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Investigación e innovación en lengua extranjera: Una perspectiva global

Research and Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching: A Global Perspective

Juan Ramón Guijarro Ojeda
Raúl Ruiz Cecilia



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Una perspectiva global

Research and Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching:
A Global Perspective

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A global perspective

JUAN RAMÓN GUIJARRO OJEDA
RAÚL RUIZ CECILIA
Editores

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Chapter 49

WHEN THEY BECOME ONE: AWARENESS OF AND ALTERNATIVES TO GENDER BINARY LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

This research is based on a project about the use of gender nonbinary and inclusive language in English that I conducted at the University of Granada in Spain. The main objective of this study was to demonstrate that students who are exposed to inclusive language are more likely to show awareness of and to find alternatives to the gender binary system in the English language. This particular use of the language is not often contemplated in the English-language classroom (in this case, EFL – English as a Foreign Language), and is rarely discussed in terms of gender nonbinary identities. The implementation of inclusive and gender nonbinary language in education is important if we do not want to discriminate against women and other people who do not fall into the gender binary system (that is, female or male). My study was mainly inspired by queer theory (Nelson, 2009) and transformative pedagogy (Bedford, 2009). The data were gathered using an anonymous online survey (Google Form) containing twenty questions, which required short answers related to the third person singular, such as she, he, they or other alternatives; including jobs terminology, such as ‘actor’ or ‘firefighters’, and the usage of certain androcentric expressions, such as ‘mankind’ or ‘man-made’. The corpus under analysis for this paper was organised into three groups: A) 20 students: 10 undergraduates and 10 studying for an MA, who were exposed to this type of language in my lessons (they received input); B) 20 students with similar characteristics but without having received specific input on inclusive and nonbinary language; and C) 20 native speakers of English. Overall, the results supported my main objective. However, more research is needed to further corroborate my findings.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have been an English-language teacher for many years. However, during my process of learning English (as a non-native speaker), as well as during my EFL teaching experience, I have rarely observed situations in which non-cis-heterosexual¹, nonbinary or trans people were taken into account. Yet, because a diverse range of sociocultural identities and interactions are inherently involved in the learning experience, gender and sexual identities likewise should be part of EFL teaching. All the EFL textbooks that I have used show cis-heterosexual family units or relationships and they also tend to show traditionally typical gender stereotypes (often referred to jobs, activities or sports). Some of my EFL students, who are mainly native speakers of Spanish, tend to say ‘he’ (or occasionally ‘he or she’) when they refer to a generic person without knowing their gender, showing little awareness of the possibility of employing the nonbinary and inclusive ‘they’. It is my belief that language is one of the most important tools that we can adopt when we want to counteract discrimination of all types. The use of inclusive and gender nonbinary language helps protect people’s rights and improve their lives, in this specific case, women, lgbtiq+² and gender nonbinary people. By doing so, it also helps to counteract sexism, misogyny, cissexism and heteronormativity in education, thus contributing to a safer and more welcoming environment for everybody.

In most questionnaires and surveys that I have come across I have found the term ‘sex’ used, instead of ‘gender’, with only a binary choice given (male or female). I have encountered very few surveys that include, for example, ‘other’ or ‘nonbinary’. As a matter of fact, I never reply to surveys in which I am obliged to choose between male or female. Sometimes I write to the authors of the survey and at times they reply and say that they were not aware of it and they thank me, admitting that they should add a third choice to be fair (which they

¹ Cis people feel comfortable with their social gender and anatomical sex, both assigned at birth.

² I prefer to write this acronym in lower case as in capital letters it stands out in the text and my intention is to use it as any other word (it is often used as an adjective).

often do in the end). This underlines the ongoing lack of awareness, and possibly interest, surrounding the topic.

However, despite this, the issue has been significantly debated in recent years. For example, in 2018 the European Parliament suggested and urged all the European partners to employ inclusive language in English so as to change the mainstream, often sexist and chauvinist, usage of certain words and expressions, such as ‘mankind’, ‘man-made’, ‘chairman’, into more inclusive ones (such as ‘humans’, ‘artificial’, ‘chair/person’). In the European guidebook, Papadimoulis (2018) claims that:

The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality. (p. 3) Moreover, Lipson (2021) reminds us that the use of the singular ‘they’ for an unknown person was frequently used by Shakespeare, and Jane Austen used it as well in her *Mansfield Park* in 1814. Many languages, including Romance ones, such as French, Spanish and Italian, are strongly gendered and binary; and they use the masculine form for the inclusive one as in “*todos*” (everybody) in Spanish, which is masculine and plural but claims to include everyone. Thus, there are even more linguistic barriers in other languages, rather than English, where the masculine form is the predominant one and other neutral possibilities are not permitted. However, in the last few decades Spanish has evolved better than Italian and French (for example), which still both often employ androcentric expressions such as the equivalent to ‘the rights of man’ instead of ‘human rights’.

The fact that most of the participants in my study (in group A and B) were native speakers of Spanish might have had an influence in some of their answers in the questionnaire, which could be considered a case of ‘language transfer’; for example, the use of ‘he’ when addressing an unknown person. Nowadays, this use in English is deemed inappropriate by most people, not only for women but also for nonbinary and trans people, whose representation, in terms of pronouns or neutral forms of the language, in most languages nowadays is very limited and often unaccepted, as in the case of the nonbinary third person singular ‘ze’ in English, which has not yet formally entered in the language. In this study, the teaching of gender inclusive and nonbinary language in English was applied to a group of 20 preservice preschool and

primary school teachers, that is, undergraduate students with A2/B1 level of English (lower intermediate), including students from an MA in ELT (English Language Teaching) with B2/C1 level of English (upper intermediate/advanced), all studying at the university of Granada. The objective was to help them understand the importance of the use of inclusive language and to investigate whether they would use it after an initial input (group A). Another group formed of 20 students with similar characteristics, but, to my knowledge, without having received any input on this type of language, was analysed and compared (group B); together with a group of 20 native speakers of English to check how they would apply gender nonbinary and inclusive language to the questionnaire (group C). This is the first research project on inclusive and gender nonbinary language in English conducted at the University of Granada with EFL undergraduate and MA students, including native speakers of English.

The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the students who have received even a minimal input of inclusive and gender nonbinary language in English (group A) would perform better in the questionnaire than those who have not received such an input (group B). The native group (group C) is expected to have a higher degree of awareness, giving the fact that for example, the inclusive third singular person ‘they’ has been used for decades, but other uses of the language, such as professions (‘actress’, ‘poet/ess’) might still be marked according to a generic usage, which this study might or might not confirm.

1.1. Hypotheses (*driven*)

H1: After receiving input on inclusive and gender nonbinary language, the majority of the 20 EFL learners will be able to reproduce this specific type of language in the online questionnaire (Group A, non-native speakers of English).

H2: The 20 EFL students who have not received any specific input will not be so aware of this type of language as the input group (A) in the same given test. Consequently, the majority will not apply it accordingly to the online questionnaire (Group B, non-native speakers of English).

H3: Native speakers of English (group C) are much more exposed to this kind of language, often without realising it. Therefore,

the degree of awareness should be higher than the previous two groups, especially group B, in the same given questionnaire.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH STUDIES

In ELT there are various studies dealing with sexual and gender identities, which are often based on queer pedagogy. For example, Nelson (2009) analyses how sexual identities are discussed in ESL (English as a Second Language) through the use of queer theory. The main result of this study evidences the lack of queer identities (lgbtiq+) in ESL and how heteronormativity permeates both ESL textbooks and teaching methods. Similarly, Sunderland and McGlashan (2015), problematise heteronormativity in EFL textbooks, which are similar to the textbooks that I have been using, usually from British publishers such as Cambridge and Oxford Press. In a similar way, Paiz (2015) explores the high level of heteronormativity in ESL reading texts and textbooks at university level, emphasising once again the necessity for a more inclusive intervention; whereas Way (2016) does it in general ELT materials.

Furthermore, Canale and Furtado (2021) argue that “EFL textbooks tend to avoid explicitly -and critically- addressing gender identities: they naturalise and reinforce binary and heteronormative ideologies” (p. 58). In order to confront and counteract this issue, they suggest promoting critical classroom interactions with EFL students, as I have been doing with mine. More specifically, Bjørnson (2017) analyses gender-inclusive language in English through a feminist analysis. This research shows a lack of awareness of this type of language, confirming the still ongoing androcentric biases in the English language. Other international studies include those carried out by De Vincenti, Giovanangeli and Ward (2007), Gray (2015), and Harrison (2007). They all underline the importance of discussing and promoting gender and sexual diversity in the foreign language classroom.

In Spain, a study written in Spanish and carried out by Barozzi and Pérez-Figueras (2016) deals with how to teach inclusive and nonbinary language in Spanish employing, for example, the neutral ‘e’ (e.g., ‘*todes*’ instead of ‘*todos*’), which has not formally entered the Spanish language yet and it is not officially accepted. The main result of this study shows how a little input of this type of language in a

short university course of 40 teaching hours for university students and primary and secondary school teachers (this type of language was implemented in every lesson) can make a considerable difference in the students' and teachers' awareness of the possibility of a more inclusive language in Spanish. In fact, at first, they found it difficult to apply, but after a few sessions it was spontaneously embraced by most of them.

Another study, written in English but conducted in Spain (Ortega-Aranda, 2020), discusses a pedagogical approach to the study of gender-biased language in English and Spanish, and gender inequality, aimed at raising awareness especially among Spanish teenagers. The main conclusion of this research is that biased language, that is, binary and androcentric, is still very frequent in both Spanish and English. Likewise, Richards et al. (2016) discuss nonbinary and genderqueer genders, criticising the lack of their representations in education.

As for gender nonbinary language, Chack (2015) comments on the rise of nonbinary pronouns in English giving examples in which 'they', 'ze', 'ey' or 'zie' are employed by people in different parts of the world. Some of these people admitted that 'ze' (inspired by the German '*sie*'), for example, might be difficult to be accepted. However, they also claimed that 'they' is already a reality, even if some grammarians are against its use in its singular form, and they pointed out the fact that 'you' was only plural in the past and now is accepted as a singular form as well ('thou' has been replaced); therefore, the same can happen with 'they'. In this same article, the use of the neutral 'Mx' is discussed as a replacement for 'Mr' or 'Ms' (or 'Mrs'). On the same note, Caplan (2020), suggests that 'they' is very useful both for plural and singular forms and that perhaps English is at a transition point with its pronouns.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand how English (EFL or ESL) is taught all over the world, and how, for example, the third personal pronouns are discussed according to heteronormative and the gender binary system (she/he), as evidenced by Prentis (2018). Furthermore, McCutcheon (2019), argues that transgender and nonbinary terms should be included in the English-language classroom, asserting that:

As teachers of English, we have an utmost responsibility to be purposeful with our language, as many of our students are learning English in order to survive in a new country or in order to communi-

cate in global discourses, at work/academic/socially with people from around the world. (n. p.)

McCutcheon also stresses the importance of using the preferred pronouns for students who identify as trans or gender nonconforming and claims that: “It is important to teach our ESOL/EFL/ESL students identity language so that they have the linguistic tools to begin to understand themselves and cultures, or so that they can help a friend” (ibid. n. p.). This chimes in with the purpose of my study: to be aware of viable alternatives in English for women, trans and nonbinary people. In their blog, McCutcheon (2019) offers inclusive examples not only on how the language should be used, but also on how to discuss gender-related themes in history, culture and books.

Furthermore, Prentis (2018) stresses that nowadays there are almost one billion people learning EFL around the world and they are all confronted with binary gender pronouns from the very beginning: “EFL teachers are potentially at the forefront of influencing the way a billion people around the world think about gender” (n. p.). This suggests the usefulness of my study and the appropriateness of discussing these issues in EFL education.

In this research, I have applied the principles of queer theory (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 1996; Nelson, 2009) and transformative pedagogy (Bedford, 2009), which share similar aims: to contribute to the eradication of bullying and discrimination based on misogyny, sexism, sexual orientation and gender identity in education, as well as to transform both our education and society at large into a more welcoming and inclusive environment. In my experience, the EFL classroom offers the ideal space to work on inclusive and gender nonbinary language.

3. METHODOLOGY

An anonymous questionnaire using Google Form³ was made public online and distributed using different means, including students’ emails, Facebook and an online database. About 200 people replied,

³ <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/18XAYziBDbltN7U6dXueybuV3p8p0l7opAYkH51hdTso/> prefill

from whom I selected 60: 20 from those who received input with me, 20 from those with similar educational characteristics who, to my knowledge, did not receive any specific input, and 20 native speakers of English (only 20 responded). The questionnaire is divided into two parts: the first one is dedicated to general questions regarding the respondent, and the second is formed by 20 questions related to the use of the third singular person in English and job terminology. The second part of the questionnaire, referring to the 20 questions, is herewith attached as Appendix 1. I used the title 'English Language Project' for the questionnaire because I did not want to give away its aim. In fact, I also included some 'fillers', in which the pronoun did not have to be questioned, at least for the native speakers and for the students with more than B1 level of English.

The most important parameters in the first part of the questionnaire are related to age, gender and education. Gender is of particular relevance for this study, in fact I had left an open answer without the usual binary choice between female and male, with the hope that somebody would make a comment such as 'nonbinary' or 'not relevant', or any other expressions. However, to my surprise, all the respondents wrote either male (man) or female (woman). Since I did not want to give away the purpose of my project, I only put 'gender' without giving them the choice between, for example, M, F or NB (nonbinary). Obviously, the nonbinary choice would have given them more clues about the aim of the questionnaire, therefore, I left it blank. Moreover, in my analysis I did not consider that the answers were 'right' or 'wrong', but rather I was interested in the respondents' level of awareness of gender nonbinary and inclusive language.

Part of this research is a case of 'Data Driven Learning' (DDL), a term first coined by Tim Johns in 1990 to describe the process of discovery-oriented learning opportunities. In my study, DDL was presented only to one of the three corpus groups (A). It is my contention that, if students have never received input on this type of language, they would almost certainly use more common language, which might reflect heteronormativity, the gender binary system and gender discrimination. For both group A and B, their L1 (first language), Spanish in most cases, could have been influential regarding their answers.

3.1. *Participants and data analysis*

The selected participants were divided into three groups:

- a) Non-native speakers of English: 20 students who received input with me on gender nonbinary and inclusive language through 'DDL', between preservice preschool teachers (5, mostly L1 Spanish), preservice primary school teachers (5, mostly L1 Spanish) and MA students in ELT (10, mostly L1 Spanish), all studying at the University of Granada. 10 men and 10 women were selected in order to have a 'gender balance'. The respondents only identified themselves as binary, that is, they all replied with either F or M. The age was between 19 and 56, with a prevalence of students in their 20s.

The input for the undergraduate students studying for a preschool and primary school degree was given directly in the classroom every time that any theme related to gender issues came up either from the textbook, other materials and class discussions (or driven/triggered by me). It was not a specific teaching unit on nonbinary and inclusive language, rather it was a continuous process that lasted a whole term (twice a week for more than three months), in which students were asked to think critically and adjust the language according to the circumstances. When referring to job terminology their awareness was particularly good, but regarding the third person singular these students still found it very difficult to avoid the gender binary system or to use the inclusive masculine 'he', as happens in the Spanish language (language transfer). So, the input was not specific, but spontaneous and achieved through critical thinking using queer and transformative pedagogy as the basis for my class discussions.

Generally, the students enjoyed talking about this type of language. However, there was a difficult obstacle: their level of English. Only a small portion of the participants had a level equivalent to or higher than B1 in English, a factor which I had to take into account during my data analysis. Out of these 10 preservice preschool and primary school teachers, 7 were women and only 3 men. Although this is a case of gender unbalance, it corresponds to reality: more than 65% of the students studying for preschool and primary school degrees (at least at

the University of Granada) are women in their early 20s, the percentage is even higher at preschool level where women tend to be the vast majority.

The ten participants selected from the MA in ELT were 5 women and 5 men that I have chosen randomly among the respondents in order to have a gender balance in the whole input group. These students had a higher level of English than the undergraduate students, and this might have influenced their answers in the questionnaire. However, they received specific input on nonbinary and inclusive language only in a two-hour session during their MA programme. In these two hours that I offered, we discussed heteronormativity in the EFL coursebooks, inclusive language in professions, biased androcentric language ('mankind') and how to avoid the gender binary system 'she or he'. Although their level of English was higher, their awareness of this type of language was not always high, nonetheless they demonstrated a great interest in the matter and seemed to appreciate this type of input. Age-wise, they were a bit older than the students studying for a degree.

- b) Non-native speakers of English: 20 selected participants without having received any specific input, to my knowledge, on inclusive and gender nonbinary language, but with similar educational characteristics as in group A. Among the questionnaires that I have received, I have chosen 10 women and 10 men, to have a gender balance as in group A. Group B was formed by 3 preservice preschool teachers (2 women and 1 man), 8 preservice primary school teachers (4 women and 4 men), 4 studying for a degree in English Studies (2 women and 2 men, the only difference in terms of types of studies from group A, as I needed 4 more participants to analyse) and 5 studying for an MA in ELT (2 women and 3 men), mostly L1 Spanish, all studying at the University of Granada. In this group there were fewer students studying for an MA compared to group A, therefore the level of English was a bit lower than group A, which might have contributed to their answers. However, the difference in their level of English was not significant and the age was similar: between 19 and 41 with a prevalence of students in their 20s, like

group A. Therefore, I find it reasonable to make a comparison between these two similar groups of EFL students (A and B).

- c) 20 native speakers of English from a linguistic list from an online corpus database and from spreading the questionnaire to colleagues at the University of Granada; they mostly had an MA or a PhD, which might have contributed even more to their awareness of inclusive and gender nonbinary language. Naturally, native speakers of English are more exposed to an everyday usage of the language and therefore should be more aware of gender inclusive and nonbinary language. In this case, I could not make a selection between the ‘two genders’, as I only received 20 replies: 13 women and 7 men. Their age was between 22 and 63.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During my data analysis I have divided the participants into three tables which contain their main variables. In this section I will show the tables and I will comment on the most salient results after each table/group. “P” stands for participant and “G” for gender.

Table 1. Group A – Input – Participants’ main variables

Nº	G	AGE	EDUCATION (What they were studying)	L1	INCLUSIVE – GENDER NONBINARY LANGUAGE AWARENESS
P1	F	23	MA in ELT	Spanish	YES – 65%
P2	F	25	MA in ELT	Finnish	YES – 55%
P3	F	28	MA in ELT	Arabic	NO – 20%
P4	F	19	Degree Preschool Ed.	Spanish	YES – 80%
P5	F	20	Degree Preschool Ed.	Spanish	NO – 40%

P6	F	20	Degree Preschool Ed.	Spanish/ English	NO – 30%
P7	F	23	Degree Preschool Ed.	Spanish	NO – 40%
P8	F	26	Degree Preschool Ed.	Spanish	NO – 30%
P9	F	19	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 20%
P10	F	21	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	YES – 70%
P11	M	22	MA in ELT	Spanish	NO – 40%
P12	M	25	MA in ELT	Spanish	YES – 70%
P13	M	26	MA in ELT	Spanish	YES – 55%
P14	M	28	MA in ELT	Spanish/ German	YES – 52%
P15	M	30	MA in ELT	Flemish	YES – 75%
P16	M	32	MA in ELT	Spanish	YES – 51%
P17	M	56	MA in ELT	Spanish	NO – 45%
P18	M	19	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	YES – 52%
P19	M	21	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	YES – 51%
P20	M	23	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 20%
					TOTAL: 11 YESes, 9 NOs

As shown in Table 1, the results for group A demonstrate that there is a small majority of the participants (11 out of 20) who could apply nonbinary and inclusive language in context. The percentages are based on their answers in the questionnaire: for example, 52% means that they were just sufficiently aware. That is, the percentages related to all the participants' awareness are based on their knowledge: the closer the answers to gender nonbinary and inclusive language the higher the percentage.

Interestingly, the level of awareness was much more significant for those studying on the MA programme: 7 out of 10 respondents versus only 4 out of 10 for those on the degree programme. This could be explained by the higher level of English among the MA students, ranging from B2 to C1 compared to the lower level of the undergraduate ones (A2-B1). Another possible factor for this difference is that the MA students received a specific input in a two-hour lesson based exclusively on gender nonbinary and inclusive language in English. This approach might work better than the one I used for the undergraduate students, who received input of this type of language in every situation where I found it necessary to talk about it, but without a specific planning.

As for the variable 'gender', there is no significant difference between the scores for males and females despite the level of their programme of study. However, in the MA group, who performed well, there were more males than among the undergraduates: this is the selection I made in order to have a gender balance for group A.

P14 questioned the use of the term 'gender' in the survey, and wondered if 'sex' should have been used instead. In my opinion, 'sex' is often related to our anatomical sexual parts, whilst 'gender' refers to our identity or how other people perceive us or themselves. Therefore, gender with an open answer seemed to be the most adequate term for me.

P16 was the only participant of this group to use the nonbinary third person singular pronoun 'ze' in one of his answers, a pronoun I mentioned during my two-hour lesson in their Master's course. I did not go into details with the undergraduate groups in terms of pronouns, that is, I advised them to use always the inclusive 'they'.

The most significant result in this group highlights the lack of awareness of the third singular person 'they', although it was used

more frequently by the MA students. However, both the MA and undergraduate students were quite aware of inclusive language referred to professions: most wrote ‘firefighters’, ‘police officers’, ‘poet’ and even (female) ‘actor’. Yet some referred to a generic person as a ‘man’, and some others wrote ‘mankind’, even if a slight majority used the inclusive terms ‘artificial’ and ‘humans’. My opinion is that, apart from the differences between the two main L1 languages (Spanish and English), there are also cultural influences that might have contributed to these results. For example, in Spanish the generic ‘*los seres humanos*’ (human beings) is favoured to the generic ‘*hombres*’ (men), whilst in English ‘mankind’ is still popular and ‘actress’ might be a term in transition, which seems to be still the most common in English. Perhaps one day ‘actor’ might become common also for female actors. Whilst, in accordance with my results, ‘poetess’ has almost disappeared from the normal usage of everyday English.

Another example where the majority of respondents did not use inclusive language was when the gender of the person was not revealed or when spouse, trans or intersex people were mentioned in the questionnaire. In fact, some wrote ‘he’, many ‘he or she’ (or ‘chairman or chairwoman’), although the questionnaire suggested using only one pronoun; and just a few wrote ‘they’. The reason for their choice may lie on the fact that the majority of these participants were native speakers of Spanish. In fact, in Spanish the masculine form is considered the generic one, hence the use of ‘he’ at times (instead of ‘they’). However, given the fact that Spanish is a gendered binary language, to answer with both genders (‘he or she’) is a type of awareness per se.

Although I expected a higher level of awareness, I consider this result to be positive. The level of education, the level of English and transfer language were the most salient factors that appear to have influenced their answers.

Table 2. Group B – No input– Participants’ main variables

Nº	G	AGE	EDUCATION (What they were studying)	L1	INCLUSIVE – GENDER NONBINARY LANGUAGE AWARENESS
P1	F	23	MA in ELT	Spanish	YES – 80%
P2	F	25	MA in ELT	Arabic	NO – 45%

P3	F	19	Degree Pre-school Ed.	Spanish	YES – 60%
P4	F	22	Degree Pre-school Ed.	Spanish	NO – 20%
P5	F	19	Degree Pre-school Ed.	Spanish	NO – 20%
P6	F	19	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	YES – 60%
P7	F	20	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 30%
P8	F	24	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 20%
P9	F	22	Degree English Studies	Spanish	YES – 55%
P10	F	34	Degree English Studies	Spanish	NO – 20%
P11	M	25	MA in ELT	Spanish	NO – 40%
P12	M	33	MA in ELT	Sindhi (Pakistan)	NO – 45%
P13	M	41	MA in ELT	Ilocano (Philippines)	YES – 75%
P14	M	35	Degree Pre-school Ed.	Spanish	NO – 30%
P15	M	19	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 5%
P16	M	20	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 40%
P17	M	24	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 35%
P18	M	39	Degree Primary Ed.	Spanish	NO – 30%
P19	M	25	Degree English Studies	Bulgarian	YES – 90%

P20	M	33	Degree English Studies	Arabic	NO – 20%
					TOTAL: 6 YESes, 14 NOs

These students (group B) demonstrated far less awareness than those in group A. As far as I know they have never received any specific input on inclusive language within the context of EFL teaching, which could explain this. Even the MA students, who were at a higher level of education, did not show significant awareness. I would suggest, from this, that specific input is fundamental for a better awareness.

As indicated in Table 2, there were some participants who showed some awareness on particular questions, but did not score very well in general, apart from three students, meaning that their level of awareness was not as high as group A. This group also made lots of repetitions of ‘he or she’, or the use of ‘he’ as an inclusive term. As for job terminology, a slight majority replied accordingly, avoiding non-inclusive language, but almost all of them did not know how to employ the inclusive term ‘they’. In this case, among the 6 ‘positive’ responses, women (4) performed better men (2), but there is no clear evidence that the educational level was a key component affecting their answers.

Another typical example of less awareness in group B was the use of the determinate article ‘the’ instead of using the more expected possessive pronoun in English (as in: *A student during ‘the’ exam*). This was also a transfer error that I found within the answers of group A: in some cases where in English the pronoun is expected (as in the above sentence), in Spanish the definite article is used instead.

The lack of awareness of the inclusive and gender nonbinary ‘they’ in native speakers of Spanish was very common and this is, like the example above with ‘the’, evidence of language transfer (from Spanish to English). However, these participants did not receive specific input on nonbinary and inclusive language, and this is the most important factor that I believe has contributed to their lack of awareness in their answers. Language transfer is very difficult to overcome unless EFL students possess a high level of English or are exposed to the language almost every day.

Table 3. Group C – Native Speakers of English – Participants’ main variables

Nº	G	AGE	EDUCATION (Most had already finished their studies)	L1 ENGLISH	INCLUSIVE – GENDER NONBINARY LANGUAGE AWARENESS
P1	F	24	MA		YES – 90%
P2	F	24	DEGREE		NO – 35%
P3	F	27	MA		YES – 65%
P4	F	29	DEGREE		NO – 40%
P5	F	30	PHD		NO – 48%
P6	F	34	MA		YES – 80%
P7	F	35	PHD		YES – 90%
P8	F	36	PHD		YES – 85%
P9	F	40+	PHD		YES – 90%
P10	F	41	DEGREE		NO – 40%
P11	F	41	MA		YES – 80%
P12	F	54	PHD		YES – 90%
P13	F	63	PHD		YES – 95%
P14	M	22	MA	ENGLISH/ SPANISH	NO – 40%
P15	M	32	MA		YES – 95%
P16	M	34	MA		YES – 98%
P17	M	44	PHD		NO – 45%
P18	M	52	DEGREE		NO – 40%
P19	M	59	MA		YES – 51%
P20	M	60	MA		YES – 97%
					TOTAL: 13 YESes, 7 NOs

Group C met my expectations as they outperformed group A and particularly group B. However, they did not outperform group A by much more: in this case 13 respondents were aware and in group A, 11, which is not a considerable difference. Generally, they performed quite

well with the use of the nonbinary singular ‘they’, but at least 9 out of 20 employed terms such as ‘man’, ‘man-made’, ‘mankind’, ‘firemen’, ‘policemen’, and almost all used ‘actress’, yet only 2 wrote ‘poetess’. I believe most of these terms are still very common in the English language.

Some respondents were still binary in some of their answers (‘she/he’), when they were asked to try to choose only one word. This is probably due to the fact that native speakers of English might not be aware of the ongoing use of this non-inclusive language, as they might not be aware when they actually use inclusive language, for example the use of ‘they’ in its singular form.

As a form of comparison, groups A and B tendentially avoided writing ‘man’ and opted more for ‘humans’ and ‘police officers’ and ‘artificial’. It would be interesting to see whether there is a cultural correlation regarding this finding. I would argue there is, language is also a product of our culture and vice-versa. In this group C, I cannot take into consideration the category ‘gender’, because there was no balance, as there were more women (14) than men (6). If we compare all the three groups in terms of percentages, we will notice that awareness is higher in group C, as I would expect, being native speakers of English. Only P16, who was almost ‘perfect’ in his answers, used the nonbinary term ‘ze’ within this group.

The level of education could be considered an important factor to analyse, since all of the participants of this group had degrees and mostly MAs or PhDs. This fact partially corroborates with group A, where the MA students performed better than the undergraduate students. However, group C was quite varied in terms of age (ranging from 22 to 63), with an average age above 30. Age could be a variable to be taken into account. However, in my opinion, older people without a degree might have been less aware than younger people (without a degree), so, generally, I would not consider age a very important factor.

5. CONCLUSIONS

My hypotheses were accurate: H1 was confirmed, 11 students out of 20, who received input in group A, managed to apply gender nonbinary and inclusive language. H2 was also confirmed: in this case most students from group B demonstrated a much lower level

of awareness. Likewise, H3 was confirmed too: group C, the native speakers of English, showed a higher level of awareness compared to both group A and C: 13 out of 20. However, the most interesting outcome of this research is that EFL students (group A) only need to receive little input of inclusive and nonbinary language in order to perform almost as well as native speakers of English (group C).

The key difference between group A and C was a different type of awareness: the students from group A were generally aware of gender inclusive professions ('actor', 'poet', 'firefighters') and the use of 'human' and 'artificial' instead of 'man' and 'man-made'. Whilst group C often used 'actress', 'man-made' and 'mankind', thus demonstrating less awareness of gender and androcentric biases, as I have pointed out in my results and discussion.

On the other hand, both groups A and B had little awareness of the use of 'they' as a gender nonbinary and inclusive pronoun, giving answers which were clearly influenced by their L1 (mostly Spanish), with many examples of language transfer; whilst the participants from group C were on the whole very aware of the use of the singular form of 'they'.

During my research, I could not find, and therefore compare, specific studies with similar characteristics as mine, that is, dealing with EFL, using an online questionnaire and comparing three corpus groups. Hence, further research should focus on offering input on gender nonbinary and inclusive language in EFL in order to corroborate the main result of my study, which shows that with a little input on this type of language an equitable social change is possible starting from the EFL classroom.

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APPENDIX 1

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE 'ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROJECT'

(The first personal questions are omitted)

Please fill in the gaps with the most appropriate pronoun or noun (try to use just one word):

1. That woman has just left _____ umbrella in the pub.
2. Someone has left _____ mobile phone in the library. (Could _____ please contact me?)
3. Environmentalists are convinced that the earth is being destroyed by the hand of _____.
4. A student who loses too much sleep may have trouble focusing during _____ exams.
5. John's spouse is very happy because _____ has/have just received a wonderful piece of news.



6. What is she (Julia Roberts), (her job)?_____.

7. Students who study hard may succeed better in_____ exams.

8. Is the earth a planet? Yes, _____is.



9. What are they?_____.

10. Look for the rental car company's representative at the airport exit;_____ will be holding a sign with your name on it.

11. A trans man is driving_____own car.

12. An intersex person might find it difficult to express_____ gender identity.

13. How would you call the president of a company? Ch_____.

14. A girl decided to leave_____own town and move elsewhere.

15. A gender non-binary person has given me_____own address.

16. Mountains with a lot of snow are beautiful. _____stunning.really look



17. Emily Dickinson wrote poetry. So, she was a _____.

18. What would you write (or put as a sign) on toilet doors in a school?_____.

19. If something is manufactured (not natural), which other adjective would you use to refer to it?_____.



20. What are they?_____.