“What do *they* say in Quebec?”: Non-binary gender expression in informal spoken Quebec French

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This paper examines how non-binary French-speakers in Quebec express their gender identities in speech. I argue that reformist efforts regarding neutral French should include increased attention to how neutral French is done in informal spoken Quebec French, as I examine how current recommendations based on spelling can fail to be taken up in speech, and how regional varieties can sometimes require different prescriptions. Based on a preliminary field study with eight participants who are part of this community of practice, I find that participants did not use any audible neologisms, such as the ones recommended for writing and for other varieties. Not only did they all use gendered language to refer to non-binary referents, although at a much lower frequency than for binary referents, but they also used gender-avoidance strategies in most cases. I also show that third person clitics seem to be the word category most resistant to neutralization or avoidance for speakers of this variety. I argue that these results point to the development of two distinct systems of neutral French, one for speech and one for writing.

1 Introduction

In recent years, in the English-speaking world, there have been considerable advances in the awareness and recognition of non-binary identities, “identities which are not, or not exclusively, masculine or feminine” (Konnolly and Cowper 2017). Merriam-Webster chose singular *they*, the personal pronoun chosen to represent persons of a non-binary-gender, as word of the year for 2019, as the use of singular *they* increased by 313% in 2019 compared to the previous year (Merriam Webster 2019).

In the context of Quebec French, one of the varieties spoken in Canada, queer activists and scholars are decrying the fact that non-binary issues, and trans issues in general, are behind (Ashley 2018, 2019). French-speaking feminist scholars are less likely to problematize cisnormativity (Baril 2017) than English-speaking ones, and French-language articles, books, and reports include less attention to trans issues (Baril 2017). French-language media have also been fairly silent on the issue of gender-neutral language in French (Hord 2016).

French traditionally has no gender-neutral form and binary gender, either masculine or feminine, is obligatorily expressed on most third person pronouns, on determiners, on past participles, and on many adjectives. Consequently, the process of gender-neutralizing French involves the creation of a great number of neologisms. This considerable barrier likely explains why non-binary French-speakers report feeling that French does not have space for gender-neutrality (Hord 2016), and that their language does not let them express their identity fully (La vie en queer (LVEQ) 2016, 2017). As a result, many report using some combination of standard gendered pronouns in daily life (LVEQ 2016, 2017) and are consequently forced to invisibilize their gender identity.

Ashley (2019) explains that, in the French-Canadian context, there has been a general lack of awareness of non-binary identities outside of militant circles even if many recommendations have been put forth, including neologisms, to encourage non-binary and neutral language in French (henceforth called

neutral French). These neologisms are increasingly used by members of queer/non-binary communities in writing (Hord 2016; LVEQ 2016 2017; Knisely 2020), and present in a variety of ways. For example, we can see the emergence of the gender-neutral clitics “ille”, “al”, and “iel”, this last one a blend of the traditional gendered third person pronouns *il* ‘he’ and *elle* ‘she’.

Citing misgendering as one of the greatest sources of anxiety and depression for non-binary French-speakers, Ashley (2019) proposes a plan to advance the elaboration of a consensus from within the international French-speaking non-binary community as to how non-binary language in neutral French should be integrated into standard French without placing this marginalized group in a constant state of opposition against the dominant linguistic ideologies. Ashley also criticizes the lack of support from the *Office québécois de la langue française* ‘Quebec Office for the French Language’ (OQLF) the highest authority on the French language in the province of Quebec, and wonders to what extent the pursuit of support from institutions should be a goal of the movement: currently, the OQLF, notes the existence of non-binary neologisms but discourages their use to the public.

To move forward in this movement and understand why neutral French is not catching on outside of militant groups in Quebec, I believe we need to gain a deeper understanding of what non-binary speakers of this variety of French are currently doing in informal spoken situations. In the existing studies on the topic of neutral French, focus is on the written forms and on self-reported uses of neutral French via surveys. We know that neological forms are reportedly used less in speech than in writing, which is something many participants in the LVEQ study spoke about. One participant mentioned only using neological forms in writing but never in speech (LVEQ 2017). Is this often the case? What is it that makes the use of the proposed neologisms more challenging in speech? And if speakers do indeed use neologisms less in speech than in writing, as this speaker claims they do, what is used instead in spontaneous speech? Furthermore, the variety of French spoken by the respondents is rarely differentiated, and it is possible that different varieties of French may be using these forms in different ways.

Not having answers to these questions constitutes a considerable blind spot. If we are to propose linguistic prescriptions that tackle linguistic exclusion by seeking to end misgendering, we should examine what members of the non-binary community are currently doing in spoken interactions to avoid misgendering one another. There might also be a need for examination of the use of neutral language in the different varieties of French, as the challenges relating to gender-neutral French likely present in different ways as different varieties

To find this out, I designed a sociolinguistic study in which I ran informal interviews with four pairs of participants, which included seven non-binary persons and one man, all native speakers of Quebec French. Establishing a casual setting by meeting them in pairs, and using prompts meant to elicit third person constructions about one another, I was able to examine their speech and apply quantitative analysis to the data, identifying how speakers neutralized spontaneous speech in contexts where gendered words would be expected.

Just as the anonymous participant in the LVEQ study claimed, no neologisms appeared in my data: some phonological considerations, which I explore in section 1.2.3, may be at play here, making the use of certain neo-pronouns challenging in informal spoken Quebec French (ISQF). This strikes a contrast with Metropolitan French, the variety spoken in France, where neopronouns are reportedly used in speech without the same challenges (Bolter 2019), as these phonological features of ISQF do not exist in Metropolitan French.

Because every participant in my study asks to be referred to using some sort of gendered pronoun in daily life, as is common with non-binary French-speakers in Quebec, every non-binary participant both referred to their non-binary friend and was referred to by their friend with gendered language throughout the interviews. However, they used gendered words at a much lower frequency when the referent was non-binary than when the referent has a binary gender, meaning that, consciously or not, they made use of circumlocution strategies, which are strategies to avoid gendered words altogether if a gender-neutral replacement is not available. This is the strategy that was also used when speakers referred to a non-binary person who does not speak French and who uses they/them pronouns in English.

Further analysis reveals that even in speakers who were very successful at neutralizing their speech

(meaning the participants who replaced or avoided the most gendered forms), gendered third person pronouns (*il/lui* ‘he/him’ and *elle* ‘she/her’) were the gendered words that still appeared the most often in their speech. This seems to further point to the idea that third person pronouns may be the most challenging to avoid or neutralize in ISQF using circumlocution alone.

We may be seeing the development of two parallel systems for neutral French in Quebec: one for writing and one for speech. If this is true, we may find the need for a speech-specific gender-neutral third person pronoun designed to target the place where misgendering is most likely to occur even if the speaker means well: third person clitics in informal spoken interactions.

A certain positioning on my part is needed here: I am a cis woman who uses she/her/elle pronouns. I believe that opening up space for the gender-neutral language of non-binary persons, as well as normalizing the use of non-gendered forms when gender is not relevant, is a step towards greater equality for persons of every gender.

2 Gender-neutral recommendations

A number of grammars and recommendations have been published in the past years as to how one could neutralize one’s speech. Many members of queer communities are aware of the *Grammaire non sexiste de la langue française* (GNSLF) (Lessard and Zaccour 2017) published in Quebec, and of the *Grammaire du français inclusif* (Alpheratz 2018), published in France, two grammars that have come to constitute the most-cited recommendations in terms of neutral French. They put forth a variety of recommendations, such as the gender-neutral third person clitics *al*, *ille*, and *iel*, as well as other recommendations that draw from historical suffixes like agreements using a final-*x* where gendered agreements would have been, leading to neologisms such as *étudianxe* ‘student’, standard declinations being *étudiante* ‘student_F’ and *étudiant* ‘student_M’. Many of the recommendations involve the use of typographic symbols and punctuation. Currently, no one form seems to be taking the lead in a significant way, and a large amount of diversity exists when it comes to writing these forms.

Meanwhile, the OQLF notes the existence of gender-neutral neo-language but writes that they do not endorse the use of these gender-neutral neologisms, and that they do not expect any real change to affect how gender is used in French (OQLF 2019). To refer to a non-binary person, the OQLF recommends only the use of circumlocution strategies (the OQLF calls this *l’écriture épiciène* ‘epicene writing’).

Circumlocution is used to avoid gendered forms wherever possible (Kosnick 2019: 2). For example, a speaker could choose to avoid using a gendered adjective by reorganizing the syntax of the utterance in a way that uses a noun instead: *tu es belle/beau* ‘you are beautiful_F/beautiful_M’ could become *tu es d’une grande beauté* ‘you are of a great beauty’. However, scholars (Marignier et al. 2015; Lessard and Zaccour 2017; Kosnick 2019) agree that while circumlocutions are undoubtedly a core part of spoken neutral French, they do not constitute a complete solution without a functional set of neologisms.

3 The literature

A small number of scholars and bloggers (Hord 2016; LVEQ 2016, 2017; Kosnick 2019; Bolter 2019; Knisely 2020) have examined the question of how neutral French is being used, analyzing gender-neutrality in French literature and conducting surveys in non-binary communities. These studies measure which of the recommended neologisms cited above are used the most by speakers. These studies documenting uses of neutral French also often include reports of the challenges associated with the use of neologisms in speech.¹

Notably, La Vie En Queer (LVEQ 2016, 2017) is a blogger who conducted large online surveys of 51 questions amongst 309 non-binary French-speakers from all over the world two years in a row, in which

¹ The studies reviewed do not always distinguish between speakers of different varieties of French, and it is difficult to say if these results hold for different regions. In addition, none of the studies reviewed compare the ways neutral French is done in speech and in writing, which can mislead some to understand there to be no real difference.

non-binary individuals self-reported on their uses of neutral French. Participants were also invited to express how they would like to be able to use French, and what kinds of changes they would wish to see as a non-binary person. Participants reported preferring standard gendered pronouns for themselves (masculine or feminine) more often in speech than in writing, which is a common strategy amongst non-binary French-speakers that acknowledges that pronouns may be more challenging in speech. Neological forms in general are also reportedly used less in speech, which is something many participants brought up unprompted in the comments section at the end of the survey, with one participant stating that they *only* used neologisms in writing, never in speech. In Hord's (2016) study, which surveyed non-binary speakers of English, French, German and Swedish, only one of the five non-binary French-speaking respondents to the survey reported using neo-pronouns at all, the others using some sort of standard gendered pronouns.

4 The study

I designed a study to find out what non-binary speakers are actually doing in their day-to-day speech. I recruited non-binary adult participants having Quebec French as their native language. I asked them to bring along someone they knew (a friend, a partner, a roommate, a family member, etc.) to “come answer fun questions together” for a linguistics study about non-binary genders and the French language. A recruitment poster was posted on my personal Facebook page and in queer Facebook groups I am a part of. I recruited the first four eligible participants who showed interest in the project and who agreed to a date to meet. Three of them brought along another non-binary person as their partner, which means I was able to speak to seven people who were non-binary and one man. Participants were aged between 18 and 41, were all white, at least college-educated, and resided in Quebec. The fact that all of the participants I found were white and college-educated is a considerable shortcoming of this study, as it is unable to account for the experience of BIPOC and of people who have not attended college. As such, I want to emphasize that my findings should not be understood as representing the entire non-binary community, but rather a small subsection of it.

Because these interviews took place in June 2020, during the Covid pandemic, everything was done via Zoom. I asked them to come in pairs rather than individually because this allowed me to access how speakers interact with each other, in a setting as close as possible to an everyday informal conversation.

During the initial greetings, I explained to them that I was interested in hearing how non-binary persons spoke in casual spoken interactions with one another. I recommended that they imagine that we were hanging out. I also told them that there would be a debrief at the end.

I recorded about one hour of audio from each pair. I used prompts to move the conversation along. These were generally on the topic of the other person present (“Why did your friend ask you to participate to this study with them?”, “What is your friend’s astrological sign?”, “What are your friend’s greatest qualities?”, “What do you do when you hang out?” etc.) to encourage the participants to feel enthused about the topic and speak without feeling as though they need to perform any kind of expected linguistic result. These prompts were also designed to be light-hearted, not too personal (they were not asked to disclose any personal information), and to drive the use of third person pronouns, adjectives, and lexical items. Through these conversations, participants also naturally drifted into other topics of their choice, and in so doing referred to persons having binary genders, which means I was able to compare how the same speakers referred to non-binary and binary people.

Each interview ended with a debrief session during which I explained in more detail the specifics of the study and what I was looking to measure. I also asked them to choose a pseudonym. Discussions emerged about the details of what I had been observing during the interviews. Many of the participants mentioned that they had found the process fun and less intimidating than they had imagined.

4.1 Analysis

After transcribing the audio and creating a corpus, I extracted every utterance spoken on the topic of a third person, as this is the context where gendered third person constructions would be expected. I sorted each

of these utterances into two categories: category A, reference to a binary referent; and category B reference to a non-binary referent. Category A utterances will later be used as a baseline of what *standard* gendering looks like when each speaker refers to a binary referent. These were then compared against Category B. Most Category utterances in both categories were on the topic of a person close to them, such as a friend, a child, a sibling, a partner, or other persons with whom the speakers shared a bond.

I define *utterance on the topic of a third person* as starting at the beginning of the sentence in which the referent is first mentioned, and as ending when a new topic is introduced and this referent is no longer the topic or involved. I then calculated the total number of words spoken by each speaker in each category and normalized per 100 words the number of gendered words (pronouns, determiners, adjectives and nouns) used. For the purposes of this study, gendered past participles were grouped with adjectives, as these two categories differ in function but are morphologically the same.

4.2 Results

Use of gendered pronouns. As we established above, the participants all asked to be referred to using some form of gendered pronouns and agreements in speech, which is a strategy often used by non-binary French-speakers. Two of the non-binary participants in the study have masculine pronouns and agreements of reference, while the five others have “varied” or “alternating” pronouns and agreements of reference (the eighth participant was a man who uses masculine pronouns). “Varied” or “alternating” pronouns involve the use of both feminine and masculine words at different times within a sentence, within an utterance, or within a conversation, and the specifics can vary depending on the person, on the context or on the relationship the speaker has to the referent. One participant had neutral pronouns and feminine agreements.

Even with these uses of standard gendered pronouns, I found that participants used gendered words (pronouns, nouns, adjectives, and determiners) on average at a much lower frequency when speaking about a non-binary person who has gendered pronouns of reference than when speaking about a binary person. Participants used on average 8.7 gendered words per 100 words on the topic of a binary referent. In contrast, they used on average 2.1 gendered words per 100 words on the topic of a non-binary referent. In fact, every single participant used gendered words less often when referring to a non-binary referent. This means that speakers do in fact avoid gendered words even if they are given permission by the non-binary referent to use them. This finding hints at the fact that the use of gendered words seems to be a last resort for speakers, and that they use them when circumlocution fails.

Further analysis shows us that of all the gendered forms used by speakers referring to non-binary referents, pronouns are by far the most used. Pronouns represent 65.5% of the gendered words used in reference to binary referents but 74% of all the gendered words used in reference to non-binary referents, meaning that they are used at a relatively higher rate for non-binary referents than for binary referents.

Table 1. Ratio of gendered word per lexical category – comparison of reference to binary referent and non-binary (NB) referent

	Total words spoken	Total gendered words	Pronouns		Determiners		Nouns		Adjectives	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total reference to binary referent	3435	300	197	65.5%	45	15%	39	13%	19	6.3%
Total reference to NB referent	3879	82	61	74%	7	8.5%	4	5%	10	12.5%

Furthermore, four of the participants used gendered forms at a considerably lower rate than the four other participants: these *superneutralizers* used only on average 0.7 gendered words per 100 words in

reference to a non-binary referent, while the non-superneutralizers used on average 4.2 gendered words per 100 words in reference to a non-binary referent. These four superneutralizers have in common careers in community work and activism within queer and/or LGBTQ+ communities, meaning they can be said to have had more opportunities to practice spoken neutral French.

If we focus our counts only on how superneutralizers refer to a non-binary referent, we find that the percentage of gendered pronouns in their speech climb up to 88% of the gendered forms they use for non-binary referents. This means that the more speakers are avoiding gendered words through avoidance or replacement, the higher the ratio of pronouns amongst the gendered words used, with the superneutralizers using the highest percentage of gendered pronouns proportionally even though they use the fewest gendered words overall.

Table 2. Ratio of gendered word per lexical category in reference to non-binary person – comparison of superneutralizers to non-superneutralizers

	Total words spoken	Total gendered words	Pronouns		Determiners		Nouns		Adjectives	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Reference to NB referent by non-superneutralizer	1504	64	45	70%	6	9.5%	4	6.5%	9	14%
Reference to NB referent by superneutralizers	2375	18	16	88%	1	5.5%	0	0%	1	5.5%*
Total reference to NB referent	3879	82	61	74%	7	8.5%	4	5%	10	12.5%

Tellingly, the superneutralizers used no gendered nouns whatsoever: this points to nouns being the easiest to neutralize or avoid for this group of speakers, with pronouns as the most difficult word category to neutralize or avoid using circumlocution alone in ISQF.

Circumlocution. The gender-avoidance strategies used by the speakers involved most notably the use of the epicene noun *une personne* ‘a person’. *Une personne* is a noun that, while grammatically feminine, can be used to refer to persons of any social gender. The expression *une personne* was used a total of 15 times of the 3879 words spoken on the topic of a non-binary referent. Meanwhile, it was used only once on the 3435 words on the topic of a binary person. Depending on the context and on the interlocutors, it may even have the power to convey that the referent is a non-binary person.

Below are two excerpts spoken by one of the superneutralizers, Elio. In the first, they are speaking about their friend Jill, a non-binary person, successfully neutralizing their utterance entirely using the epicene noun *une personne* a total of five times. In the second, they are speaking about their sister, a binary woman, and using gendered pronouns seven times, one adjective, and one noun.

(1) *Elio talking about Jill, a non-binary person*

Jill c’est une personne à qui c’est vraiment facile de parler de tout. C’est une personne super ouverte pis comme juste vraiment cool en général aussi pis comme avec pleins d’intérêts super diversifié. Dès que j’ai rencontré Jill ça m’a fait comme « Oh mon Dieu, je veux juste en apprendre plus sur cette personne ». Pis les qualités c’est, justement, super ouverte, une personne aussi qui a une franchise de vie, d’identité. Pis c’est ça une personne fantastique en général.

‘Jill is a person to whom it’s really easy to talk. It’s a super open person and just really cool in general and with all kinds of diverse interests. As soon as I met Jill I was like “Oh my God, I want to know

more about this person”. And qualities, like, super open, a person also who has an honesty for life, for identity. And yeah just a fantastic person in general.’

(2) *Elio talking about their sister, a woman*

Ma sœur è pleine de contradictions, a va dire qu’è pas tant foule là, pis première chose que je sais, è allé à une parté random là à l’autre bout de la ville avec comme des gens qu’è connaissait pas pis qu’i avait comme cinquante personnes, mais à moi a va être comme « Ah j’suis pas tant gros parté ». Faque pleins de fois où je lui ai dit « Hey tu devrais venir ». Mais là je pense que je suis en train petit à petit de la faire sortir de sa bulle pis de sa zone de confort.

‘My sister she is full of contradictions, she will say that she isn’t into crowds but next thing I know, she went to a random party on the other end of town with people she didn’t know and there were like fifty people, but to me she’ll be like “Ah, I’m not into big parties”. So a bunch of times where I said “Hey you should come”. But now I think that I am slowly getting her to come out of her bubble and of her comfort zone.’

These excerpts show how Elio neutralizes their speech when referring to a non-binary person, and illustrates well the different kinds of circumlocution strategies used: repetition of given name, use of *une personne*, and a depersonalized style of circumlocution. Depersonalization circumlocutions are those in which a human referent is not made the subject, thus avoiding the gendered agreements that inevitably follow, like when Elio focuses on how Jill makes them feel (“Oh my God I want to know more about this person”).

We see that even though the superneutralizers used a great number of circumlocution strategies and no neologisms, which is just what the OQLF recommends, we are still left with 16 gendered pronouns spoken by Elio in reference to a non-binary person. This leads to our next questions: why are they not using the recommended third person gender-neutral pronouns in those contexts?

Neologisms. The absence of neologistic pronouns like *iel* or *al* in informal spoken Quebec French (ISQF) may be due to a phonological features of subject pronouns in ISQF: subject pronouns (clitics) are almost systematically shortened in ISQF to single vowels (Walker 1984). This phenomena is not present in other varieties such as Metropolitan French. The table below shows the rule:

Table 3. Third person singular pronouns and their realization in speech

Subject pronoun	Gloss	Translation	Standard realization	ISQF realization	Realization before vowels
il	3 rd pers. sing. masc.	he	il	i	j
elle	3 rd pers. sing. fem.	she	el	a, ε	al, εl
ils	3 rd pers. plur. masc.	they _M	il	i	j, iz
elles	3 rd pers. plur. fem.	they _F	el	ε	εz

The absence of neologisms in the study is likely (at least in part) due to the fact that if *iel* were to be subject to the same rules that shorten the other clitics, it would be realized [i], which sounds just like the masculine form, while *al* would be realized [a], which sounds like the feminine form. This may be one of the reasons speakers of Quebec French avoid neopronouns in speech and use different pronominal strategies while neopronouns remains unproblematic in writing.

I also wondered if the absence of neologisms in the interviews was due to my presence as a cis person. During the post-interview debriefs, I offhandedly pointed out to three of the pairs of participants that they had not used neologisms, and they told me that they did not often use neologisms in daily life. They also admitted to not being surprised when told that the other pairs of participants had not used any either, and told me that the way they spoke during these interviews was consistent with the way they spoke among themselves. Most of them expressed that they found the use of gender-neutral neologisms challenging in spoken situations: one called it “*un shit show*” as they expressed frustration towards the challenges of neutral pronouns in ISQF.

An interesting finding was that a number of speakers drew on mumbled or ambiguous vowel sounds as a way to avoid gendered pronouns in instances when they failed to plan ahead and construct an utterance that did not require a gendered pronoun. With standard gendered pronouns generally pronounced [i] and [a]/[ɛ] in ISQF, five of the seven participants produced a vowel sound situated somewhere in between, like [e], [ø] or [ə] at least once, with a total of thirteen ambiguous or mumbled pronouns in the entire study (these were excluded from the counts presented above). The sounds [e], [ø] and [ə] are all existing vowel sounds in French that are situated more or less in between [i] and [a]/[ɛ] in the French vowel chart.

Similarly, this spontaneous creation of neologisms using sound rather than spelling was applied by the participants to different words. One person pronounced (intentionally or not) [œn] as a kind of phonological blend of the determiners *un* [œ] and *une* [yn] ‘a’. It is unclear if the speakers have fallen into these ambiguities by accident or if this represents a more deliberate strategy in which the speaker is using an existing neologism, or spontaneously creating one that is in line with the phonological considerations surrounding pronouns in informal spoken Quebec French.

5 Conclusion

Based on these findings, I have shown that gender-neutrality in informal spoken Quebec French depends largely on circumlocution strategies, which were used by every speaker to reduce considerably the number of gendered words used when referring to a non-binary person. The majority of the instances of non gender-neutrality were because of a third person pronoun, meaning that these seem the most resistant to neutralization in informal spoken Quebec French.

These findings seem to indicate that we are seeing the development of two systems for gender-neutral Quebec French: one for speech, with ample use of circumlocution, and one for the written, with spelling-based neutralization strategies and neologisms. If this is correct, an interesting way forward could be to embrace the discrepancies between spoken and written neutral Quebec French and construct prescriptive recommendations specific to ISQF. These could address directly the terrain in which neutral Quebec French seems to be most resisted and where in-person misgendering occurs even if speakers are ideologically committed to neutralizing their speech and make ample use of circumlocution: third person clitics.

6 Moving forward

While this descriptive study does not pretend to solve the issue of the invisibilization of neutral French in French-speaking Canada, it can offer some observations that could be of use as the plan to develop a consensus on neutral French advances. In particular, it allows us to examine the grammatical aspects of neutral French in ISQF that may be holding it back in spoken interactions. More positively, it serves to illustrate how these speakers make use of circumlocution in creative ways and how this style of speaking can serve as a model as to how categories other than pronouns can be successfully neutralized. By empowering speakers of Quebec French to use neutral French in speech through speech-specific strategies, we may be able to effectively articulate the experience of non-binary identities in more diverse ways and help neutral French integrate standard French in written as well as in speech. This could mean the creation of prescriptive grammars that take into account the specificities of different varieties of French which often become particularly apparent in speech.

Further sociolinguistic studies would be required to gain a more complete understanding of the challenges associated with neutral French and the ways in which speakers make use of the proposed strategies. For example, scholars may want to conduct similar studies on spoken neutral French in other varieties of French, such as Metropolitan French, as I have anecdotally heard speakers report that neopronouns are used with ease in spoken Metropolitan French. As we become aware of the differences neutral French is exhibiting in different varieties, as well as in writing and in speech, we may be able to create prescriptions that take into account these factors more effectively.

Lastly, insight into the kind of support the OQLF can potentially provide may be of interest: knowing how the Office’s support of the language reform in the 60s and 70s helped bolster feminization and feminized professional titles, as well as the results of this reform today, may help the movement decide the extent to which gaining support from the OQLF should be a goal of the movement.

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Appendix A: Sample prompts used in interviews

- a. Qui a vu l’annonce pour l’étude?
‘Who saw the ad for the study?’
- b. Pourquoi tu penses que ton ami.e t’as invité.e à participer à cette étude?
‘Why do you think your friend invited you to participate in this study?’
- c. C’est quand la dernière fois que vous vous êtes vu.e.s?
‘When was the last time you saw each other?’
- d. Qu’est-ce que vous avez fait ensemble ce jour-là?
‘What did you do together that day?’
- e. Qui des deux passe le plus de temps en ligne?
‘Who spend the most time online?’
- f. Qui des deux parle le plus?
‘Who talks the most of the two?’
- g. Est-ce que tu dirais que ton ami.e est introverti.e, ou extraverti.e?
‘Would you say your friend is an introvert or an extravert?’
- h. Est-ce que tu en connais, des extraverti.e.s? C’est des gens comment?
‘Do you know any extraverts? How are they?’
- i. À la maison, qui est la.e plus bordélique?
‘At home, who is the messiest?’
- j. C’est quoi un bon repas que vous avez partagé?
‘What’s a good meal you shared?’
- k. C’est quoi une activité que vous partagez?
‘What is an activity you share?’
- l. C’est quoi les meilleures qualités de ton ami.e?
‘What are your friend’s greatest qualities?’
- m. Pourquoi t’aimes être son ami.e?
‘Why do you like being their friend?’
- n. Est-ce que vous avez déjà fait un voyage ensemble?
‘Did you ever take a trip together?’
- o. Qui a eu cette idée-là?
‘Whose idea was it?’
- p. Est-ce que vous regardez des films ensemble?

‘Do you watch movies together?’

- q. Est-ce que vous êtes déjà allé.e chez l’un.e l’autre?
‘Have you ever gone to your friend’s house?’
- r. Est-ce que tu dirais que l’apart de ton ami.e lui ressemble?
‘Would you say their apartment represents them?’
- s. C’est quand la fois que vous avez eu le plus de fun?
‘When is the time you had the most fun together?’
- t. Est-ce que vous connaissez le signe astrologique de l’autre?
‘Do you know each other’s astrological sign?’
- u. Est-ce que vos signes s’entendent bien?
‘Do your signs get along?’
- v. Trouve-tu que ton ami.e fait [son signe]?
‘Is your friend a typical [their sign]?’
- w. Imagine que ton ami.e a une journée de congé parce qu’il a neigé, Décris-moi sa journée.
‘Imagine your friend is snowed in and has the day off. Describe that day.’