



UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA

FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

GRAO EN INGLÉS: ESTUDOS LINGÜÍSTICOS E LITERARIOS

**Every Person Needs their Own Pronoun: An
Approach to Singular *They* in English**



Student: Marta Andi3n Linares

Advisor: Emma Lezcano Gonz3lez

Year 2020

Table of contents

Abstract.....	ii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. State of the art	2
3. Presence of singular <i>they</i> in the educational context.....	9
3.1. Analysis of Grammars and Textbooks.....	11
4. Pilot study	15
4.1. Objective and methodology.....	15
4.2. The Guardian: analysis of the data	17
4.3. Comparison with Los Angeles Times.....	24
5. Conclusion	27
Works Cited	29

Abstract

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing tendency to make language more inclusive, which consists of avoiding the use of the masculine gender as a generic form to refer both to men and women. This paper presents a descriptive and analytical approach to the use of singular *they* as a valid alternative for an epicene pronoun in English, since the traditional one, generic *he*, has been recently considered sexist, contributing to the exclusion of women both in society and in the discourse. At the same time, the other possible substitute, the coordinated form *he or she*, has been rejected by many grammarians and various scholars for making the text unwieldy and cumbersome. For this purpose, this paper offers first a theoretical framework for the justification of the different uses of singular *they*, taking into account the opinion of various academics like Paterson (2014 and 2011) and Bjorkman (2017), among others, and giving an account of the history of the pronoun *they*, as well as some of the problems that its singular use causes. Secondly, a complete analysis of a good number of reference grammars and textbooks for students of English as a Foreign Language is carried out in order to reflect upon the presence of this epicene pronoun in different levels of education.

Moreover, this paper reports the results of a corpus-based study on the use of singular *they* in the press. A careful selection of articles from *The Guardian* and *Los Angeles Times* was thoroughly analysed in order to obtain convincing evidence of the frequency of usage of this feature in opposition to generic *he* and *he or she*. The different contexts, antecedents and linguistic environments triggering their use were carefully studied. The data reveal that singular *they* is the preferred option for a gender-inclusive pronoun, outperforming generic *he* and *he or she*, especially in the course of the 21st century.

Thus, the results of this analysis and the generalised use of singular *they* in recent newspapers offer powerful evidence of the adequacy of this pronoun as an epicene form. In this connection, this end-of-degree project may have a certain relevance in the current social and

linguistic context, as feminist movements have been condemning the use of the masculine as a generic, this being considered non-inclusive. All in all, the present study contributes to show the validity and pertinence of singular *they* nowadays, as well as how social movements can provoke a change in the language. Furthermore, this project could certainly instigate the interest in conducting further research on the topic.

KEY WORDS: singular they, gender, generic he, grammar, he or she, press, education, corpus, sexism, gender-inclusive language.

1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to examine the use of singular *they* as an epicene¹ pronoun, which responds to its employment with singular antecedents whose gender is either unknown or considered irrelevant for the statement. Despite its recent popularity, noticeable in its presence in both social networks and academic articles, singular *they* has been used since the Modern English period, although generic *he* was the most popular gender-neutral pronoun at that time. However, as a consequence of second-wave feminism and the fights against women's discrimination, generic *he* started to be considered as sexist for perpetuating male domination by making women invisible in the discourse.

As a result, new strategies to solve this problem, such as the coordinated form *he or she*, started to be used, but singular *they* ended up being the one considered more adequate, as it does not make the reading process difficult and it is certainly more inclusive than generic *he*. Although nowadays singular *they* is quite widespread, it has undergone some criticism, especially related to its plural number and the supposed ambiguity that it generates, as well as the "violation" of grammatical correction, which is highly relevant for prescriptivist grammarians.

Furthermore, regarding singular *they*, the field of education plays an important role, as it is the main source of learning that we have since our childhood years. Thus, if teachers include singular *they* within their educational programmes, children will become familiar with it from the very beginning of their education, being able to use it regularly since then. Moreover, textbooks for learners of English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) will also be taken into consideration, as EFL learning is excessively focused on traditional grammar topics, not allowing the possibility of teaching this type of features that equally affect the functioning of a

¹ "(of a word) having one form to represent male and female" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionary*).

language and which are quite controversial. Thus, the problem of “correction” is present here too, as is the fact of teaching only “standard” English, which makes students familiar only with one part of the language.

In this connection, the aim of this project is to provide an overview of the subject and to analyse the presence of singular *they* both in the field of education and in mass media, more specifically in British and American written press. To serve this purpose, the subject in question will be treated from three main approaches, each of them corresponding to the three core sections of this project. The first section will provide a theoretical approach, where a review of the literature on the issue will offer a general panorama about it, as well as the opinions and concerns of some scholars. In the second section, an educational approach will be adopted, starting with a review of the presence of singular *they* in English education, especially in textbooks for native speakers, and ending with a subsection which analyses the treatment of singular *they* in some Grammar Academic books and textbooks for EFL students. Finally, the third section introduces a more practical approach, involving a pilot study with a corpus of texts from two different newspapers, *The Guardian* (UK) and *Los Angeles Times* (USA), which will examine the usage of singular *they* in the written press in comparison with other linguistic strategies, such as generic *he* and *he or she*.

2. State of the art

A review of the literature on singular *they* highlights the importance of this phenomenon for gender-inclusive language. According to the *Collins Dictionary*, inclusive language accounts for the “language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that might be considered to exclude particular groups of people, esp gender-specific words, such as “man”, “mankind”, and masculine pronouns, the use of which might be considered to exclude women”.

In this connection, regarding sexist language and women's discrimination, Cixous (1976) stated the need for women to revindicate themselves with a movement of their own, thus including themselves not only in the world, but also in the language (p. 875). For her, there is a necessity to "dismantle patriarchy through the exploration of a unique women's language, created by and manifesting women's sexual difference" (Verma, 1997, p. 277). She founds in writing the "very possibility of change", considering it a field that can provoke people to reflect upon social issues and thus lead to the social transformation we are fighting for (Cixous, 1976, p. 879). As for language, she clearly does not feel included in the "patriarchal language" manifested by the masculine gender which is supposed to encompass women (Verma, 1997, p. 276).

The recent demand for a more gender-inclusive language has a historical background. In the past, grammar documents in English were mainly written and addressed to men, so they were permeated with a masculine perspective (Stanley, 1978, p. 800) or, as Ann Bodine calls it, an "androcentric world-view", in which people were automatically considered men when the gender was unknown (1975, p. 133). Thus, the masculine was considered the "worthier" gender².

After the 20th-century's second-wave feminist movements, people started to pay attention to sexist language, in particular to the "he/man approach", which according to Martyna (1983) involves "the use of male terms to refer both specifically to males and generically to human beings" (p. 25). More recently, there has been much controversy over the ideas of some linguists who consider that the so-called "generic *he*" is a grammatical feature which has nothing to do with sexism against women, thus considering grammatical gender not as biological, but as merely grammatical (Stanley, 1978, p. 802).

² This view is shared by Miller and James (2009, p. 494).

Ann Bodine claimed (as cited in Zuber and Reed, 1993, p. 6), that Kirby was the first grammarian to introduce generic *he* in 1746³ but, as Stanley (1978) acknowledges, it was not until the 20th century that it was considered “correct” in American grammar books (p. 802). According to Paterson (2014), the use of generic *he* implies a social impact, adding a “semantic value and related world view” to the English language (p. 27). Thus, it cannot be considered gender neutral, as it has an inherent masculine interpretation, giving an automatic assumption of male gender (Patterson, 2014, p. 30).

As has been stated above, there had been huge reactions against the consideration of this male-oriented language as sexist, although, according to Martyna (1983), it is not taken as seriously as other types of inappropriate language such as the racist discourse (p. 27). This denial of sexism in language is directly connected with prescriptivism⁴, which is related with the process of standardisation that took place after the invention of the printing press, making the language more rigid by reducing dialectal features that differed from the standard (Paterson, 2014, p. 78). To simplify, it is a movement against language change, which, in this case, is based on the reiterated premise that generic *he* includes women in the discourse. Nevertheless, as Martyna (1983) clearly states, “good intentions are not enough, unfortunately, to guarantee generic meaning will be conveyed” (p. 28).

On the contrary, people that take the use of the generic masculine as sexist demand “a language which neither obscures nor emphasizes the differences between the sexes, one which is clearly committed to expressing both maleness and femaleness, rather than a maleness that is supposed to encompass us all” (Martyna, 1983, p. 29). Thus, the generic masculine is considered ambiguous and is thought to instigate prejudices, for example in certain jobs that

³ “The masculine Person answers to the general Name, comprehends both Male and Female; as, Any Person, who knows what” (J. Kirby, 1746, as cited in Zuber and Reed, 1993, p. 6).

⁴ Prescriptivism is defined as the “view of grammar as a set of rules for the “proper” use of language” (Yule, 2006, as cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 77).

are traditionally associated to men (scientist, engineer...) and to women (nurse, teacher...) (Martyna, 1983, pp. 30-31). Moreover, Paterson (2014) refers to the relationship between a sexist society and a sexist language, stating that language shapes the way we see reality (p. 90), so a sexist language will lead their speakers to see the world from a male perspective.

Within this panorama, singular *they* is presented as the inclusive form in order to refer to both genders or to be unspecific about it. It is necessary to look at the changes experienced by personal pronouns and their gender in English to understand where this innovative use of *they* comes from and how language change has been present in the language from the very beginning. From Old English to Middle English, English moves from a grammatical gender, with the neuter animate *hit*, to a biological one, becoming “linked to natural gender (or biological sex)” (Paterson, 2014, p. 17). As a consequence, there was a need to distinguish between masculine and feminine pronouns.

The origin of the pronoun *they* goes back to the Middle English period, when the *th*-Scandinavian forms irrupted in the language due to language contact and as a need for differentiation of these pronouns from the rest of the paradigm which sounded almost the same (Paterson, 2014, p. 18). With this change it is shown that society also influences the language in many different ways, often contributing to the evolution of its grammatical features (Paterson, 2011, p. 172).

Remarkable as it may seem, singular *they* is not a recent innovation: “gender-neutral pronouns like “ze”, “thon” and “heer” have been circulating since the mid-19th century; others as far back as 1375” (Moran, 2020). In fact, this same article highlights that, in the 1600s, the singular pronoun *you* started to be used both for the singular and for the plural, thus replacing *thou* and *thee*. Consequently, we have the same pronoun for the singular and the plural and no one seemed to complain as they are doing with the supposed ambiguity that singular and plural *they* might cause.

As a matter of fact, singular *they* has been used with epicene antecedents⁵ since the Modern English period, or even Middle English, according to Patterson (2014, p. 21), with examples in works by Shakespeare, Swift and Austen (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 3). Before that time, generic *he* was used, which could have been influenced by the roles that were associated with men and women, among other social issues (Paterson, 2014, p. 83). During the Early Modern English period, generic *he* was still the preferred epicene pronoun, although singular *they* was also present, according to Paterson (2014, p. 21), probably due to the changes in the social roles of women and their infiltration in the workplace (p. 83).

In the course of the 18th century, singular *they* was largely condemned in order to support the so-called “economy of expression”, which ended up maintaining the patriarchal structure of society (Zuber and Reed, 1993, p. 6). However, before the 19th century, singular *they* was largely employed both in writing and speaking (Bodine, 1975, pp. 131-133) and as she herself points out:

This virtual explosion of condemnation of singular 'they' culminated in an Act of Parliament in 1850, which legally replaced 'he or she' with 'he'. The Act clearly reveals a recognition that specification of both gender (for pronouns) and number (for pronouns and concrete nouns) is obligatory in English, even when such information is irrelevant to the communication (Bodine, 1975, p. 136).

Nowadays, the most common use of singular *they* is the one that comes after an indefinite antecedent (*someone, anyone, each...*). As Zuber and Reed (1993, p. 2) state, in this case, we have three choices, “generic he”, “he or she” and “singular they” and, according to them, the fact of choosing one or the other implies making a political decision. However, it should be noted that there is also an employment of singular *they* with “specific definite

⁵ The term *epicene* is used by Bjorkman to refer to “antecedents of unknown, indeterminate, or mixed gender” (2017, p. 3).

antecedents”, as in *My friend left their sweater here*, which tend to be more accepted by younger speakers than by older ones (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 3). In this respect, Conrod has discovered that singular they is widely accepted by everybody, but “those over age 35 don’t like it when it’s used to refer to Mary and John” (Steinmetz, 2019).

This innovative use of *they* mentioned in the above paragraph demonstrates that the fact of specifying the gender of the referent is optional for some people. Furthermore, in certain contexts, it serves to highlight that “there is no specific real-world referent for the antecedent” (Paterson, 2014, p. 39), as happens in *Like any girlfriend with someone they care about serving on the front line (...)* (Paterson, 2014, p. 39, adapted from Paterson, 2011).

Moreover, it is also used as a non-binary pronoun, both with definite and specific antecedents. This means that people who do not feel identified with any of the sexed pronouns can have a pronoun of their own, mainly as a protest against the fact “that every person can be identified as male or female in a clear-cut manner and that males and females should look and act and be referred to in certain ways” (Steinmetz, 2019).

Although singular *they* appears to be widely accepted, at least in some of its uses, there are certain aspects concerning it that have provoked some criticism. Firstly, prescriptivist grammarians have pointed it as grammatically incorrect, due to the fact that *they* is meant for plural antecedents (Paterson, 2014, p. 93). This means that, for prescriptivist linguists, it is more important to follow a set of rules than to listen to the voice of a part of society who are not feeling represented in the discourse. As Moran (2020) states, language is a “dynamic democracy”, not a number of rules that need to be obeyed.

In addition, people who censure singular *they* stick to the argument of ambiguity and confusion, which is also related to the fact of having the same form both for the singular and the plural. This can be rebutted by the change of the personal pronoun *you* which started to be

used for both singular and plural numbers, as I have stated before, and ended up contracting into a single word. Moreover, “more recently, second person singular pronouns have been undergoing change in a number of other European languages - French, German, Italian (...)” (Bodine, 1975, p. 142). This proves that changes in language are taking place all the time, accompanying those of society.

In general, however, the authors previously mentioned agree that singular *they* is the most favourable choice for an epicene pronoun in English, much more than generic *he*, who was the preferred one in the past centuries. Moreover, singular *they* is seen, in general, more accurate for referring to both genders than “he or she”, which is considered “cumbersome” (Steinmetz, 2019), as well as “clumsy, pedantic or unnecessary” (Bodine, 1975, p. 133). Despite, singular *they* is still questioned when having a specific antecedent from whom we know their biological gender, but the speaker chooses not to specify it.

Although it has undergone some criticism, singular *they* managed to survive and be present in today’s language. In fact, in 2015, the American Dialect Society chose it as their “word of the year”, having seen how people were starting to use it to “transcend the gender binary” (Steinmetz, 2019). Moreover, some celebrities have also manifested themselves concerning this issue: For example, in 2017, Jennifer Lopez was on the news for using singular *they* on Instagram “to refer to a younger family member (...)” and, in the same line, singer Sam Smith made the announcement that “My pronouns are they/them” (Steinmetz, 2019). The quotation below seems to summarise and justify her view on the topic:

“What are your pronouns?” everyone is asked, the suggestion being that one should never assume another person’s gender, however obvious it might seem, in part because it is offensive to use words like him or her for individuals who use they and them. For some people, this all amounts to just one more example of hand-wringing liberals trying to control people’s behavior and speech (Steinmetz, 2019).

Despite singular *they*'s widespread use nowadays, the next section of this project will demonstrate that, within the field of education and teaching English as a second language, it is not as common as it should be.

3. Presence of singular *they* in the educational context

In order to introduce singular *they* in the field of education, its ease or difficulty of acquisition should be noticed. As is probably well-known, the moment a certain paradigm settles in our personal grammar, it is not inclined to be changed (Chafetz, 1994, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 23). However, it is possible to have an effect on a pronoun pattern while it is being acquired for the first time, as it is still versatile (Tang, 2000, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 23), holding to the assumption that “children are born without a fully formed paradigm, but do have the innate ability to acquire one” (Paterson, 2014, p. 23). Therefore, if we teach singular *they* to children, they are going to learn it with ease, thus contributing to change the previous generation's paradigm (Paterson, 2014, p. 24). In this sense, Meyers (1990, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 25) makes reference to a study that evidenced how a group of children from Minnesota utilised singular *they* in larger amounts than their parents, which means that it was already part of their own paradigm.

According to Paterson, the plural pronoun *they* is easy to acquire, so the reception of the singular form would only imply the “redefinition of an existing form”, meaning the expansion of a prevailing form both in significance and syntax (Paterson, 2014, p. 25). In the previous section of this project, the issue of neutralization of the personal pronoun *you* into just one form was discussed. In this connection, “there appears to be no reason why a child cannot acquire singular *they* in the same manner as singular *you*” (Paterson, 2014, p. 26).

As far as education is concerned, there is a link between prescriptivism⁶ and the current educational system (Paterson, 2014, p. 99). Although the majority of scholars theoretically tend towards descriptive grammar⁷, the prescriptive approach is the one chosen for school-teaching, thus having a huge social impact (Bodine, 1975, p. 129). In this sense, the genesis of prescriptivism is considered by Bodine as “having significant social and psychological causes and consequences, but the specific choice of the prescriptive grammarians are rarely explored and are therefore treated as unmotivated and arbitrary” (1975, p. 30). Moreover, as Zuber and Reed state (1993, p. 519), prescriptivism does not reflect usage, as its formality does not take into account the diverse situations in which people employ language.

Hence, in relation with prescriptivism, a huge presence of masculine pronouns in English textbooks is found, due to its consideration as “more correct”, which will probably have the direct implication of children considering the masculine as the “normal” gender (Paterson, 2014, p. 99). As Zuber and Reed explains:

Handbooks can and do change in response to language practice. Correct English can be seen from a larger perspective as flexible, variable, and audience-sensitive without disintegrating into chaos. Handbooks are not bibles. They contain rules that should be responsive to the variety and growth in a language (Zuber and Reed, 1993, p. 527).

As Bodine (1975) states, although in the seventies textbook writers did not justify themselves in an androcentric manner in order to defend generic *he*, they still considered it as ‘correct’, singular *they* as ‘inaccurate’ and *he or she* as ‘awkward’ (p. 139). The thing is that, though society has improved, there is a feeling that this view is still maintained by some people even nowadays. That being so, they coincide with prescriptivists in the sense that, for them,

⁶ Defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “the belief that there are correct and wrong ways to use language and that books about language should give rules to follow, rather than describing how language is really used”.

⁷ Defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “the belief that books about language should describe how language is really used, rather than giving rules to follow saying what is correct and not correct”.

“disagreement of number, as in the proscribed singular ‘they’, is no more ‘inaccurate’ than disagreement of gender, as in the unprescribed sex-indefinite ‘he’” (Bodine, 1975, p. 139).

Furthermore, as Paterson (2014, p. 100) declares, “grammarian’s rulings on epicenes are not stable”. Overall, modern grammars promote what is called “recasting and pluralisation” more than singular *they*, which means that, though they are aware of the problem that generic *he* is causing, they are not willing to contemplate a substitute epicene pronoun (Paterson, 2014, p. 103). Some of the discussed alternatives are pluralising the sentence, changing the person of the pronoun, using the so-criticised *he or she*, etc. (Treichler and Frank, 1989, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 103).

3.1. Analysis of Grammars and Textbooks

Having taken into account textbooks for native speakers, I have also found interesting dealing with general grammars, which would also be consulted by native speakers, and textbooks for EFL students, in order to observe how they handle singular *they*. For this purpose, I have analysed seven grammar books and ten textbooks in order to verify whether singular *they* is taken into consideration as a valid option in epicene contexts. In general, grammar books show much more commitment with inclusion than textbooks, which, as has been stated in the above subsection, are more inclined to prescriptivism and correctness. In this chapter, it will be noted that textbooks for non-native speakers follow the same pattern.

Regarding the seven grammars of English selected, some differences have been found between them. For the most part, they consider singular *they* as an acceptable option to avoid sexism in language, although some of them prefer other alternatives or advocate some restrictions for its usage. Despite this being the common circumstance, there are grammars where singular *they* is not contemplated as a possibility or it is vaguely mentioned.

As I has been mentioned in the previous section, the seventies were a decade when singular *they* was barely considered as a valid option and generic *he* was preferred. Concerning the grammars where singular *they* is not considered a valid option, the only case is Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), which, as a matter of fact, advocates generic *he* as the preferred form when the gender is unknown, without even taking into account the possibility of employing *he or she*. When referring to “gender-sensitive” pronouns, they mention a “personal *he*” (p. 89), thus implying that there is an “impersonal” type of *he*. As they state it, when nouns are used generically, “neither gender is relevant though a masculine pronoun may be used” (p. 91). Despite the fact of being a grammar from the seventies, it is still read by non-native speakers as reference material.

In the rest of the grammars that were consulted, singular *they* is mentioned somehow. In the case of Quirk et al. (1985), it is vaguely mentioned when designing “mysterious forces which appear to control the ordinary citizen’s life: ‘the authorities’, ‘the media’, ‘the government’, etc.” (p. 354). Consequently, it does not consider its epicene use with indefinite antecedents, which is the most conventional.

Moreover, there are four more recent grammars that mention singular *they* quite openly as an alternative for generic *he*, thus adjusting to modern times. However, they specify that singular *they* is not used in academic register because it lacks “correctness” and so favour another option, such as *he or she*. This is the case of Biber et al. (1999), who acknowledge that gender does not mirror reality, whereas it represents the speaker choice and the use of certain tactics to prevent the specification of gender (p. 312). Although they consider generic *he* as problematic, they believe singular *they* as a solution “least likely to be adopted by academic writing, being a register much concerned with correctness” (p. 317).

Besides, Swan (2005) discusses singular *they* on a section of its own, but indicating as well its appearance mostly in informal contexts. Starting from the consideration of generic *he*

as sexist, they explain that singular *they* is “perfectly correct” and, though normally found in informal style, it has also occurrences in formal written English (p. 521). To prove it, he gives an example from a British passport application form: “If the child possesses the nationality or citizenship of another country, they may lose this when they get a British Passport” (p. 521).

Within this group, there are two grammars that discuss singular *they* in a shorter manner. One of them is Carter et al. (2011), which mentions singular *they* very briefly: “when we want to refer back to everyone or everybody and we don’t know if everyone is male or female, we use him or her and his or her. In informal styles, we use plural pronouns they, their and them” (p. 199). This perspective overlaps with Thomson and Martinet (1985), who contemplate the coordinated form *he or she* and its variations as the preferred option with indefinite pronouns, while claiming that singular *they* is more widespread in “colloquial English” (p. 69).

The only grammar that clearly defends singular *they* as the most adequate option is Huddleston and Pullum’s (2002), considering generic *he* as “one of the most obvious and central cases of sexism in language” and, especially with professions, having an implication of the male as the “default” gender (p. 492). They contemplate various options, including “sex-neutral *she*”, which:

represents a new and very much minority usage that can be thought of as the linguistic equivalent of affirmative action, consciously introducing linguistic discrimination in favour of females to counterbalance the effects of the long tradition of linguistic discrimination in favour of males implicit in purportedly sex-neutral *he* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 493).

Regarding singular *they*, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) recognise its long tradition, which goes as far as the Middle English period and its commonness in informal style (p. 493). Further to this, they posit that, even though it is ordinarily employed with indefinite antecedents, it is possible to use it, though more restrictively, with antecedents having “common nouns as

head”, such as “the patient” (p. 493). Besides, *they* can also refer, in their opinion, to “some unspecified institution or authority”, as in “They’ve closed the bridge for repairs following last week’s floods”. Thereby, as it can be observed, this last grammar analysed is the only one that contemplates all the possible applications of singular *they* as an epicene pronoun, insofar as considering “generic *she*” as a valid alternative.

Regarding textbooks for learning English as a second language, as a rule, they hardly ever mention singular *they* or even generic *he* as an epicene pronoun. Broadly speaking, they do not take into account gender ambiguity with pronouns. Within the ten books examined, including the *Face2Face* collection, only Murphy’s (1994) mentions the existence of singular *they*, though in an abbreviated way. When dealing with “Some and any”, he states that “Somebody/someone/anybody/anyone are singular words (...) but we often use they/them/their after these words: someone has forgotten their umbrella (=his or her umbrella)” (p. 168). The same is specified with “nobody/no one” (p. 170) and also with “everybody/everyone” (p. 178).

On the contrary, there are other handbooks where, while singular *they* is not mentioned nor explained, they use it in some examples or exercises. For instance, Hashemi and Thomas (2008), when referring to the usage of “each and every”, exemplify their explanation with the sentence “Each child drew a picture of her own parents”, where even the feminine pronoun *her* is used as a generic (p. 95). Two pages after, singular *they* is used in an exercise where students have to choose between *everyone* and *someone*: “everyone/someone has one of these cards pinned to their back and they have to find who they are by questioning every/all the people in the room” (p. 97). Furthermore, Hewings (2009) does not deal with singular *they* either, not even when alluding to “subject-verb agreement” (p. 44), where he could have explained the case of sentences which have an indefinite pronoun as a subject. However, he employs singular *they* in an example of “verbs with two objects”: “A child might offer their mother some food” (p. 82).

Nevertheless, in most of the books analysed singular *they* is not mentioned nor used. Taking Redston and Cunningham's Face2Face collection as a first example, there is no reference to singular *they* in any of its books, not even in the Elementary (2013) and Starter (2014) student's book, where pronouns are normally taught. In the former, "subject and object pronouns" (p. 31) are given a section of their own, with a table for students to complete with the correct pronoun, but without any mention to the ambiguity that these pronouns can cause in terms of gender and how to solve it. The latter also includes a section for "object pronouns" (p. 55) and "he, his, she, her" (p. 8), with again no reference to singular *they*. While the Pre-intermediate (2012) and Intermediate (2016) ones do not include any sections where singular *they* could fit, the Upper-intermediate (2013) deals with quantifiers, but focusing on whether they are followed by a singular or plural verb, so singular *they* could have been introduced. In this connection, the Advanced student's book (2009), when making reference to "subject-verb agreement", students can read that "a verb usually 'agrees' with its subject (...)" (p. 97). Continuing with this topic, singular *they* could have been explained. Another handbook in which singular *they* is not mentioned in any form is O'Connell's (1992), where the topics are not even related.

After having examined the presence of singular *they* in the field of education and teaching, in the following section newspaper articles are will be analysed, in order to ascertain the frequency of usage of singular *they* in this particular genre.

4. Pilot study

4.1. Objective and methodology

The aim of this pilot study is to compare and contrast the use of singular *they* with other solutions for the epicene problem, such as generic *he* and *he or she*. For this purpose, a corpus of articles from the British newspaper *The Guardian* and the American newspaper *Los Angeles*

Times have been selected and analysed. The former will be studied more exhaustively, while the latter, as the number of texts is inferior, will be used for a general comparison in the final subsection of this chapter. Moreover, the data will be analysed both quantitatively, providing the numbers and frequency of occurrences of singular *they*, generic *he* and the coordinated form⁸ *he or she*, and qualitatively, focusing, among other things, on the type of antecedent after which they are used.

To achieve this aim, articles from the online version of the above mentioned newspapers have been used, due to its greater accessibility. The scope of this study has been restricted to 50,799 words over 48 texts in *The Guardian* and 32,967 words over 19 texts in *Los Angeles Times*, due to the fact that the examples were not easily found, especially old ones⁹. The selection of texts was made taking into account epicene contexts, so that every text which included an epicene context, i.e. a sentence with a genderless subject, was selected for the corpus. Likewise, various dates and topics were considered. During this process, a difficulty in finding old articles was encountered, especially in the case of *Los Angeles Times*, since the archive was not accessible for free. The different articles were compiled in two separate documents, one for *The Guardian* articles and another for *Los Angeles Times*, and the different epicene phenomena were marked and counted manually.

The reason for choosing newspapers was that they are sources of relevant formal language use, in which words are consciously selected to serve a certain purpose, except when they reproduce the words of other people; in these particular cases, we are introduced to the common language of ordinary people, which is also relevant to this purpose. As Paterson states, following Baker (2006, p. 48, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 47), “if a specific grammatical

⁸This was called “disjunctive coordination” by Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 493).

⁹ The difficulty of finding older articles in online newspapers has also been stated by Paterson (2011, p. 175).

construction occurs in a corpus it illuminates ‘something about [the] intentions’ of the writer/speaker”. Thus, the occurrence or not of these forms shows its acceptability in the written field. Moreover, newspapers are accessible to a wide audience, so their use of the language will make a considerable impact on the people who read them. In addition, the articles compiled for this project deal with different topics (politics, education, science...), which makes them representative of the journalistic genre.

4.2. *The Guardian: analysis of the data*

Before starting analysing the data, it is relevant to state that *The Guardian* shows great commitment to gender-inclusive language in its style guide, which has been published in 2015. They are also aware of the social implications of using stereotyped or discriminatory language towards women, thus advocating for the use of singular *they* as an epicene pronoun:

Never say “his” to cover men and women: use his or her, or a different construction; in sentences such as “a teacher who beats his/her pupils is not fit to do the job”, there is usually a way round the problem – in this case, “teachers who beat their pupils ...” (*The Guardian*, 15/10/2015).

In order to analyse the data, the corpus has been grouped in three time periods: 1837-1940 (5,078 words over 6 articles), 1950-1991 (13,866 words over 15 articles) and 2000-2020 (31,855 words over 27 articles). In each of the periods, the number of occurrences of singular *they*, generic *he* and *he or she* is stated, as well as its frequency of appearance per 1,000 words. Normalised figures had to be used to compensate for the fact that different periods do not comprise the same number of words.

My data will provide numeric evidence of the presence of these phenomena in British newspapers throughout the years. Furthermore, they are going to be relevant for the final analysis, where the presence of singular *they*, generic *he* and *he or she* is going to be considered in the corpus as a whole, to see which the predominant form is. In general, it will be

demonstrated how the use of singular *they* has increased remarkably in the course of the 21st century, accompanied by the parallel descent of generic *he*.

To serve the purpose mentioned, Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of singular *they*, generic *he* and *he or she*, as well as their frequency of appearance per 1,000 words in each of the periods that were mentioned above.

	Singular <i>they</i>		Generic <i>he</i>		<i>He or she</i>	
	Totals	1,000 words	Totals	1,000 words	Totals	1,000 words
1837-1940	1	0.19	5	0.98	0	
1950-1991	5	0.36	12	0.86	0	
2000-2020	27	0.84	2	0.062	3	0.094

Table 1: Occurrences and frequency of appearance per period

Quantitatively speaking, there is a substantial increase in the frequency of use of singular *they* throughout the years, with an associated –and certainly more drastic– descent of the use of generic *he*. Although the present research should be complemented with a larger corpora in order to make general assumptions, a progressive expansion in the use of singular *they* can be inferred, especially in the period 2000-2020, thus coinciding with the moment of the major drop of generic *he*. These results fit with what was stated in the previous sections related with generic *he* being popular in the 70s, but decreasing as singular *they* begins to be used in the 21st century.

Furthermore, Table 1 also exhibits the scarce presence of the coordinated form *he or she*, which is only documented in the 2000-2020 period, specifically from 2010. In the previous sections, the fact that this particular way of avoiding generic *he* hindered the reading process was discussed; accordingly, the reason why journalists do not tend to use *he or she* may be related to a desire to make their articles more bearable for their readers.

As a summary for the quantitative analysis, Table 2 displays the total of occurrences and the total frequency per 1,000 words regardless of the period.

	Totals	Items per 1,000 words
Singular <i>they</i>	33	0.64
Generic <i>he</i>	19	0.37
<i>He or she</i>	3	0.059

Table 2: Total of occurrences and frequency

As can be seen, Table 2 shows a substantial difference in the occurrences of generic *he* and singular *they*, which leads to the consideration that singular *they* is widely accepted in the written field, specifically in the journalistic one. Moreover, *he or she* does not seem to be an approved alternative for a substitute of generic *he*. These results overlap with those of Paterson (2014): “The raw quantitative data for they and he suggests that, numerically at least, singular they is more popular in written British English than generic he” (p. 45). This demonstrates that singular *they*, at least in this limited corpus, is the chosen epicene pronoun.

Moving on to the qualitative analysis, the type of antecedents where singular *they*, generic *he* and *he or she* occur will be analysed now. In general, indefinite pronouns (*someone, anyone, everyone, anybody*, etc.), indefinite noun phrases and even definite noun phrases are employed as antecedents for these forms. Table 3 shows the relation of antecedents that occur with singular *they* and generic *he*, as *he or she* has only 3 occurrences in the corpus, so its antecedents will be commented on at the end.

	Indefinite pronouns	Noun phrases
Singular <i>they</i>	16 (45.4%)	17 (48.4%)
Generic <i>he</i>	8 (42.10%)	11 (57.89%)

Table 3: Relation of antecedents

Regarding singular *they*, as Paterson also states (2014, p. 45), the results of the analysis indicate that singular *they* occurs with different antecedents. Although the numbers do not show a substantial difference between indefinite pronouns and noun phrases, the use of the noun phrase as antecedent appears to be slightly more popular. In relation with indefinite pronouns, the use of *someone* and *anyone* stands out as the most popular.

- (1) “If anyone from the council found me in here they would throw me out on to the street. I don’t want to sleep on the street where people can see me. I still have my pride.” (*The Guardian*, 23/11/19)
- (2) (...) how should someone decide whether to change their diet based on new scientific findings? One has to understand what any specific risk level means (*The Guardian*, 29/10/19).

Furthermore, there are two cases regarding indefinite pronouns as antecedents with singular *they* that deserve comment. Firstly, there is a case of singular *they* in an article of 1865 where *everybody*, though grammatically singular, is understood as plural in meaning. I believe that is the reason for the use of singular *they* in that particular article. According to Nielsen (1984, p. 156, cited in Paterson, 2014, p. 104), when people feel that the sentence has a plural sense, they will use a plural pronoun “without bothering to change the surface structure to plural”. This is the case of (3), where the indefinite pronoun *everybody* refers to the crowd of the theatre:

- (3) The theatre was densely crowded, and everybody seemed delighted with the scene before them (*The Guardian*, 14/04/1865).

Similar to (3) but having to do with noun phrases, there is a case where a singular antecedent, *the community*, is used with the plural pronoun *they* because, though being singular, the global meaning is plural, as it refers to a group of people.

- (4) “Walls speak,” said Nicole Knight, executive director of the district’s English language learner and multilingual achievement office. “When the community comes in and this is one of the first messages that they see, that’s comforting to them. They know that the school has their back (*The Guardian*, 21/08/17).

Moreover, there is also a case where *someone* is used with a definite sense, meaning that the pronoun refers to a particular human entity, as can be seen in (5). This use corresponds to the will not to show the gender of the person, either because it is not relevant or because it is not considered appropriate:

- (5) Advice helps, but you should make the final decision. Listen to your instinct as it will be right in 99% of cases. Someone once said to me they didn’t like the name Lady Geek as it reinforced stereotypes, but it’s been one of the best things about my business (*The Guardian*, 5/03/2015).

Moving on to noun phrases as antecedents for singular *they*, the majority of them are indefinite, meaning that they do not correspond to a specific referent, but there are some cases of definite ones, that is to say the ones that do refer to a specific human being. Regarding indefinite noun phrases, there are cases where singular *they* is used with an antecedent (*a judge*) that refers to a profession that was usually stereotyped towards men, as example (6) demonstrates, which means a great progress in favour of the consideration of women as valid for any type of profession:

(6) In most US states, the minimum age for marriage is 18. However, in every state exceptions to this rule are possible, the most common being when parents approve and a judge gives their consent (*The Guardian*, 6/02/2018)

In addition, there is also a particular case where the antecedent, and consequently the whole phrase, has been made plural in order to avoid the “lack of agreement” that using the plural pronoun *they* with a singular antecedent supposedly causes. The reason why I infer that this plural antecedent has been used in order to avoid using singular *they* is that the sentence could have been written in the singular without a change in the meaning. In fact, Balhorn (2004, p. 80) contemplate the “pluralization of the antecedent” as one of the strategies to avoid sexism in language. An example can be observed in (7):

(7) Eduqas – an arm of the Welsh examination board WJEC – issued an apology but said that any students who felt they were affected would have to apply for “special consideration” to adjust their marks (*The Guardian*, 19/06/18).

As I have already anticipated above, there is also a case where, although the antecedent noun phrase is definite and thus refers to a specific human entity, singular *they* is also used. The reason for this particular use, which is very recent and innovative, as was stated in the first chapter of this project, could be that the gender of the person is not important or not worth mentioning for any particular reason. This example, which is shown in (8), demonstrates that this innovative use of singular *they*, which is the least accepted by the majority of the people, is used consciously in some newspaper articles.

(8) This secondary teacher has classes across the age range, but has to focus on key stage 4 students rather than those lower down the school. It’s far from unusual but came to a head when the writer realised they had little to say about a key stage 3 child, Tom, at parent’s evening. “My performance as a teacher is judged completely on exam results,” they write (*The Guardian*, 24/12/2016)

Regarding generic *he*, there is a sharper difference between noun phrases (57.89%) and indefinite pronouns (42.10%). According to Paterson (2014, p. 59), generic *he* is preferred with noun phrase-antecedents rather than with indefinite pronouns and the reason is that “individuation (...) impacts upon epicene choice, with singular *they* occurring frequently with antecedents which have lower individuation or less semantic definiteness” (p. 61). Thus, in the case of noun phrases, the writer may have had a masculine referent in mind which causes the use of a masculine pronoun. Sometimes, as is the case of (9), this use corresponds to an entity, *a Prime Minister*, that was usually represented by a male figure:

- (9) Last night the Government was without a head. Technically, there were no Ministers either, for when a Prime Minister resigns he tenders the resignations of all his colleagues at the same time (*The Guardian*, 10/04/1957).

Moreover, there are also cases where the noun phrase-antecedent is definite, as also happened with singular *they*. One of the cases, shown in (10), is slightly ambiguous, because it is not clear whether the antecedent, *a security guard*, is a person whose gender the writer of the article knows or if it is supposed to be masculine.

- (10) A security guard notified the police when he saw that locks and doors of the offices had been tapped to keep them from closing. When police arrived they discovered that ceiling panels near the chairman's office had been removed (*The Guardian*, 19/06/1973).

Furthermore, there is a highly particular case where the antecedent is the name of a women poet, *Miss Marian Anderson*, but the pronoun used to refer to her is the masculine one, as can be observed in (11). The reason may respond to the fact that pieces of writing written by women in the past were not well-regarded.

- (11) The incomparable voice of Miss Marian Anderson was lifted up in solemn song, and the unfaltering faith that freedom will always be domiciled in America shone

upon one of his quiet, immortal poems, read with artless beauty by Mr Robert Frost (*The Guardian*, 20/01/1961).

In the case of *he or she*, the three unique occurrences of this phenomenon in the corpus have an indefinite noun phrase as antecedent. Generic *he* being popular with that type of antecedents, due to the male mental referents that people sometimes have, *he or she* may have appeared in some cases as a transition between the use of generic *he* and the use of singular *they* with this sort of antecedents. In (12) and (13) we can see two examples of the usage of *he or she*:

(12) A pupil in an independent school was 136 times more likely to sit an IGCSE than his or her counterpart in a state-funded school. Analysis of entries in all subjects shows that three out of every four IGCSEs taken were sat in private schools (*The Guardian*, 29/12/18).

(13) The winner will receive \$1m (about £630,000) and be asked to serve as a global ambassador for the Varkey Foundation, attending events and speaking about their work. He or she will also be required to remain working as a classroom teacher for at least five years as a condition of winning the award (*The Guardian*, 20/02/16).

As can be observed, especially in the case of singular *they* and generic *he*, these variants are preceded by different syntactic forms ~~which~~, noun phrases in particular, which can indicate the reason why a certain form has been chosen as an epicene pronoun.

4.3. Comparison with *Los Angeles Times*

Although the subcorpus of articles of the American journal *Los Angeles Times* is shorter than the *The Guardian*'s, it is still valid to carry out a useful comparison. For this purpose, Table 3 shows the total number of occurrences of singular *they*, generic *he* and *he or she*, as well as the frequency per 1,000 words.

	Totals	Items per 1,000 words
Singular <i>they</i>	15	0.45
Generic <i>he</i>	5	0.15
<i>He or she</i>	1	0.03

Table 4: Total of occurrences and frequency in *Los Angeles Times*

As can be seen, comparing these results with those shown in Table 2, the frequency of use of singular *they* is higher in *The Guardian*, as the subcorpus is larger. However, the difference between the use of singular *they* and generic *he* is almost the same in both subcorpora, which demonstrates that singular *they* is also the preferred alternative in the American newspaper. Furthermore, *he or she* continues to be a scarcely used feature. Regarding special uses, it is worth commenting on the use of a generic *she* in *Los Angeles Times*, which is shown in (14). As this example corresponds to a rather old article, the use of the feminine pronoun to refer to “some single parent” might respond to stereotypes of women taking care of a whole family by themselves:

- (14) During the campaign, Hillary says, she could “stop at the Dunkin’ Donuts. You got a chance to sit down across the counter and talk to some single parent who was working the midnight-to-8 shift-or 11-to-7, I guess it is. There wouldn’t be anything between you and her. You had a sense of being anchored in your life as well as other people’s lives.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 23/05/1993).

As for the different antecedents employed, there is a similarity with those of *The Guardian*, which were displayed in Table 3. Table 4 shows the types of antecedents found in the American newspaper:

	Indefinite pronouns	Noun phrases
Singular <i>they</i>	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.6%)
Generic <i>he</i>	1 (20%)	4 (80%)

Table 4: Relation of antecedents in Los Angeles Times

As can be observed, although the percentages are quite close, singular *they* is more commonly used with indefinite pronouns, while generic *he* is more popular with noun phrases as antecedents, which is what Paterson (2014) concluded in her study. Moreover, the only occurrence of *he or she* in the corpus has a noun phrase, “each reporter”, as antecedent. Having seen that, in the case of *The Guardian*, the antecedents for *he or she* were also noun phrases; consequently, it could be inferred that this form is more usual with this type of antecedents.

By way of summary, it has been noted how singular *they* is highly employed in newspaper articles, both British and American, though other forms are still present in some cases. Also, as LaScotte (2016) demonstrated in his study, which consisted in a survey designed to know which pronoun American people employed to refer to a genderless person, singular *they* is also the preferred alternative in American speech, especially in informal contexts, *he or she* being the preferred option in formal ones.

I am perfectly aware that my corpus is probably not large enough to offer conclusive generalizations about the use of singular *they*; however it has proved useful to show that singular *they* can be regarded as adequate to perpetuate the use of inclusive language. Consequently, I do hope I have contributed to the theoretical and practical understanding of this apparently not so common structure.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined the use of singular *they* as an epicene pronoun and has hopefully contributed to demonstrate its adequacy as an inclusive pronoun, which is supported by many scholars. Moreover, it has also provided an analysis of its presence in the field of education, as well as a brief panorama of its usage in the press –a very important medium nowadays–, together with an analysis of the type of antecedents that precede it.

Furthermore, the widespread use of singular *they* evidences the importance of social movements in provoking a change in the language as something natural in its evolution. Thus, singular *they* breaks with the consideration of the male as the “default gender”, as Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 492) have called it, as well as with the masculine perspective of the world that using generic *he* encompasses, which leads to prejudices and stereotypes. Therefore, singular *they* also proves that the specification of gender is not so relevant in the discourse, as it is also used with definite noun phrases, in which the gender of the person is supposedly known by the speaker; in fact, though this could appear to be a non-common and informal use, it was employed in various articles of the corpora used for the pilot study of this project. Moreover, singular *they* also contributes to giving a pronoun for those people who have a non-binary gender.

Besides, it has also been shown how prescriptivism and standardisation take part in the condemnation of singular *they*, due to its extreme concern with “correction”, considering language as a fixed set of rules. Regarding the educational context, this is the approach chosen most of the time, without taking into account the actual usage of the language in the real world, which, as a matter of fact, I believe to be the most important part. My data corroborate that singular *they* is hardly mentioned in EFL textbooks, which means that students of English as a second language are not taught this gender-neutral structure nor the ambiguity regarding the gender of some pronouns. However, some of them, such as Hashemi and Thomas (2008), use

this structure in their examples or exercises, which demonstrates that either they might not consider it a feature worth explaining, or ~~either~~ they might be using it rather unconsciously.

In addition, some of the Grammar books examined in section 2 assert that singular *they* is used mainly in informal register, a claim that could be contested by the results of our corpus study, which demonstrates that it is also employed quite regularly in formal registers, especially since the 21st century, corresponding with a decline in the use of generic *he*. Also indicative of this high degree of integration is the fact that the American Psychological Association (APA) has accepted its use in academic writing in its 7th edition (Lee, 2019).

As a matter of fact, the fight for a gender-inclusive language is not exclusive of English. In Spanish, for example, it is even more complicated, as it is not just limited to pronouns: nouns have morphological endings to specify gender and the masculine is the one employed as “generic”. In the same way as English, there is a recent consideration of the Spanish generic masculine as sexist, which results in the current demand for a non-sexist language by some feminist groups. Without a doubt, an example of victory for gender-inclusive language is Swedish, due to its incorporation of a gender-neutral pronoun (*hen*), which was introduced by the feminist movement and which can also apply for people of non-binary gender (Moreno, 2015).

Finally, I would like to end with a personal reflection. As singular *they* seems to be widely accepted, despite its non-inclusion in education, generic *he* appears to be not necessary anymore, being considered by a large amount of the population as sexist. Moreover, I believe that studying a language should not be all about correction, but it must provide students with a wide perspective of how to use the language in real life, which also includes the “social aspects” that may affect it. Thus, they should be familiar with the gender ambiguity caused by some pronouns and the options available in order to solve it.

Works Cited

- Biber, D.; Johansson, S.; Conrad, S. & Finegan, E. (1999). *Grammar of spoken and written English*. London: Longman.
- Bjorkman, B. M. (2017). Singular *they* and the syntactic representation of gender in English. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics*, 2(1), 1-13. doi: 10.5334/gjgl.374.
- Bodine, A. (1975). Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: Singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he', and 'he or she'. *Language in society*, 4(2), 129-146. doi: 10.1017/S0047404500004607.
- Carter, R.; McCarthy, M.; Mark, G. & O'Keeffe, A. (2016). *English grammar today: An A-Z of spoken and written grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cixous, H., Cohen, K., & Cohen, P. (1976). The laugh of the medusa. *Signs*, 1(4), 875-893.
- Descriptivism. (2020). In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/descriptivism>
- Hashemi, L. & Thomas, B. (2008). *Grammar for First Certificate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hewings, M. (2009). *Cambridge grammar for CAE and Proficiency with answers: Self-study grammar reference and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Inclusive language. (2020). In *Collins Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/es/diccionario/ingles/inclusive-language>

- LaScotte, Darren K. (2016). Singular they: An empirical study of generic pronoun use. *American Speech*, 91(1), 62-80. doi:10.1215/00031283-3509469.
- Lee, C. (2019). Welcome, singular “they”. Retrieved from <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/singular-they> [May 9, 2020]
- Louise Paterson, L. (2011). *Epicene pronouns in UK national newspapers: A diachronic study*. Loughborough University.
- Louise Paterson, L. (2014). *British pronoun use, prescription, and processing. linguistic and social influences affecting 'they' and 'he'*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martyna, W. (1983). Beyond the he/man approach: The case for nonsexist language. In T. Barrie; C. Kramarae & N. Henley (Eds.), *Language, gender and society* (pp. 25-37). Cambridge: Newbury House Publishers.
- Miller, M. M. and James, L. E. (2009). Is the generic pronoun he still comprehended as excluding women? *The American Journal of Psychology*, 122(4), 483-496. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27784423>.
- Moran, J. (2020, Jan. 21). English’s pronoun problem is centuries old. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/books/review/whats-your-pronoun-dennis-baron.html>.
- Moreno, G. (2015). Suecia oficializa el pronombre neutro. Retrieved from <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20150328/54429302071/suecia-oficializa-pronombre-neutro.html> [May 9, 2020].
- Murphy, R. (1994). *English grammar in use: A self-study reference and practice book for intermediate students*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Connell, S. (1992). *Advanced English CAE*. London: Collins.

Prescriptivism. (2020). In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved from

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/prescriptivism>

Quirk, R. *et.al* (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. New York:

Longman.

Quirk, R. & Greenbaum, S. (1973). *A university grammar of English*. Harlow, England:

Longman.

Redston, C., & Cunningham, G. (2009). *Face2Face: Advanced student's book*. London:

Cambridge University Press.

Redston, C., & Cunningham, G. (2012). *Face2Face: Pre-intermediate student's book*.

London: Cambridge University Press.

Redston, C. & Cunningham, G. (2013). *Face2Face: Elementary student's book*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Redston, C., & Cunningham, G. (2013). *Face2Face: Upper-intermediate student's book*.

London: Cambridge University Press.

Redston, C. & Cunningham, G. (2014). *Face2Face: Starter student's book*. . Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

Redston, C., & Cunningham, G. (2016). *Face2Face: Intermediate student's book*. London:

Cambridge University Press.

Stanley, J. P. (1978). Sexist grammar. *College English*, 39(7), 800-811. Retrieved

from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/375702>.

Steinmetz, K. (2019). This is why singular 'they' is a controversial subject. *Time*, Retrieved

from <https://time.com/5748649/word-of-year-they-merriam-webster/>.

Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thomson, A. J. and Martinet, A. V. (1985). *A practical English grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Verma, V. (1997). Femininity and sexual difference: A critical reading of Helene Cixous. In M. Thapan (Ed.), *Embodiment: Essays on gender and identity* (pp. 271-289) Polity Press.

Retrieved

from [https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/\[SITE_ID\]/detail.action?docID=1319122](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/[SITE_ID]/detail.action?docID=1319122)

Zuber, S. and Reed, A. M. (1993). The politics of grammar handbooks: Generic he and singular they. *College English*, 55(5), 515-530. Retrieved

from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1290141228>.