). Thus, the study shows that the relationship of pronoun usage and sexist attitudes is evident and that there should be another method so that all people feel included.

4.1. Political correctness – The European Parliament Guidelines

Political correctness is a matter that is growing in importance in today’s society. Language should reflect the needs of people and cease to discriminate against individuals. While the matter of linguistic discrimination is not officially addressed on the Polish arena, many countries in Europe and on other continents have discussed or are discussing it. The European Parliament has been trying to regulate the matter so that the linguistic choices are inclusive towards all. Thus, they proposed a guideline covering the topic of GNL, titled *Język Neutralny Płciowo w Parlamencie Europejskim* [Eng. “Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament”] (2018), which aimed to introduce the subject as well as to encourage people to use gender-inclusive solutions on daily a basis (Parlament Europejski, 2018, pp. 3-4).

The solutions described in the Guidelines concern three types of languages previously mentioned. For languages with natural gender, the favoured strategy is neutralization, therefore using terms that do not denote gender, such as “chairperson”, “police officer”, “spokesperson”. Moreover, pronouns should include all the gender, therefore the mentioned “he and she” use (Parlament Europejski, 2018, p. 5).

Grammatical gender languages are believed to be difficult or impossible to neutralize. Because few of these languages had officially introduced gender-neutral solutions in their language, the European Parliament introduced feminisation as a preferred method, which consists on using both masculine and feminine forms of personal nouns and pronouns where the sex of the referent is not known or when referring to more than one person (Parlament Europejski, 2018, p. 5). However, while it does include women in the discourse, it is not necessarily gender-neutral since it does not include non-binary people. The only language that has addressed the issue semi-officially is the aforementioned French, but it is still unclear how to fully adjust the language.

The last type of languages, genderless languages, do not need any moderations since they do not denote the idea of grammatical gender. Certain issues appearing in these languages are looked into individually by competent local authorities.

Even though the Polish language is one of the grammatical gender languages, the European Parliament does not recommend adopting the feminine and masculine forms together too frequently (e.g., *poseł lub posłanka* [En. “deputy (m.) or deputy (f.)”], *przewodniczący lub przewodnicząca* [En. “chairman or chairwoman”]), as it may overcomplicate the text making it difficult to understand. The method is not fitting for legislative acts; thus, a better solution is to use one gender throughout the text if the gender of the recipient is known. Moreover, in the plural, for nouns the masculine personal gender is preferred, since it includes both men and women (such as *lekarze* [En. “medical practitioners”]) (Parlament Europejski, 2018, p. 10). However, the use of only masculine nouns might distort the message making females and non-binary people invisible, thus resulting in linguistic sexism.

A more inclusive solution mentioned in the guideline is the use of neutral terms, such as *osoby uczestniczące w spotkaniu* (En. “people attending the meeting”) or *personel* (En. “staff”). If possible, they recommend as well using the impersonal form of verbs, for example,

na posiedzeniu zatwierdzono/ustalono/określono (En. “on the meeting, there has been accepted/settled/determined”) (Parlament Europejski, 2018, p. 10).

Another good practice mentioned is including feminine forms of careers; however, many of them are still considered strange and unnatural (e.g., *psycholożka* [En. “female psychologist”], *coachyca* [En. “female personal coach”]) (Parlament Europejski, 2018, p. 11). The rules concerning the matter are unclear and they neglect the neuter form. Even though it is possible to form new nouns just like female versions, nobody considers the neutral form, which would solve the problem of using either male or female forms. In concluding remarks, the guideline mentioned that speakers should avoid spreading negative and stereotypical ideas, but their guideline titled “Gender-neutral language” gives only three methods concerning gender-neutrality. At the same time, it mostly talks about gender-inclusivity and visibility of both male and female. Therefore, the practice shows the alarming problem of gender-neutrality in the Polish language and that the issue needs to be addressed internally, within the nation, so that further sexism is confined.

5. Gender-inclusive language solutions in Polish

Gender-neutral language in Polish is not frequently encountered in everyday situations. However, it starts to appear in the social media and online tabloids generally for the younger audience (e.g., Vibez.pl). These forms are still met with dissatisfaction of Poles' and incite heated debates. While some gender-inclusive solutions are normative, most of them are new to the language, hence their reluctant acceptance.

Inclusion and tolerance are ones of people's elementary needs, and language choices play a prominent part in these aspects. Yet, inclusive language is not readily implemented in everyday situations, which influences people's presence in society.

5.1. Neutratives (Pl. Neutratywy)

Neutratives consist of neutralizing grammatical forms of their gender marking. They are mainly normative since the pronoun used for neutratives is neuter *ono*. However, the neuter form hardly ever refers to people. It denotes mainly impersonal nouns.

Suffixes used to form neutrative nouns already exist in the Polish language and are used in everyday language. Nonetheless, they are solely used for inanimate objects since the neuter form of animate objects is not frequent, especially neutral words concerning people. These suffixes are: *-rze* (as in *partner* (m.) /*partnerka* (f.) – *partnerze* [En. “partner”]), *-cze* (as in *artysta* (m.) /*artystka* (f.) – *artyszcze* [En. “artist”]) or *-o* (as in *lekarz* (m.) /*lekarka* (f.) – *lekarko* [En. “doctor”]). For this solution, there also appears the suffix *-um* loaned from Latin (*emeryt* (m.) / *emerytka* (f.) – *emerytum* [En. “pensioner”]) (Grzybowski, n.d.).

Verbs in neuter conjugation provoke lively discussion concerning their use in first- and second-person singular. These forms are uncommon, yet fully correct. However, many people believe neuter used in this way does not sound right. *Encyklopedia języka polskiego* (1999), states that “In the past tense except for inflexions of person and number, there occurs an inflexion of cases: in the singular, there is an opposition masculine : feminine : neuter (suffixes *-ø, -a, -o*)” (Urbańczyk & Kucała, 1999, p. 45, Trans. own). It continues with a table where suffixes for the singular of the future tense are shown, including masculine, feminine and neuter suffixes (*-m, -ś, -ø*). Thus, it proves that these forms are grammatically correct⁴.

⁴ https://rjp.pan.pl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=317:byom-byo&catid=44&Itemid=58

Therefore, neutratives use the neuter gender such as in the sentence with an everyday life usage of the neuter word *dziecko* (En. “child”): *Dziecko wzięło do ręki smoczek*. (En. “The child took a dummy into its hands”). It only shows that people obey the grammatical rules in the context that everyone is used to, but fail to accept queer context of the same rule.

Yet, for some non-binary people, the neuter form is not a desired one, and they refuse to use it. They believe it sounds insulting, belittling and dehumanizing as it is mainly used for small creatures, most frequently animal cubs (such as *prosię* [En. “a piglet”]) or inanimate objects (such as *biurko* [En. “a desk”]). Another reason for its bad reputation is that non-binary people do not want to conform to any system be it binary or a choice of three. They believe that the notion of gender is of a broader spectrum (Wąsowska, 2020).

On the other hand, Polish grammarian professor Jerzy Bralczyk argues that the pronoun *ono* should be connected to dehumanization (Mach, 2021). People usually treat it as an impersonal pronoun; however, its usage stretches further since in Polish, there are nouns in the neuter, even ones that semantically carry a gender, such as *to dziewczę* (En. “this maiden”) or *to chłopię* (En. obsolete: “this boy”). Therefore, firstly, it can refer to people, and secondly, its meaning may be strictly linked with a semantic feminine or masculine referent, which proves that neuter itself does not dehumanise but it is people who understand it this way.

5.2. Dukatives (Pl. Dukatywy)

Dukatives are forms of nouns, pronouns and verbs that correspond to the post-gender pronoun created by Polish writer Jacek Dukaj. Dukatives appeared for the first time in his science-fiction book *Perfect Imperfection*, which describes a life of post-human beings who do not conform to the contemporary sexual and gender norms (Dukaj, 2008). Therefore, Dukaj invented neopronouns and a whole new way of noun declension (see Table 1) and verb conjugation (see Table 2). Although the author did not deliberately construct a new gender-inclusive form, and it was instead an artistic procedure, non-binary people quickly acquired this new alternative.

Table 1. Declension of the posthuman pronoun *onu/jenu*

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	onu	ony
Genitive	jenu/nienu	ich/nich
Dative	wu	im
Accusative	nu	ni
Instrumental	num	nimi
Locative	num	nich

The pronoun determines the form of adjectives as well as verbs. Adjectives take the *-u* ending as in *miu* (originally *miu* (m.)/ *mia* (f.); En. “kind”). The conjugated verb endings are presented in below:

Table 2. Conjugation suffixes based on Dukatywy

	Singular	Plural
1st person	-um	-a <u>u</u> śmy
2nd person	-uś	-a <u>u</u> ście
3rd person	-u	- <u>u</u>

For some nouns that reveal the gender dukatives can be used as well, especially those describing people. As in the previous examples, the ending *-u* is used, e.g. *artystu* (normative: *artysta* (m.)/ *artystka* (f.); En. “artist”), *astronautu* (normative: *astronauta* (m.)/ *astronautka* (f.); En. “astronaut”) or *partneru* (normative: *partner* (m.)/ *partnerka* (f.); En. “partner”)⁵.

5.3. Use of “person” (Pl. Osobatywy)

Osobatywy are normatively used in the Polish language, although they are not very frequent. They are constructed by putting *osoba* (En. “a person”) on the beginning of the phrase and adding a participle or an adjective, e.g. *osoba studiujaca* (En. “a student person”). This form does not reveal the gender of the referent; therefore, it corresponds well with gender inclusivity. What is more, osobatywy are in use in everyday language, and many people do not view them as something bizarre. A widespread phrase using osobatywy is *osoba*

⁵ <https://zaimki.pl/dukatywy>

towarzyszka (En. “an accompanying person”) which is included, for example, on invitations for a wedding.

Osobatywy use normative conjugation and declension and are conjoined with the pronouns *ta/tej*. Even if *osoba* does have grammatical feminine gender, it does not convey the idea of feminative. A comparable feature is apparent in the word *rodzic* (En. “parent”), which grammatically is masculine; however, because it describes either a mother or a father, it does not disclose the gender of the referent.⁶

5.4. “X”atives (Pl. Iksatywy)

Iksatywy are a broad umbrella term for all the placeholders or special characters that replace the suffixes that would indicate the gender of the referent. The most frequent use of iksatywy is the use of “x” (*onx*)⁷; however, it can be replaced with placeholders such as an asterisk (*on**) or an underline (*on_*). Placeholders may be used on all parts of speech that reveal the gender, such as pronouns (e.g. *onx* – stem from the words *on* or *ona* without stating the normative gendered suffix [En. “he” or “she”]), nouns (e.g., *panx* – stem from words *pan* [En. “mister”] or *pani* [En. “miss”]), verbs (e.g., *poszłxm* – stem from the words *poszedłem* or *poszłam* [En. “I went”], *grałx* – stem from words *grał* or *grała* [En. “he/she played”]) or adjectives (e.g., *miłx* – stem from the words *miły* (m.) or *miła* (f.) [En. “kind”]). Pronouns and nouns are uninflectional in this case since the suffix indicating the gender is replaced with an “x”. The plural form can be marked using two xs, e.g. *partnerx* – *partnerxx*. In writing, placeholders are of great convenience, unlike in oral utterances, for these characters are either very hard or impossible to pronounce. The solution is frequently encountered on the Internet.

5.5. Neopronouns

5.5.1. *onæ/jæ* or *onae/jae*

The neopronoun *onæ/jæ* or *onae/jae* uses the form “æ” or the ligature “æ”. The form *ae*, which appears at the final position of the word, may also serve as substitution of the gendered suffixes (e.g., in verbs – *zjadłæm* [En. “I ate”]; in adjectives – *zabawnæ* [En. “funny”]; or names – *Zuzannæ* [En. “Susannæ”]). The ligature *æ* is a sound between the Polish vowels *a*

⁶ <https://zaimki.pl/osobatywy>

⁷ <https://zaimki.pl/iksatywy>

and *ɛ*. This sound exists only in the dialect of Polish from the Northern parts of Mazovia situated in the centre of the country and the Eastern part of Masuria, located right above Mazovia⁸. An example of the usage of this pronoun without the ligature can be found in an article covering an interview with a non-binary person Isaa, written by Weronika Pérez Borjas (2019) for the Polish magazine *Duży format*: „**Bylaem** wtedy w podróży po Ameryce Centralnej. Tej nocy w Hondurasie **bawilaem** się moim starym imieniem, **przerzucaleam** litery. Od kiedy **bylaem** dzieckiem, **chcialem** zmienić imię, ale nie **znajdowaleam** niczego, co by pasowało” (Pérez Borjas, 2019). The translation of the text would be “During that time I **was** on a journey around Central America. That night, while in Honduras, I **was playing** around with my name, **reordering** the letters. I **had wanted** to change my name since I was born, but I **couldn’t find** anything that would suit me” (Trans. own). In the text both “ae” and “ea” forms have been used alternately.

5.5.2. *vono/vego*

Vono/vego is a neopronoun that does not resemble any of the previously mentioned and is the furthest away from the normative pronouns. The originator of the pronoun is Polish translator Paweł Wieczorek, who created the pronoun as a counterpart of the English pronoun *ve/ver* found in the book *Distress* written by Australian writer Greg Egan (2003). The pronoun is used in sentences with neuter forms of verbs and adjectives, as in the sentence “*Myszę, że **vono** jest bardzo miłe (neuter) i przyjacielskie (n.), bo zawsze jest gotowe (n.), by pomóc.*” (En. “I think that *ve* is very kind and friendly because *ve* is always ready to help”).

5.6. Interchangeable normative forms

The form most frequently used by Polish non-binary people is interchangeably using normative masculine and feminine pronouns as well as verb conjugation. It is less “controversial” and more readily accepted by others for its normative usage. However, since the Polish language is heavily gendered, using masculine or feminine forms instantly implies the gender of the referent, which may be misleading, knowing that most non-binary people want to liberate themselves from the binarity of the language.

A technique related to using interchangeably normative forms is using mirrored pronouns. It consists of referring to oneself by the pronouns of the interlocutor. Therefore, if the nonbinary

⁸ <https://zaimki.pl/on%C3%A6>

person talks with a male, they will use male pronouns, and while speaking to a female, they will use female pronouns.

5.7. Plural

The plural form of the normative pronoun *on* or *ona* is a calque from the English singular *they*. It is grammatically correct and easily understood by people knowing the singular *they* pronoun. It has many variants because one can use the masculine *oni/ich*, non-masculine *one/ich* or neuter *ona/ich*. *Ona* is not a Polish normative plural form as there is only masculine and non-masculine personal gender in Polish grammar. The pronoun *ona* is a derivative from Croatian, which has a neuter plural form, analogical to the Polish declension, e.g. *to okno* (s.) – *te okna* (p.) (En. “this window” – “these windows”).⁹ The conjugation of the plural neuter verb is analogical to the neuter singular form by adding non-masculine plural normative suffixes (see Table 3).

Table 3. Verbs conjugation in neuter

	Non-masculine	Neuter
1st person	-ałyśmy	-ałośmy
2nd person	-ałyście	-ałoście
3rd person	-ły	-ły

Another plural form used by non-binary Polish is the normative pronouns *my* (En. “we”) and *wy* (En. “they”) to refer to the first person singular. However, the use of already existent plural pronouns may be misleading. What is more, these pronouns require gendered forms when used in past tense, e.g. *Chcieliśmy iść z wami* (En. “We wanted [masculine] to go with you”). Another issue connected to this form is the still vivid memory of Poland with communistic regime, when people would call each other using the pronoun *wy*. Therefore, it might have additional negative connotations which influence Polish people’s linguistic choices.

⁹ <https://zaimki.pl/ona/ic>

5.8. Avoiding gendered forms

Avoiding gendered forms within the limit of grammatical correctness requires linguistic sensibility and awareness, knowing that the Polish language is heavily gendered, and even the slightest change might distort the message. There are numerous solutions to follow this idea, most of them normative, therefore more natural and acceptable to Polish speakers.

5.8.1. Avoiding gendered suffixes

Some non-binary people decide to omit suffixes implicating gender at the end of verbs. This procedure is quite easily accessible; however, the pronunciation might be a bit complicated. It is more frequently used in the written form than orally, nevertheless, its oral usage is not impossible. Many non-binary people claim to speak unclearly, especially at the end of words, so as to leave this space for interpretation of the other person¹⁰. Therefore, this solution can be implemented as follows: (1) *Zrobiłm* or (2) *Zjadłm*, where the normal form would be (1) *Zrobiłem* (m.) / *Zrobiłam* (f.) and *Zjadłem* (m.) / *Zjadłam* (f.) (En. (1) “I did”; (2) “I ate”).

5.8.2. Removal of the main clause with the subject as an experiencer

Removing the main clause with the subject as an experiencer, which results in replacing the subordinate clause with a simple clause, is another solution used by non-binary people. It is composed as in (1) *Usłyszałam, że dzwoni telefon* changed to (2) *Zadzwonił telefon* (En. (1) “I heard (f.) the phone ringing”. (2) “The phone rang”). This way, the message is intact, and the gender is not revealed¹¹.

5.8.3. Passive voice

Another solution is using the passive voice instead of the active voice. This idea has the same premise as changing the subject since it relocates the focus from the doer of the action to the object by using it as the theme of a sentence. Instead of saying (1) *Zjadłem ciasto*, the passive form can be used (2) *Ciasto zostało zjedzone* (En. (1) “I ate (m.) the cake”. (2) “The cake has been eaten”).

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyzlqIUWTDk>

¹¹ <https://zaimki.pl/unikanie>

5.8.4. Impersonal form and impersonal 3rd person plural

Instead of using the personal “actual” referent, one can always use the impersonal, broader referent, such as (1) *Pani w urzędzie powiedziała mi...* changed to (2) *W urzędzie powiedziano mi...* (En. (1) “A woman in the office told me”; (2) “In the office I was told to”). Another solution is to use the impersonal 3rd person plural, which does not state the gender of the referent, as in (3) *W urzędzie powiedzieli mi...* (En. (3) “In the office, they told me to”).

The impersonal form is also useful while using the future tense since there are two possible ways of forming it: using the verb “be” conjugated in the future tense and adding the other verb conjugated in the past tense or a verb in an impersonal form, such as in the fragments *będę robiła* (f.) -> *będę robić* (En. “I will do” (using the past tense) -> “I will do” (using the impersonal form of the verb) and *będę jadł* (m.) -> *będę jeść* (En. “I will eat” [using the past tense conjugated verb] -> “I will eat” [using the impersonal form of the verb]).

Another possibility of achieving an impersonal form is using the agent in the dative case, e.g. (1) [Ja] *Przypomniałem sobie* -> (2) [To] *Przypomniało mi się* (En. (1) “I have recalled”; (2) “That got me reminded”). In the first sentence, the performer of the action is the person (I), although, in the second sentence, the subject is (that), which was recollected to the person stated in the dative case (me).

5.8.5. Passive adjectival participle and perfective adverbial participle

In order to not use gendered forms of verb conjugation, the participle may be adopted instead. By replacing the sentence (1) *Zjadłem obiad* with (2) *Zjadłszy obiad* (En. (1) “I ate the dinner”; (2) “Having eaten the dinner”), the gender of the referent is removed. The perfective adverbial participle is formed from a perfective verb, the third person singular, masculine form of the past tense by adding *-wszy* or *-wszy* suffix (Sadowska, 2011, p. 411). It has only one form and may be used by both males and females, therefore it is genderless. In normative use, it serves as a replacement of the clause with *kiedy* (En. “when”). This participle is not frequent in today’s Polish language as it conveys the impression of old, lyrical text.

Another participle that can be used is the passive adjectival participle which is formed by adding the suffix *-ny*, *-na*, *-ony*, *-ona*, *-one*, *-eny*, *-ty* or *-ta*, which conveys the idea of the past

tense of the verb, such as in *zrobić – zrobiony* (En. “do” – “done”). This participle is used by non-binary people, just like the previous one, when they want to omit the conjugated verb.

Both solutions serve in an unusual way; therefore, the sentence *Zjadłszy śniadanie i poszedłszy do szkoły*, which normally in masculine would sound *Zjadłem śniadanie i poszedłem do szkoły*, or in feminine *Zjadłam śniadanie i poszłam do szkoły* (En. “I ate breakfast and went to school”), does not intend to disclose the participle but serves as an ungendered sentence in the past tense. Not only is the perfect adverbial participle viewed as obsolete, but also, when used in the same manner, might be misleading for the subject of the sentence is not stated.

5.8.6. Avoiding conditionals

Conditionals in Polish have gendered suffixes, just like, for instance, the verb *chciałbym* for masculine and *chciałabym* for feminine (En. both: “I would like to”). Polish conditionals correspond to English constructions with “would”, “could” and “might”. They are made up of the third person form of the past tense (forms with *-ł, -ła, -ło, -li, -ły*) of both imperfective and perfective verbs combined with the appropriate form of the suffix *-by* (Sadowska, 2011, p. 404). To omit gendered forms, non-binary people try not to use conditionals. Therefore, instead of (1) *Chciałabym pojechać na wakacje* they say (2) *Chcę pojechać na wakacje* (En. (1) “I would like to go on holidays”; (2) “I want to go on holidays”) which solves the problem. Another example can be the sentence *Czy mógłbyś mi pomóc?* changed into *Czy możesz mi pomóc?* (En. (1) “Could you help me?”; (2) “Can you help me?”) which avoids using gendered forms. The only problem with this solution is that, just as in English, Polish conditionals are considered more honorific and formal, thus using a different structure may convey a different message.

5.8.7. Archaic forms

Most of the historical forms used by non-binary people are originally masculine; nevertheless, they are not popular in the modern way of speaking. The forms reintroduced once again to the everyday Polish language are understood in a different manner as well, thus today they mostly have gender-neutral connotations. One of the solutions used are the shortened, Old Polish pronouns such as *to dlań* or *mieszkam uń* (*Unikanie form nacechowanych płciowo*, n.d.). The first one is today’s *to dla niej* (En. “It is for her”), and the second one is *mieszkam u niego*

(En. “I live at his place”), which to the contemporary ear do not sound masculine. Grammatically *-ń* is an archaically used contraction of a pronoun *on*, therefore this form cannot be treated as gender-neutral unless it reaches *usus* (a linguistic custom which may not necessarily be in accordance with the rules of the language). Moreover, another problem concerns the limitation of the use of the contracted forms since they can be employed in accusative or genitive case.

Another use of historical forms, which also lost their masculine connotations, is the nominal declension of adjectives and participles, which solves the problem of gendered suffixes. An example illustrating that is the sentence *Jestem zmartwion*, or *Jestem szczęśliw*, which normally would sound *Jestem zmartwiony/a* (En. “I am worried” [m./f.]), *Jestem szczęśliwy/a* (En. “I am happy” [m./f.]).

6. The study

6.1. Research questions and hypotheses

The controversy around gender-neutral language in Poland is evident; however, the attitudes of Poles are yet to be closely examined. The research tends to show how likely people are to accept and use the inclusive solutions provided by researchers and founders of the website *zaimki.pl*. Considering the ongoing debates in Poland and other European countries, people get to broaden their knowledge about non-binary individuals, yet, research about the people's attitudes are limited. What is more, Patev et al. (2019) suggest that the way people use gender-inclusive language and what they think about it may be helpful in increasing gender-inclusive language usage. Introduction and/or increasing the usage of gender-neutral language may consequently reduce discrimination and promote equity of all genders (Sczesny et al., 2016, p. 8). Therefore, the first research question posed is as follows:

Research Question 1: Do Poles view the Polish language as gender-inclusive or -exclusive?

The question not only examines people's attitude towards GNL but subliminally as well towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Considering the heavy genderism of the Polish language and its unlikelihood to change, many people may not be aware of how the way we speak affects other people. With new trends being introduced to Polish society, there is also a need to moderate the language to correspond to the modern requirements of society. While most young people who are active on the Internet are more likely to be exposed to the topic of GNL, older people may not understand the new trends. Therefore, I hypothesise that:

H1.1: Age will moderate people's acceptance and understanding of the stereotyping and sexism of the Polish language, as well as the need for changes.

Consequently, I hypothesise that:

H1.2: Affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community moderates openness to the linguistic issues in Polish, such as sexism and discrimination.

While in Poland the subject is new, there were occasions to get acquainted with it especially for people having greater knowledge about language. Therefore, I hypothesise:

H1.3: People studying or those who have finished studies in a linguistic or philological major are more likely to understand the problem and be more acceptant towards it.

Furthermore, GNL has been growing in importance for the past few years in other languages. Therefore, people knowing other languages might understand the subject better than those who know only Polish. Thus, I hypothesise that:

H1.4: Ability to communicate in a foreign language will moderate people's acceptance towards GNL.

Another point worth examining is the very knowledge of GNL solutions and if this aspect influences people's acceptance.

Research Question 2: Are Poles familiar with gender-inclusive solutions in any language?

Since the subject of GNL is more visible in other languages I hypothesise that:

H2.1: Poles are more familiar with gender-neutral solutions in foreign languages.

What is more, considering aforementioned exposure to the subject of gender-inclusive language, I hypothesise that:

H2.2: Younger people will know more gender-neutral solutions both in Polish and in foreign languages.

The next question considers strictly the acceptance of given GNL solutions formulated basing on the solutions available online.

Research Question 3: How do Poles perceive gender-neutral solutions in Polish?

Since gender-neutral language is new in Polish society and is only becoming visible, there is a high possibility that people will not accept many of the solutions. However, considering that some solutions are already in use as a form of inclusive language, there might be a change in people's attitudes. There were two normative usages of GNL – *osobatywy* and the use of

on/a/(o). Two sentences were provided to the aforementioned solutions; one was used in a known and used way and the second was in queer context. For the two normative usages of GNL I hypothesise that:

H3.1: Prejudice against LGBTQ+ members will predict negative attitudes towards gender-neutral solutions in a queer context but not in a generic context.

Following this track of thought, I hypothesise that:

H3.2: LGBTQ+ community respondents will show acceptance and willingness towards GNL solutions more than people outside of the community.

Considering that age, place of origin and residence might be related to people's acceptance of gender-neutral solutions I hypothesise that:

H3.3: Age, place of origin and of residence will moderate people's acceptance towards GNL. Older people who are less familiar with the subject as well as people living in smaller towns, where stigmatised non-binary people are not as visible as in bigger cities, will be less tolerant towards GNL solutions.

Following the rule of exposure, I hypothesise that:

H3.4: Prior knowledge of GNL solutions in Polish and/or a foreign language modifies acceptance of the given solutions.

With the questions and hypothesis, I have created the survey research study.

6.2. Method

6.2.1. Participants

The participants were 232 native Polish speakers recruited online. The average age of the participants was 32.1 years ($SD = 13.79$), ranging from 19 to 84, with one individual not stating their age. The majority (79.3%) of the participants were cisgender (124 cis females, 59 cis males). The other part (20.7%) were diverse members of the LGBTQ+ community, with 4 people being non-binary.

Regarding the education level, the majority (57.8%) of the participants have a university degree, 97 individuals (41.8%) have finished high school and only one person has finished their education on the level of middle school. Within participants a minority (27.6%) studies or has finished studies on a philological or a linguistic major. A vast majority of people (91%) claimed to being able to communicate in at least one foreign language. Of 212 respondents who know languages majority spoke English (92.9%), followed with German (19.3%), Russian (16%), French (16%) and Spanish (14.2%). Other languages represented only about 1% of all languages (see Table 4).

Table 4. Foreign languages spoken by respondents ($n=212$)

English	197	92.9%
German	41	19.3%
French	34	16.0%
Russian	34	16.0%
Spanish	30	14.2%
Italian	12	5.7%
Swedish	4	1.9%
Japanese	3	1.4%
Czech	2	0.9%
Hungarian	2	0.9%
Netherlandish	2	0.9%
Norwegian	2	0.9%
Slovakian	1	0.5%
Slovene	1	0.5%
Ukrainian	1	0.5%
Serbo-Croatian	1	0.5%
Polish Sign Language	1	0.5%
Invalid answers	2	0.9%

Moreover, a big number are tri- or multilingual (see Table 5). Only 45% claim to know only one foreign language.

Table 5. Number of languages spoken

Bilingual (One foreign language)	45.8%
Trilingual (Two foreign languages)	35.8%
Multilingual (Three or More foreign languages)	17.5%
Invalid answers	0.9%

Participants' place of origin and place of residence (see Figure 1) show that the majority (48.7%) originate from big cities with more than half a million residents and for 75% of the participants it is the current place of residence. A notable group of 15% originate from towns or cities between 50k and 150k residents, 12.9% from towns with fewer than 50k residents and 7.8% cities come from cities between 150k and 500k residents. Looking at the place of residence, the changes in participants' distribution can be seen in every category with 7.3% people living in towns, 6.9% in a city with fewer than 50k residents, 5.2% in both city between 50k and 150k and between 150k and 500k.

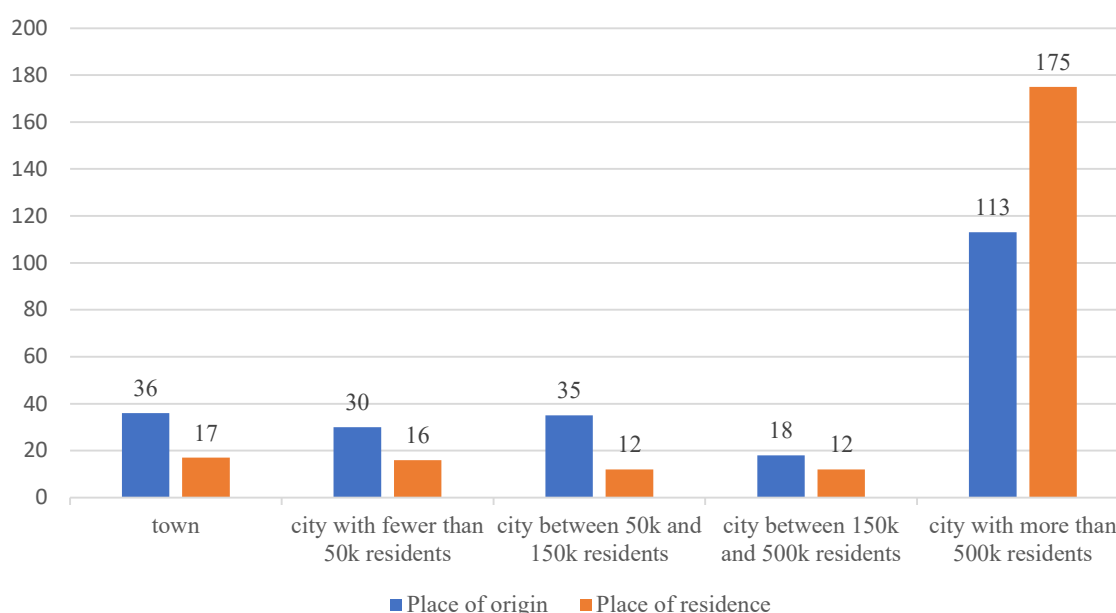


Figure 1. Participants' place of origin and place of residence

6.2.2. Procedure

All participants completed an anonymous online survey about their attitudes towards gender-neutral Polish language. The survey was available in April of 2022 and the questions were in the Polish language. All the survey data was translated from Polish to English prior to analysis. It included various attitude scales as well as demographic and open response questions. In total, the survey included 33 questions, and the estimated time it took was approximately 10 minutes.

6.2.2.1. Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ community

The first four questions aimed to measure the acceptability of gender-neutral language and LGBTQA+ members. To measure this variable, the following questions were asked (1) “Do you think that Polish language is discriminative towards non-binary people?”; (2) “Do you think that gender-neutral language should be officially introduced to the Polish language?”; (3) “Do you think that the generic masculine used when we do not want to state the gender or when we refer to more than one gender may influence the understating of the text?”; (4) “Would you use gender-neutral language if it was officially introduced to the Polish language?”. Participants reported on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = definitely no, 5 = definitely yes), with a subscale for the fourth questions (1 = Definitely No – these changes are unnatural, 2 = Probably No – I do not think it is necessary, 3 = Neither Yes nor No, 4 = Probably Yes – I would try to use them, 5 = Definitely Yes – it is crucial for me).

In this part, the last open-answer question concerned the participants’ knowledge of gender-neutral solutions used in the Polish language.

6.2.2.2. Attitudes towards gender-neutral Polish solutions

The participants were given 15 sentences to which a 6-point scale was attached (1 = I find it unacceptable and I would not use it; 2 = I find it unacceptable, but I would use it; 3 = I find it weird and I would not use it; 4 = I find it weird, but I would use it; 5 = I find it acceptable, but I would not use it; 6 = I find it acceptable and I would use it.). The scale offered to examine two different attitudes, the first one being acceptability presented in three different ways: acceptability, weirdness, and unacceptability. The second attitude is adoptability, which shows the willingness to use accepted or unaccepted forms.

In this part 6 different solutions were presented in the form of sentences: *Neutratywy*, *Iksatywy*, *Osobatywy*, *Neopronouns*, Graphic alternatives, and *Dukatywy*. In every category there were at least two sentences.

6.2.2.3. Open response questions

On the last page, the participants were asked to answer questions concerning their ability to communicate in other languages as well as the gender-neutral forms and debates on the topic in other languages.

7. Results

7.1. RQ1: Do Poles view the Polish language as gender-inclusive or gender-exclusive?

To answer the research question four questions were asked, which examined overall acceptance and awareness of the subject of gender-neutral Polish language (see Figure 2). The greatest number of participants (45%) showed acceptance and willingness to make a change. Fewer people (40%) were against any form of gender-inclusivity. The minority of 15% participants were neither against nor for the ideas.

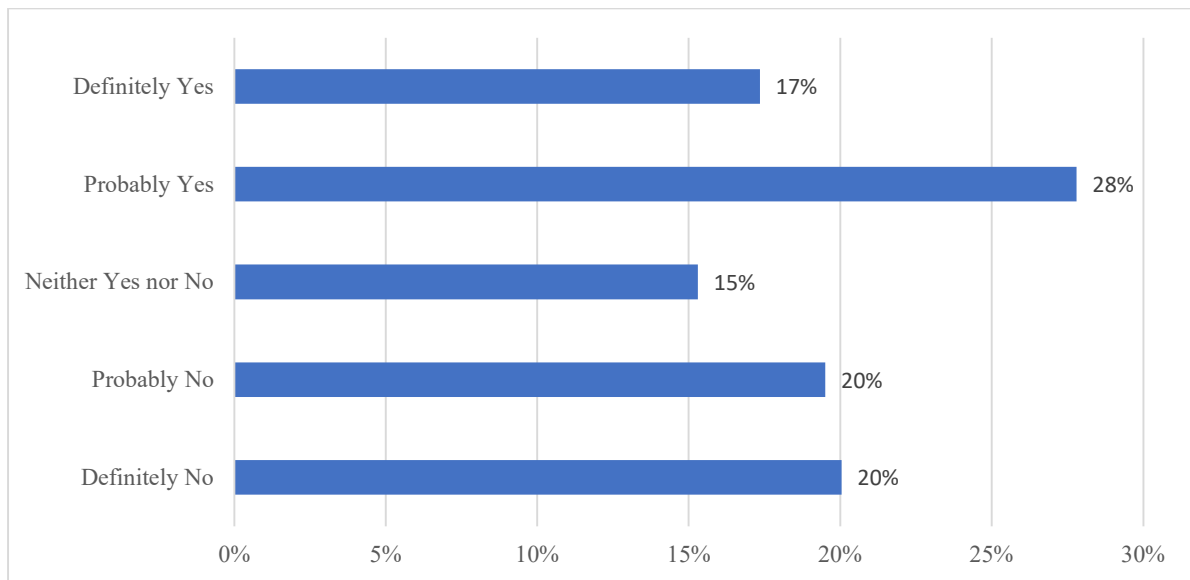


Figure 2. Overall attitude towards gender-inclusivity

Delving on a smaller scale, the first question aimed to examine Poles' view on the Polish language. For the question "Do you think that the Polish language is discriminative towards non-binary people?" the opinions of people were not greatly polarized (see Table 6). The majority (45%) believed that the Polish language is discriminative. Fewer people (39%) did not agree that Polish is gender-exclusive, while 16% did not have any opinion.

Table 6. Do you think that the Polish language is discriminative towards non-binary people?

<i>Disapproval</i>	
Definitely No	16.38%
Probably No	22.41%
<i>Neutral</i>	15.95%
<i>Approval</i>	
Probably Yes	27.16%
Definitely Yes	18.10%

The second question (see Table 7) examines the acceptability of gender-neutral language, as well as Poles' adaptability to new rules. The greatest number of the participants (47%) do not want gender-neutral solutions to be introduced officially. A smaller number (35%) wish for it to be changed, and 18% had a neutral opinion on the matter.

Table 7. Do you think that gender-neutral language should be officially introduced to the Polish language?

<i>Disapproval</i>	
Definitely No	24.57%
Probably No	22.41%
<i>Neutral</i>	17.67%
<i>Approval</i>	
Probably Yes	17.67%
Definitely Yes	17.67%

The next question aimed at showing people's sensitivity to the general subject of gender discrimination in the Polish language, since the preferred form is the generic masculine. The question (see Table 8) asks if people believe that the application of the generic masculine when used as a gender-neutral solution might distort the message. The answers were not polarized in this case either, as the greatest number of the respondents (46%) believe that it does change the meaning, and a smaller group (32%) do not think it influences the idea of the sentence. 22% of the participants were indecisive about the matter.

Table 8. Do you think that the generic masculine used when we do not want to state the gender or when we refer to more than one gender may influence the understating of the text?

<i>Disapproval</i>	
Definitely No	23.28%
Probably No	9.05%
<i>Neutral</i>	21.98%
<i>Approval</i>	
Probably Yes	21.98%
Definitely Yes	23.71%

The final question was straightforwardly asking about attitudes towards GNL and participants' willingness to adapt to the hypothetical introduction of gender-neutral forms officially (see Table 9). More than half of the participants (54%) approve of the introduction and show willingness to change their way of speaking; however, a not greatly smaller number of people (40%) believe these changes are unnecessary or unnatural. Only 6% of the respondents restrained from giving away their opinion.

Table 9. Would you use gender-neutral language if it were officially introduced to the Polish language?

<i>Disapproval</i>	
Definitely No – these changes are unnatural	15.95%
Probably No – I do not think it is necessary	24.14%
<i>Neutral</i>	5.60%
<i>Approval</i>	
Probably Yes – I would try to use them	44.40%
Definitely Yes – it is crucial for me	9.91%

H1.1: Age will moderate people's acceptance and understanding of the stereotyping and sexism of the Polish language, as well as the need for changes.

Since people of younger ages have higher possibility of being exposed to the GNL solutions used in Polish, there is also a higher possibility that they are more open to changes and critical thinking towards issues in the language.

The analysis of the correlation shows, that there is a significant relationship between the age of the respondents and the idea of Polish being discriminative towards non-binary people

(Spearman's $\rho = -.146^*$; $p = .027$). The negative correlation indicates that younger people in a greater amount believed that the Polish language is not gender-inclusive. A similar relationship can be noted within opinions about the possible introduction of GNL forms to Polish (Spearman's $\rho = -.170^*$; $p = .010$) and the willingness to use it (Spearman's $\rho = -.167^*$; $p = .011$). However, there has not been any relationship between the age of the respondents and the opinion that the use of generic masculine may be misleading (Spearman's $\rho = -.117$; $p = .074$).

H1.2: Affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community moderates openness to the linguistic issues in Polish, such as sexism and discrimination.

Considering that nobody knows better about linguistic discrimination than people discriminated themselves, I have examined if affiliation to LGBTQ+ community moderated answers.

The analysis shows that there is a crucial relationship between the affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community and open-mindedness to changes in the language as well as critical thinking about the linguistic issues. The idea of Polish being discriminative towards non-binary people proved to be significant (Spearman's $\rho = .296^*$; $p < .010$). The same pattern can be seen in the question of official introduction of GNL to Polish (Spearman's $\rho = .298^*$; $p < .010$) and people's willingness to use it (Spearman's $\rho = .163^*$; $p = .013$). LGBTQ+ people also viewed generic masculine as discriminative in a bigger extent (Spearman's $\rho = .261^*$; $p < .010$) than those who are heterosexual. Thus, the hypothesis about LGBTQ+ affiliation has proved to be correct; however, the correlation has a rather small effect.

H1.3: People studying or those who have finished studies in a linguistic or philological major are more likely to understand the problem and be more acceptant towards it.

People who are close to linguistic studies are more exposed to linguistic changes and more aware of possible outcomes some linguistic solutions may have on the overall understanding of certain issues. Taking that into consideration, they might be more open to linguistic debates and think more critically. Thus, they are more sensitive and aware of linguistic matters as well as they understand the need to adjust language to everyone's needs.

The research showed that people studying on philological or linguistic majors or those who have finished such majors are more likely to perceive the Polish language as discriminative

(Spearman's rho .165*; $p=.012$) and that the generic masculine is not gender-inclusive (Spearman's rho .134*; $p=.041$). However, the analysis did not show any relationship between respondents' studies and their willingness to introduce GNL solutions officially (Spearman's rho .114; $p=.083$) and use it (Spearman's rho .089; $p=.178$).

H1.4: Ability to communicate in a foreign language will moderate people's acceptance towards GNL.

People's understanding of the linguistic issues in Polish might also be moderated by their command of foreign languages. Especially influencing in this case might be English, which accepts gender-neutral solutions already officially or semi-officially. Therefore, I have examined if this factor really influenced people's awareness of linguistic issues.

The analysis shows no relationship between the mentioned issues in the Polish language and people's ability to communicate in a foreign language (Polish being discriminative towards non-binary people [Spearman's rho .119; $p=.069$], generic masculine being sexist [Spearman's rho .070; $p=.285$], official introduction of GNL to Polish [Spearman's rho .039; $p=.558$] and willingness to use it [Spearman's rho .075; $p=.258$]). Therefore, this factor does not moderate answers.

Looking closer, the languages that the respondents indicated most frequently are English, French, Spanish, German, and Russian. While the first four languages are whether gender-inclusive officially or semi-officially, Russian is equally challenged concerning inclusivity. Russian, just like Polish, is one of Slavic languages, in which gender-neutrality is especially difficult to introduce due to their heavy gendered nature. Therefore, I examined if the mentioned languages moderated people's answers correlated with the questions about issues in the Polish language.

The analysis indicates that the hypothesis that certain languages moderate answers is not entirely true. While the knowledge of French language has crucial relationship with all of the aspects mentioned in the first part of the survey (Polish being discriminative towards non-binary people [Spearman's rho .153*; $p=.020$], Generic masculine being sexist [Spearman's rho .161*; $p=.014$], Official introduction of GNL to Polish [Spearman's rho .136*; $p=.038$] and willingness to use it [Spearman's rho .151*; $p=.022$]), Russian which is less gender-inclusive also notes crucial relationship in one aspect (e.g. the issue of generic masculine used

to describe a group of people [Spearman's $\rho = -.142^*$; $p = .031$]). The English language which has the most officially introduced GNL solutions, does not disclose any crucial relationships. Therefore, foreign language knowledge does not necessarily moderate people's attitudes towards the discrimination and lack of gender-inclusivity in the Polish language.

7.2. RQ2: Are Poles familiar with gender-inclusive solutions in any language?

The participants were asked in an open response question about their familiarity with gender-neutral solutions in Polish and in any other language. Half of the respondents did not know solutions in any language (see Figure 3). Only 25% declared knowing any solution in Polish and 44% of respondents knew some solutions in foreign languages.

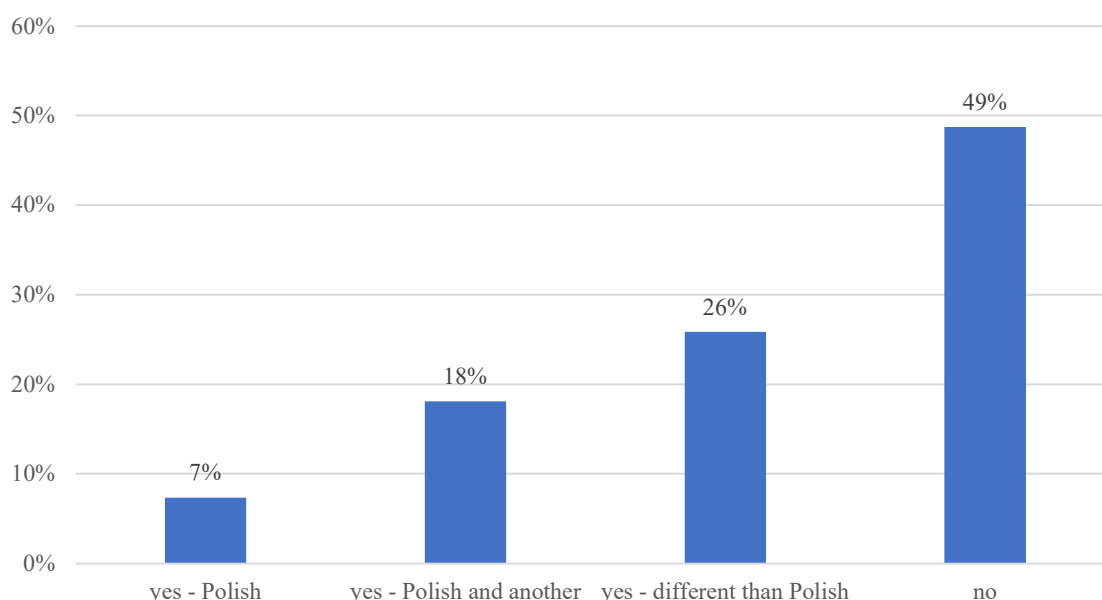


Figure 3. People's familiarity with GNL solutions

H2.1: Poles are more familiar with gender-neutral solutions in foreign languages.

For the question about Polish gender-neutral solutions only 80 people responded, of which 58 responses could be taken into consideration. The remaining 22 responses either stated "I do not know" or mentioned solutions from the English language instead of Polish. There were 111 single ideas which were put in 12 umbrella categories (see Table 10).

Table 10. Poles' familiarity with Polish gender-neutral solutions ($n=110$)

Answer	Number of responses	Percentage
Neutratives	43	38.74%
“X”atives	11	9.91%
Oni – pronoun "they"	10	9.01%
Dukatives	5	4.5%
The us of “person”	4	3.6%
Graphic symbols	4	3.6%
Interchangeable forms	3	2.7%
Plural form	2	1.8%
My – pronoun "we"	2	1.8%
Normative forms	2	1.8%
Neopronouns	1	0.9%
Mirror pronouns	1	0.9%
I do not know, invalid responses	22	20%
Total:	110	

Considering that a minority of the participants (34.5%) have responded, and an even smaller group (25%) gave a valid answer to the question, it is debatable if it is possible to determine if Poles are aware of gender-neutral solutions in the Polish language. Taking into account the group of respondents, most of them know solutions that are frequently used on the Internet and in online media. Not many people are familiar with other solutions, which may result in little acceptance towards them.

In regard to other languages, a slightly bigger group of participants declared their command of gender-neutral solutions. 153 respondents gave an answer, out of which 96 were valid. Participants indicated 131 single ideas (see Table 11).

Table 11. Poles' familiarity with gender-neutral solutions in foreign languages

<i>English</i>		
<i>they/them</i>	69	52.67%
<i>it</i>	12	9.16%
<i>you</i>	7	5.34%
"English does not have gendered forms"	5	3.82%
forms with -x	4	3.05%
Neopronouns (<i>xe, ze</i>)	4	3.05%
Neutral noun forms	3	2.29%
<i>we</i>	1	0.76%
<i>Spanish</i>		
Suffix -e	2	1.53%
<i>usted</i> - formal "you"	1	0.76%
<i>French</i>		
<i>iel</i> - gender-neutral pronoun	5	3.82%
<i>vous</i> - formal "you"	2	1.53%
<i>on</i> - impersonal pronoun "it"	1	0.76%
<i>Swedish</i>		
<i>hen</i> - gender-neutral pronoun	2	1.53%
<i>German</i>		
<i>sie</i> - formal "you"	2	1.53%
<i>Dutch</i>		
<i>hen/hun/die</i> - gender-neutral pronouns	1	0.76%
<i>Norwegian</i>		
Impersonal conjugation	1	0.76%
<i>Japanese</i>		
"Japanese does not have gendered forms"	1	0.76%
<i>Hungarian</i>		
"Hungarian does not have gendered forms"	1	0.76%
<i>Generic rules</i>		
Graphic symbols	5	3.82%
Neutral names	1	0.76%
Total:	Total: 131	

Considering the numbers, the respondents are more aware of gender-neutral forms in foreign languages than in their mother tongue. People who did not speak any foreign language (8% of the respondents) were also less versed in gender-neutral forms both in Polish and other languages. Only 2 people from the monolingual group ($n=19$) stated a gender-neutral solution in Polish. None of them indicated a solution in foreign language. Therefore, one can assume

that knowledge of foreign language influences one's linguistic sensitivity towards gender-inclusive solutions.

The correlation between the ability to speak a FL and familiarity with GNL solutions yields support for one hypothesis, but not the other since the relationship between ability to speak a foreign language with familiarity with Polish GNL solutions was insignificant (Spearman's $\rho = .096$, $p = .147$). The relationship between ability to speak foreign language and familiarity with GNL solutions in FL was significant, but had a small effect (Spearman's $\rho = .271^*$, $p < .001$).

H2.2: Younger people know more gender-neutral solutions in Polish and/or a foreign language.

The analysis of the correlation between the age of respondents and familiarity with solutions shows that the older the respondents are the less familiar with solutions. Although both familiarity of the Polish solutions (Spearman's $\rho = -.168^*$, $p = .010$) and FL solutions (Spearman's $\rho = -.277^*$, $p < .001$) have a crucial relationship with age, older people knew fewer FL solutions than Polish solutions. Therefore, the hypothesis that older people are less likely to be familiar with solutions is true; however, the effect is relatively small.

7.3. RQ3: How do Poles perceive gender-neutral solutions in Polish?

In order to examine Poles' attitudes, the participants were exposed to 15 sentences including one gender-inclusive solution each. The forms used can be grouped into 6 umbrella categories: *Neutrality*, *Ikstety*, *Osobaty*, Neopronouns, Graphic alternatives, and *Dukaty*. I have presented the data in two tables, one showing means of answers (see Table 12); however, because every category had a rather similar mean, another table presents percentages of total answers (see Table 13).

Table 12. Poles' opinion on GNL solutions - mean

Solution	Mean
<i>Neutratywy</i>	2.751
<i>Iksatywy</i>	1.351
<i>Osobatywy</i>	2.302
Neopronouns	1.323
Graphic alternatives	2.887
<i>Dukatywy</i>	1.1623

Table 13. Poles' opinion on GNL solutions - percentage

Answers	Percentage	
<i>Unacceptability</i> (answers 1 and 2 combined)	Dukatywy	50.9%
I find it unacceptable and I would not use it	Dukatywy	45%
I find it unacceptable, but I would use it	Dukatywy	5.8%
<i>Weirdness</i> (answers 3 and 4 combined)	Neopronouns	42.7%
I find it weird and I would not use it	Dukatywy	31.5%
I find it weird but I would use it	Neutratywy	15.8%
<i>Acceptability</i> (answers 5 and 6 combined)	Osobatywy	63.6%
I find it acceptable but I would not use it	Graphic alternatives	11.8%
I find it acceptable and I would use it	Osobatywy	52.4%

The responses (see Table 12) indicate that the most unacceptable (50.9%) solution is *Dukatywy*, and the most accepted (52.4%) is *Osobatywy*, which can be seen most frequently in a generic, normative sense.

The solution that was the most unacceptable was *Dukatywy*, with over the half of responses “I find it unacceptable”. The reason for that may be the fact that *Dukatywy* are very close to the normative system, yet sound foreign to Poles. The solution uses the suffix *-u*, while normative forms are *-a* or *-ø* (e.g. *onu przyjechał* [dukatives], *ona przyjechała* [f.], *on przyjechał* [En. “They/she/he arrived”]). Both sentences ([1] *Onu jest takie fajnu, a zawsze myśli, że nie da się jegu lubić* [En. “**They** are so nice, but **they** always think **they** are not likeable”]; [2] *Myślę, że byłubym zdolnum piosenkarzum* [En. “I think that I would be a talented singer”]) were equally unacceptable to people with the first one counting 46% and the second one 44%.

The “weirdest” solution was Neopronouns with the pronouns *vono/vego* and *onæ/jæ*. The discrepancy in attitudes towards the two sentences ([1] *Ale **onæ** ma śmieszne spodnie!* [En. “What funny pants **ae** has!”]; [2] *Vono nie będzie, bo musi się zajmować **vego** bratem.* [En. “**Ve** won’t come, because **ve** has to take care of **ver** brother”]) was not big since the first one received 39.3% for the two answers “I find it weird” and the second one received 46.1%. The reason for the difference might be the sound with which Poles are not familiar. While *vono/vego* can be somehow associated with normative pronouns, *onæ/jæ* has a ligature which is not present in the alphabet of the Polish language, or most languages spoken by the respondents. There were only two respondents who spoke a language with the letter “æ” in the alphabet. In their case it was Norwegian, however it is impossible to examine if it influenced their acceptability towards the neopronoun, since one of the respondents chose 1 as an answer and the other one 5. Moreover, the two respondents had very diverse answers, and had nothing in common except for the knowledge of Norwegian (see Table 14).

Table 14. Comparison of responses of Norwegian speakers

Question	Respondent 1	Respondent 2
Ale onæ ma śmieszne spodnie! // What funny pants ae has!	1 – I find it unacceptable, but I would use it	5 – I find it acceptable but I would not use it
Do you think that Polish language is discriminative towards non-binary people?	Probably No	Definitely Yes
Do you think that gender-neutral language should be officially introduced to the Polish language?	Probably No	Definitely Yes
Do you think that the generic masculine used when we do not want to state the gender or when we refer to more than one gender may influence the understating of the text?	Neither Yes nor No	Definitely Yes
Would you use gender-neutral language if it was officially introduced to the Polish language?	Probably No - I do not think it is necessary	Probably Yes - I would try to use them
Your gender:	Female	Female
Are you a member of the LGBTQA+ community?	No	Yes
Your age:	59	22
Place of origin:	city between 150k and 500k residents	city with more than 500k residents
Place of residence:	city with more than 500k residents	city with more than 500k residents
Educational background:	University	High School
Can you speak any other language than Polish?	English, Norwegian, Russian	English, Norwegian
Are you studying or did you study in linguistic or philological studies?	No	Yes

An interesting fact can be observed in the answer “I find it weird but I would use it”. The category which received the most of these answers is *Neutrality*. *Neutrality* are by far the most frequently used solution strictly connected to the queer context, which can be found in many articles. For many people it still seems strange; however, due to the exposure to this form, they are more prone to use it.

H3.1: Prejudice against LGBTQ+ members will predict negative attitudes towards gender-neutral solutions in a queer context but not in a generic context.

Two solutions of the presented in the survey (see Appendix 1) are normative, or semi-normative. The first one is *Osobatywy* and the second one is a subgroup of the Graphic alternatives, the use of *on/a/(o)* (En. “s/he/(it)” – put in a bracket for *ono* does not usually refer to people).

The two sentences of *Osobatywy* showed some discrepancies. The solution is normative and already commonly used in the Polish language in non-queer context. However, one sentence was met with bigger acceptance and the other was frowned upon (see Table 20). The first sentence *Wszystkie osoby pracujące proszone są o przyjście na spotkanie.* (En. “All of the people working are asked to come to the meeting”.) is not readily connoted to non-binarity, therefore it was more accepted (85.3% responses “I find it acceptable”). The second sentence *Ostatnio byłam z moją osobą partnerską w kinie.* (En. “Lately, I have been in a cinema with my personfriend” [instead of girlfriend or boyfriend].) is strictly connected to the spectrum of non-binarity which might have been the reason for its smaller acceptance (41.8% responses “I find it acceptable”).

Table 15. Acceptance of *Osobatywy* in generic and queer context

1) <i>Wszystkie osoby pracujące proszone są o przyjście na spotkanie.</i> All of the workers (people working) are called for the meeting. – Generic Context				
2) <i>Ostatnio byłam z moją osobą partnerską w kinie.</i> Lately, I was with my personfriend in the Cinema. – Queer Context				
	1		2	
	No. of responses	Pct.	No. of responses	Pct.
I find it unacceptable and I would not use it	11	4.7%	50	21.6%
I find it unacceptable, but I would use it	3	1.3%	11	4.7%
I find it weird and I wouldn't use	10	4.3%	36	15.5%
I find it weird but I would use it	10	4.3%	38	16.4%
I find it acceptable but I would not use it	17	7.3%	35	15.1%
I find it acceptable and I would use it	181	78.0%	62	26.7%

Another normative solution which may be used in queer and generic context is the use of *on/a/(o)*. The first sentence mentioned only two genders: masculine *on* and feminine *ona*;

while the second sentence included the neuter *ono* pronoun (see Table 21). The sentence with binary genders (*Zawsze się zastanawiam co **on/a** sobie o mnie myśli*. [En. “I always wonder what **(s)he** thinks of me”]) was met with bigger acceptance (59.1% of answers mentioning acceptability and 14.2% mentioning unacceptability) and the second one was met with stronger unacceptance (25.9% of positive answers and 35.8% of negative answers with 38.4% of “weird” answers).

Table 16. Acceptance of *on/a/(o)* in generic and queer context

1) <i>Zawsze się zastanawiam co on/a sobie o mnie myśli</i> . I always wonder what (s)he thinks of me. – Generic Context				
2) <i>Zapomniałam/em/om hasła</i> . I forgot [f./m./n.] the password. – Queer Context				
	1		2	
	No. of responses	Pct.	No. of responses	Pct.
I find it unacceptable and I would not use it	30	12.9%	67	28.9%
I find it unacceptable, but I would use it	3	1.3%	16	6.9%
I find it weird and I wouldn't use	28	12.1%	54	23.3%
I find it weird but I would use it	34	14.7%	67	28.9%
I find it acceptable but I would not use it	32	13.8%	16	6.9%
I find it acceptable and I would use it	105	45.3%	54	23.3%

Attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community might influence people's linguistic choices and whether they want to use inclusive language or not. Thus, the differences in the queer and generic context of the solutions that are normative and widely used in everyday life of Poles.

H3.2: LGBTQ+ community respondents will show acceptance and willingness towards GNL solutions more than people outside of the community.

Knowing that LGBTQ+ people proved to be more sensitive toward linguistic issues concerning their community, I have examined the influence of affiliation to LGBTQ+ community with linguistic choices.

The analysis of the correlation shows that there is a crucial relationship between the affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community and GNL solutions familiarity. People of other orientation than heterosexual were more acceptant of the GNL solutions ($r = .259^*$, $p < .001$) and willing to use them ($r = .263^*$, $p < .001$). Nevertheless, this effect size was negligible.

H3.3: Age, place of origin and of residence will moderate people's acceptance towards GNL. Older people who are less familiar with the subject as well as people living in smaller towns, where stigmatised non-binary people are not as visible as in bigger cities, will be less tolerant towards GNL solutions.

The aforementioned rule of exposure to GNL and accessibility to social media starting from a younger age might influence overall acceptance of inclusive solutions. I also assumed that people living and/or coming from bigger cities (over 500k residents) will be more acceptant towards gender-neutral solutions, as they have higher chances of meeting or learning about non-binary people.

The analysis shows crucial relationship between age and people's attitudes towards GNL solutions. Respondents of younger ages were more acceptant of the solutions ($r = -.139^*$, $p = .035$) and willing to use them ($r = -.17^*$, $p = .01$). However, the effect size was minimal. This phenomenon is not apparent in the relationship between place of origin (acceptability: $r = .01$, $p = .877$; willingness: $r = .038$, $p = .562$) or residence (acceptability: $r = -.082$, $p = .217$; willingness: $r = .039$, $p = .552$), which proved to be insignificant.

H3.4: Prior knowledge of GNL solutions in Polish and/or a foreign language modifies acceptance of the given solutions.

The analysis shows that prior familiarity with GNL solutions in Polish and/or in a foreign language moderates the answers. People who indicated knowing solution(s) in any of the languages were more acceptant of the solutions proposed in the survey (PL: $r = .236^*$, $p < .001$; FL: $r = .215^*$, $p = .001$) and willing to use them (PL: $r = .266^*$, $p < .001$; FL: $r = .172^*$, $p = .009$). Therefore, the hypothesis that people with prior exposition to the gender-neutral language are more acceptant of the language is correct, but again the effect was very small.

8. Limitations and concluding remarks

8.1. Limitations

Some limitations should be mentioned when considering the results. Firstly, the examination lacked insight into political and psychological aspects of acceptance towards the LGBTQ+ community. In the research the most important topic was language itself, without comparing it with the attitudes towards people who use it. It is likely that individuals did not differentiate the two matters correctly and their attitude towards the language was strictly related to their personal view on the LGBTQ+ community.

What is more, some respondents may have had problems with understanding the unconventional terms, as there was no explanation what the solution is called and what it serves. There was no definition if the item referred to spoken or written language, or both. My intention was to expose people to the solutions without explanation so that they acted on their emotions and without thinking it through. As individuals generally have more time to think while writing, it is possible that they may be better able to think through their word choice, compared with spoken language, which generally happens more quickly and directly to someone else.

With regards to the sample of the participants ($n=232$), it has limitations. Most of the participants represented higher level of education, which does not reflect the general population. Thus, this bias could have impacted the results. A greater number of non-binary participants could be better to represent the actually used gender-neutral solutions.

8.2. Discussions

This study contributed to the exposure of people to gender-neutral solutions in Polish language. While many studies had been conducted in other languages (i.a. Bonnin & Coronel, 2021; Sczesny et al., 2016; Wasserman & Weseley, 2009), the subject of acceptability and adoptability of GNL seemed little familiar in the arena of the Polish language. Up to date people could only examine the *Niebinarny Spis Powszechny 2022* [Eng. *Non-binary census*] (Vos, 2022), which compiles linguistic techniques used by non-binary people in Poland. Nonetheless, it does not include people who do not identify as non-binary; therefore, it does not examine all people's attitudes.

At a general level, the results answer the question of how people view the Polish language, and what they accept and are willing to do to adjust the language to the needs of inclusivity. In most part, people are not acceptant towards gender-neutral language solutions and do not view Polish as discriminative. The participants were willing to use gender-neutral language, but they did not support most of the solutions provided.

8.3. Conclusions

This research aimed to address the issue of acceptability of gender-neutral solutions and Poles' attitudes towards GNL. The usage of generic masculine being sexist and gender-exclusive is evident. However, up to date, Polish researches focused on the exclusion of females and not non-binary people. Therefore, this research aimed to address the issue of gender-neutrality, which could be a solution to the sexism in the language. Based on the analysis, people are not readily acceptant of given solutions, and they do not find the Polish language sexist. However, some factors are modifying the answers, such as foreign language command, affiliation to the LGBTQ+ community and prior exposure to the subject of gender-neutrality. The results indicate that further introduction to the everyday language and education on the matter of GNL might alter people's views, causing a more considerable rate of acceptance. While lack of insight into respondents' personal opinions on the LGBTQ+ community and on GNL itself limits the generalizability of the results, this provides a new insight which should be addressed in future studies. It also proves that prejudice against LGBTQ+ members, specifically non-binary units, might be of significant importance when examining people's willingness and acceptance of GNL since this could indicate that they have unconscious biases against it. The possibility of such biases is encapsulated in the research conducted by Hernandez (2020), where they suggested that prejudice against transgender people can be blamed for the unacceptance of singular *they*.

Moreover, while people do not feel the need to change, over half of the respondents claim to be willing to use the gender-neutral forms if they are officially introduced to the language. Thus, I believe that these findings provide evidence that further exposure and findings, as well as formal actions of official institutions concerning the Polish language, will moderate people's attitudes and augment the number of those willing to introduce gender-inclusive language to their linguistic routine.

Abstract

The thesis presents how Poles view gender-neutral Polish and their attitudes towards issues in the language that contradict with today's idea of inclusivity and political correctness in terms of gender. Even though the topic is new to Polish society, there seems to be an urgent need to adjust the language for non-binary people, so that there is no further discrimination. While linguistic feminism has been gaining attention, the issue of gender-neutrality is yet to be examined. Therefore, the study conducted in this thesis tests Polish people's attitudes toward gender-neutral solutions in the Polish language. The analysis shows that many people do not perceive Polish as gender-exclusive; however, the majority of the respondents claim that they would use GNL if it were officially introduced. The aim of the research was to find the middle ground between total neutralization of the language and the discrimination which occurs right now. The solution that appealed the most was surprisingly *Osobatywy*, which use is normative, instead of the widely recognizable neuter.

Résumé

La thèse présente la façon dont les Polonais perçoivent le polonais non-binaire et leurs attitudes envers les problèmes de la langue qui sont en contradiction avec l'idée actuelle d'inclusivité et du rectitude politique en termes de genre. Même si le sujet est nouveau pour la société polonaise, il semble qu'il soit urgent d'adapter la langue aux personnes non binaires, afin d'éviter toute discrimination supplémentaire. Alors que le féminisme linguistique a gagné en attention, la question de la langue non-binaire n'a pas encore été examinée. Par conséquent, l'étude menée dans le cadre de cette thèse teste les attitudes des Polonais à l'égard des solutions de neutralité de genre dans la langue polonaise. L'analyse montre que de nombreuses personnes ne perçoivent pas le polonais comme une langue discriminative ; cependant, la majorité des personnes interrogées affirment qu'elles utiliseraient la langue non-binaire s'elle était officiellement introduite. L'objectif de la recherche était de trouver une solution qui mettrait en accord la neutralisation totale de la langue et la discrimination qui existe actuellement. La solution qui a le plus pité au gens c'est étonnamment *Osobatywy*, dont l'usage est normatif, au lieu du neutre largement reconnu.

Appendix 1 – survey in English

1.

*A Non-binary person is one that does not conform to male or female gender. Non-binarity is a wide spectrum.

	Definitely No	Probably No	Neither Yes nor No	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
1. Do you think that Polish language is discriminative towards non-binary people?					
2. Do you think that gender-neutral language should be officially introduced in the Polish language?					
3. Do you think that the generic masculine used when we do not want to state the gender or when we refer to more than one gender may influence the understating of the text?					

4. Would you use gender-neutral language if it was officially introduced to the Polish language?

- Definitely No – these changed are unnatural
- Probably No – I do not think it is necessary
- Neither Yes nor No
- Probably Yes – I would try to use them
- Definitely Yes – it is crucial for me

5. Do you know any gender-neutral solutions used by non-binary people? What kind of? (ex. pronouns)

.....

6. What do you think about these solutions?

The scale:

- 1 – I find it unacceptable and I wouldn't use it
- 2 – I find it unacceptable but I would use it.
- 3 – I find it weird and I wouldn't use it.
- 4 – I find it weird but I would use it.
- 5 – I find it acceptable, but I would not use it.
- 6 – I find it acceptable and I would use it.

1) Wczoraj **byłom** w sklepie i **kupiłom** chleb

[Eng. *Yesterday I was in a shop and I bought a bread.*]

Neuter conjugation in the past tense of the verbs “be” and “buy”.

2) - A Alex? Czy **ono** będzie? - **Jego** dzisiaj nie będzie, bo **wyjechało** na wyjazd.

[Eng. - *What about Alex? Will they come? – They won't come today, because they went on a trip.*]

Use of the neuter pronoun “ono” transferred as “singular *they*”, and neuter conjugation in the past tense of the verb “go”.

3) **Chiałxbym** być **miłx**, ale nie potrafię.

[Eng. *I would like to be kind, but I can't.*]

Use of „X”atives instead of suffixes revealing the gender of the referent – *chiałxbym* (instead of *chcialabym* [f.] and *chcialbym* [m.]) and *miłx* (instead of *miły* [m.] or *miła* [f.]).

4) Wszystkie **osoby pracujące** proszone są o przyjście na spotkanie.

[Eng. *All of the workers (lit: people working) are called to the meeting.*]

Use of *osobatywy*. Instead of *pracownik* (m.) or *pracownica* (f.) (Eng. worker) -> *osoba pracująca* (Eng. *a person working*) (use of active adjectival participle) – generic context.

5) **Vono** nie będzie, bo musi się zajmować **vego** bratem.

[Eng. *Ve won't come, because ve has to take care of ver brother.*]

Neopronouns *vono/vego* taken from the English equivalent pronoun *ve/ver*.

6) **On*** cię nie słyszy, musisz podejść bliżej.

**he doesn't hear you, you have to come closer.*

A graphic sign replacing the suffix form the word *ona* (f.) or *on* (m.) just like in **he* which is a combination of words *she* and *he*.

7) Ale **onæ** ma śmieszne spodnie!

[Eng. *What funny pants **æ** has!*]

Use of neopronoun *onæ/jæ* translated with English neopronoun *ae/aer*, pronoun invented by the writer David Lindsay in 1920 for his novel.

8) **Onu** jest takie **fajnu**, a zawsze myśli, że nie da się jegu lubić.

[Eng. ***They** are so nice, but **they** always think they are not likeable.*]

Use of dukatives, post-humanist neopronoun *onu/jegu* – translated using singular *they*.

9) Zawsze się zastanawiam co **on/a** sobie o mnie myśli.

[Eng. *I always wonder what **(s)he** thinks of me.*]

Use of the normative inclusive solution of mentioning both *ona* and *on*.

10) **Moje piękne partnerze** przyszło do domu.

[Eng. *My beautiful partner came back home.*]

Use of neutrativ noun *partnerze* (*partner* [m.], *partnerka* [f.]) as well as the neuter adjective *piękne* and neuter conjugation in the past tense of the verb “come”.

11) **Zapomniałam/em/om** hasła.

[Eng. *I forgot the password.*]

Use of semi-normative way of inclusion of other genders instead of using the masculine generic one. *Zapomniałam* [f.]/*em* [m.]/*om* [n.] – queer context.

12) **Moje ulubione artystyczę** to Sam Smith.

[Eng. *My favourite artist is Sam Smith.*]

Use of neutrativ noun *artystyczę* (*artysta* [m.], *artystka* [f.]) with the correct declination in neuter of the possessive pronoun *moje* [Eng. *my*] and adjective *ulubione* [Eng. *favourite*].

13) Myślę, że **byłubym zdolnum piosenkarzum**.

[Eng. *I think that I would be a talented singer.*]

Use of duktives in the verb “*byłubym*”, adjective “*zdolnum*” and noun “*piosenkarzum*”.

14) Ostatnio byłam z moją **osobą partnerską** w kinie.

[Eng. *Lately, I was with my **personfriend** in the Cinema.*]

Use of osobatywy of *osoba partnerska* [Eng. *personfriend*] (instead of girlfriend or boyfriend) – queer context.

15) W mojej bibliotece można znaleźć takxx autorxx jak: J.K. Rowling, Harlan Coben czy Sarah Gailey.

[Eng. *In my collection one can find such authors as: J.K. Rowling, Harlan Coben or Sarah Gailey.*]

Use of “X”atives in plural by using 2 x’s.

7. Your gender:

- male
- female
- non-binary
- other, ...

8. Assigner sex at birth:

- male
- female

9. Are you a member of LGBTQA+ community?

- yes
- no

10. If you are non-binary, what languages do you use?

.....

11. Your age:

.....

12. Place of origin:

- town
- towns with fewer than 50k residents
- city between 50k and 150k residents
- city between 150k and 500k residents
- city with more than 500k residents

13. Place of residence:

- town
- towns with fewer than 50k residents
- city between 50k and 150k residents
- city between 150k and 500k residents
- city with more than 500k residents

14. Educational background:

- Primary School
- Middle School
- Vocational School
- High School
- University

15. Can you speak any other language than Polish? Which languages?

.....

16. Do you know any neutral forms in other languages? What forms?

.....

17. Are you studying or did you finish formation on linguistic or philological studies?

- yes
- no

Appendix 2 – survey in Polish

*Osoba niebinarna to taka, która nie definiuje się jednoznacznie w kategoriach płci męskiej ani żeńskiej. Niebinarność to szerokie spektrum tożsamości płciowych.

	zdecydowanie nie	raczej nie	nie mam zdania	raczej tak	zdecydowanie tak
1. Czy uważasz, że język polski dyskryminuje osoby niebinarne?					
2. Czy uważasz, że język neutralny płciowo powinien być oficjalnie wprowadzony do języka polskiego?					
3. Czy uważasz, że ogólnie przyjęty rodzaj męski użyty w momencie, gdy nie znamy płci lub gdy mówimy o osobach np. i płci męskiej i żeńskiej, może wpływać na odbiór tekstu? (Np. Piosenkarze często potrafią grać na instrumentach. // Na scenie nie ma żadnego aktora.)					

4. Czy używała/o/-byś form neutralnych płciowo, gdyby zostały oficjalnie wprowadzone do języka polskiego?

- zdecydowanie nie – takie zmiany są nienaturalne
- raczej nie, nie uważam, że jest to potrzebne
- nie mam zdania
- raczej tak – starała/o/-bym się
- zdecydowanie tak – jest to dla mnie bardzo ważne

5. Czy znasz jakieś formy językowe stosowane przez osoby niebinarne? (np. zaimki)

.....

6. Co uważasz o następujących rozwiązaniach:

- 1 – Uważam to za nieakceptowalne i używała/o/-bym
- 2 – Uważam to za nieakceptowalne, ale używała/o/-bym
- 3 – Uważam to za nietypowe i nie używała/o/-bym
- 4 – Uważam to za nietypowe, ale używała/o/-bym
- 5 – Uważam to za akceptowalne, ale nie używała/o/-bym
- 6 – Uważam to za akceptowalne i używała/o/-bym

1) Wczoraj **byłom** w sklepie i **kupiłom** chleb. (neutratywy)

2) - A Alex? Czy **ono** będzie?

- **Jego** dzisiaj nie będzie, bo **wyjechało** na wyjazd. (ono/jego)

3) **Chiałbxxm** być **milx**, ale nie potrafię. (iksatywy)

4) Wszystkie **osoby pracujące** proszone są o przyjscie na spotkanie. (osobatywy)

5) **Vono** nie będzie, bo musi się zajmować **vego** bratem. (neozaimki – vono/vego)

6) **On*** cię nie słyszy, musisz podejść bliżej. (*)

7) Ale **onæ** ma śmieszne spodnie! (neozaimki)

8) **Onu** jest takie **fajnu**, a zawsze myśli, że nie da się **jego** lubić. (dukatywy)

9) Zawsze się zastanawiam co **on/a** sobie o mnie myśli. (on/a)

10) **Moje piękne partnerze przyszło** do domu. (neutratywy – rzeczownik)

11) **Zapomniałam/em/om** hasła. (czytelnia.wolnabiblioteka.pl, 2020)

12) **Moje ulubione artyszcę** to Sam Smith. (neutratywy)

13) Myślę, że **byłubym zdolnum piosenkarzum**. (dukatywy)

14) Ostatnio byłam z moją **osobą partnerską** w kinie. (osobatywy)

15) W mojej bibliotece można znaleźć **takxx autorxx** jak: J.K. Rowling, Harlan Coben czy Sarah Gailey. (iksatywy)

7. Twoja płeć:

- ☐ mężczyzna
- ☐ kobieta
- ☐ osoba niebinarna
- ☐ inna (jaka?)

8. Płeć przypisana przy urodzeniu:

- ☐ mężczyzna
- ☐ kobieta

9. Czy należysz do społeczności LGBTQA+:

- ☐ tak
- ☐ nie

10. Jeśli jesteś osobą niebinarną jakich zaimków używasz?

.....

11. Wiek:

.....

12. Miejsce pochodzenia:

- ☐ wieś
- ☐ miasto do 50 tys.
- ☐ miasto od 50 tys. do 150 tys.
- ☐ miasto od 150 tys. do 500 tys.
- ☐ miasto powyżej 500 tys.

13. Miejsce zamieszkania (teraz):

- ☐ wieś
- ☐ miasto do 50 tys.
- ☐ miasto od 50 tys. do 150 tys.
- ☐ miasto od 150 tys. do 500 tys.
- ☐ miasto powyżej 500 tys.

14. Wykształcenie:

- ☐ Podstawowe
- ☐ Gimnazjalne
- ☐ Zasadnicze zawodowe
- ☐ Średnie
- ☐ Wyższe

15. Czy potrafisz się komunikować w innych językach oprócz polskiego? Jeśli tak, w jakich?

.....

16. Czy znasz formy neutralne w innych językach? Jakie?

.....

17. Czy aktualnie studiujesz lub ukończyłeś/aś/oś kierunek językoznawczy/filologiczny?

- ☐ tak
- ☐ nie

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