

Ze is Better than Hir? A Corpus-based Analysis in Digital News and Magazines

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Abstract

The main aims of this study are to investigate the pronoun references in English news and magazines that are commonly used to refer to LGBT people, and to explore how pronoun references are used in these media towards LGBT people. The first-100 concordance lines were collected through news and magazines globally from the NOW Corpus. The non-gender specific pronouns *Ze* and *Hir* were selected and analyzed using descriptive percentage, thematic content analysis and concordance analysis. The findings unveiled that the highest frequencies of pronouns commonly used in news and magazines to refer to non-binary people were *Ze* (3,627 tokens) and *Hir* (1,177 tokens), respectively. In addition, there were sub-themes emerging from the concordance lines for the search words referring to LGBT people. The gender-neutral pronoun “*Hir*” was equally found to be used as a masculine type, a

feminine type and a neutral type, while the non-gender specific pronoun “Ze” was found to be more neutral than masculine, without the presence of femininity at all. It is recommended that when using a pronoun to refer to LGBT people, we need to consider the appropriate pronouns, especially in printed media.

Keywords: Concordance analysis, LGBT pronoun references, NOW Corpus, Corpus linguistics, Discourse analysis

Introduction

Nowadays, people in society tend to be more LGBT-friendly; however, gender diversity is still not totally accepted, especially in terms of language use. There are many terms used to refer to LGBT people in different ways. Some are proper terms, such as LGBT, transgender, trans people, homosexuality, while others are pejorative, or offensive words, such as ladyboy, tranny, sissy gay and *katoey* in the Thai language. The use and misuse of references to refer to LGBT people means that these groups of people are perceived differently from binary genders. In a more specific context, where pronoun references are used to refer to LGBT people, some media are reluctant to use the binary pronouns ‘he’ or ‘she’, or to refer to other references especially in a public space. This derives from the fact that pronoun references might describe an individual’s inborn sex instead of their gender identities.

Given an unclear judgement on which pronoun to use to refer to LGBT people, several studies (e.g. Darr & Kibbey, 2016; Knutson, Koch, & Goldbach, 2019; McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018) found a drive to use new terms to refer to LGBT people in different social contexts, such as ‘Ze’ or ‘Hir’ in schools (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018), or ‘Ze, Zir and Zirs’ in business contexts (Stewart, Renn, & Brazelton, 2015). However, in a more public context such as online newspapers and magazines, whether or not these pronouns are used

and how they are used to refer to LGBT people are still in need of study. This is because, as Dijk and Adrianus (2008) claimed, mass media, i.e. newspapers, are still the most powerful and influential media for a large number of readers, and that “control over public discourse is control over the mind of the public” (p.14). This brings about the motivation in the present study to investigate how LGBT pronouns, i.e. *Ze* and *Hir*, are used in the media, such as online newspapers and magazines. This could, at least, help decrease the vulnerable feelings of non-binary people themselves. Moreover, it can increase awareness for the public and the reporters who read or report news and write in magazines in English. Thus, the motivation in conducting this present study is to answer the two main research questions as follows:

Research Questions

1. How frequent are *Ze* and *Hir* used in English newspapers and magazines to refer to LGBT people?
2. In what way are *Ze* and *Hir* used to refer to LGBT people in English newspapers and magazines?

Pronoun Reference

Wales (1996) proposed that pronoun reference has changed since the sixteenth century when the term was first introduced in English by English grammarians. The origin of this term was grounded in Latin and Greek sources: *pro-nomen* from Latin and *anto-numia* for Greek standing for a noun. Also, Wales described the word-class, based on Dionysius Thrax, who was an ancient Greek grammarian in the second century BC, as a separate part of speech. Importantly, a pronoun stands for a noun and a substitute for a noun, but both of them seem to be far less in using a pronoun as a substitute for a noun or a noun phrase (NP). In addition, the concept of substitution has played a significant role in the discussion of personal

pronouns. Personal pronouns are considered prototypical pronouns, traditionally distinguished into a possessive reflexive, for example, whereas a substitution is not designated. Furthermore, it can be regarded that a pronoun has the characteristic of anaphoric reference, or it is used to refer back to the previous idea for its meaning. It is also used to avoid the recurrence of a noun or noun phrase. In addition, Duncan (n.d.) added that pronouns are used for referring to the words they replace. The substitution for nouns is considered to be pronouns' role. It is also important to be explicit about for which noun the pronoun is substituting. Hence, the noun that the pronoun replaces is called the antecedent, as shown in the following examples.

- (1) If **a student** studies hard, **he or she** should succeed.
- (2) **All of the students** are studying hard for **their** exams.
- (3) In the study, **they** state that writing skills are important.
- (4) In the study, the researchers state that writing skills are important.

(Taken from Duncan, n.d., p.1)

As can be seen from (3), the use of the pronoun “they” is improper because there must be an explicit antecedent as in (4). It is clear that pronouns have basic rules and also function as antecedents. However, it is undeniable that pronouns in English denote gender in their representations and it is debatable how they should be used to refer to LGBT people. In the following section, the concept of gender will be discussed.

The Concept of Gender and Non-binary Pronouns

Gender is a characteristic of people which a society or culture demonstrates as masculine and feminine (World Health Organization, 2013). There are two gender theories which are distinguished by literature: biological theory and sociological theory. To illustrate,

the biological theory mentions that sex is originally inborn. On the other hand, the sociological theory states that culture and society are the factors denoting how sexes can be expressed by characteristics and behaviors (Bodén & Hammer, 2008).

There are many terms which refer to gender identity, including LGBTQ, transgender, non-binary person, gender queer person, etc. Due to the rise of gender consciousness in society, more LGBTQ people identify themselves across the boundary of binary masculine and feminine. In addition, people who are non-binary or transgender may feel uncomfortable being addressed by improper pronouns. Those pronouns are third-person singular pronouns including “he” and “she”. The use of inappropriate pronouns may cause an alienated feeling to non-binary people among their friends, colleagues and people in the society. Nonetheless, the preferred pronouns are longed for by non-binary people, but worse than that, there is no specific preferred pronoun being set for them. This section provides a comprehensive background of many genders, terms, pronouns and the implications of misgendering (Darr & Kibbey, 2016).

Darr and Kibbey’s study (2016) described the various terms towards non-binary individuals based on Roxie (2015). They asserted that there are three commonly accepted terms of gender that need to be reviewed for people outside the binary gender. To begin with, the term “cisgender” is a definition that is suitable for a person whose gender identity, gender expression and physical body go together. However, if someone expresses himself as a man and is biologically male but does not identify himself as a man, we can conclude that this person is a non-cisgender because the three aspects do not agree. “Genderqueer” is another term which is used to describe an individual whose gender is different from the binary gender. Nevertheless, genderqueer differs from a non-binary gender because it includes both an identity and an expression, whilst a non-binary focuses on an identity, not an expression. The last term is “transgender” which describes people who identify as male or female, or

neither male nor female. Furthermore, the study claims that gender pronouns that are based on binary genders (male or female) are used incorrectly to refer to people who are identified as transgender and non-binary because people in these two groups are not a part of binary gender (Roxie, 2015). Hence, non-binary and transgender are more appropriate gender-neutral pronouns.

There are several pronouns that have been proposed to refer to genderqueer or transgender people. As suggested by Poon (2015), the two gender neutral pronouns “Zie” and “Hir” could be used to describe genderqueer and transgender people. However, these two pronouns are considered to be too feminine because “Sie” means she in German and “Hir” is also a pronoun in Middle English which refers to feminine. After that, Poon introduced five pronouns: “Ne, nem, nir, nirs and nerself” — each beginning with “n” to represent “neutral”. On the other hand, there is a pronominal system covering “ze, zir, zirs and zirsself”. To elaborate, “ze” is derived from “sie” and “hir”. In addition, some groups of genderqueer or transgender people may use other pronouns including “xe, xem, xyr, xyrs and xerself” to keep away from the feminine aspect of the pronoun “ze” (Darr & Kibbey, 2016).

With regard to the drive to invent new terms for LGBT people, publicly used pronouns are still in need of enquiry. This will be discussed in the following sections.

Queer Theory

Based on Spargo’s beliefs (1999) towards queer theory, it could perhaps be stated that queer theory is not just a systematic framework, but it is also the combination of intellectual concepts of sexual desire, gender and sex. The emphasis of the theory itself has a wide range of critical practices, for instance, to analyze the desire of same-sex relations in film, music and images; to analyze the sexual power of political relations; to analyze the language used to refer to non-binary genders; and to study the identification of transsexuals and transgenders.

Besides, this approach believes that, regarding specific groups of people such as lesbian, gay, transgender, women and so on, it is unnecessary to make any reference to them as a group because identities comprise such a wide range of components that it is impossible to group people together in one category. Also, the belief of Spargo (1999) towards queer theory is in line with that of Butler (1990) who claimed effective understanding of gender is needed in order to argue the existing idea that gender is constructed and shaped by a society and culture. Butler also disputes that the identity of gender does not follow a natural gender and the intrinsic level of people, however, it is demonstrated through repeated actions that people express. Therefore, it could be summarized regarding these two theories that the phobia or fear towards non-binary genders is devised from binary genders' perspectives. It is unnecessary to label or stigmatize other genders who perform differently as marginalized members in the society.

At this point in discussion, we can see that pronoun references used for LGBT are various and that the use and misuse of the terms could, to some degree, lead to gender diversity. This study takes these issues into consideration. The research also investigated language-in-use in online newspapers and magazines to study how pronoun references were used to refer to LGBT people.

In the following section, previous studies on LGBT terms are explored to formulate the present research methodology.

Empirical Past Studies

McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2018) examined experiences of LGBTQ teenagers in Kahukura High School located in Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand. The main participants were the school's sexual and gender diverse or Rainbow group. The results of the research revealed that in many contexts, gender binaries are disrupted. Furthermore, from the study, it

is apparent that use of personal pronouns is not necessarily straightforward. That gender and sexuality norms should to be disrupted is a feeling shared by many students in the Rainbow group. The problems arose when many participants revealed that pronouns in English were extremely limited. On the other hand, the terms such as “Ze” and “Hir” which are considered to be non-gender specific pronouns were available and suggested for use, however, those two terms previously mentioned were not common because they were not used in everyday language in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Bevik (2013) examined the assessment of the three gender pronouns in Swedish which comprise of hon (she), han (he) and hen (gender neutral). The participants of this research study were 51 undergraduate psychology students from Lund University in Sweden. The results of the research showed that use of the pronoun “hen” which was the gender-neutral pronoun had been weightily debated because it was often seen as a word that could provoke and distort the real meaning of what was truly being conveyed (Milles, 2011). In this sense, it showed that language could never be totally neutral. On the other hand, gender in language could change with other changes in the world. Thus, from the discussions, the gender-neutral pronoun “hen” in Swedish could bring about an increased consciousness of gender inequalities.

Knutson et al. (2019) examined the negative emotions that transgender clients in the United State of America might experience when they were identified with inappropriate pronouns. This research consisted of people who considered themselves as transgender, gender queer, agender, gender diverse and other identities. The results revealed that some teenager gender diverse people used the term “gender queer” and they tended to use three pronouns which were they, them and theirs. On the other hand, a group of older trans people might use the term “transsexual” or “cross dresser” which were considered to be outdated terms to refer to themselves. These people previously mentioned above tended to prefer to

use two pronouns which were he or she. In addition, the results also indicated that transgendered clients in the North on the coasts and in the large cities might prefer to use the terms *Ze*, *Zir* and *Zirs* which were considered as gender neutral pronouns (Stewart et al., 2015). However, transgendered clients from the Midwest, South and rural areas tended to use three pronouns such as he, she and they which were considered as common pronouns.

The existing literature as well as the findings of the relevant studies could connote that non-gender specific pronouns, i.e. *Ze* and *Hir*, are longed for by non-binary people. With no specific pronouns being designated for them, this leads and challenges the present study to investigate and explore the real use of gender-neutral pronouns, as it is claimed by Darr and Kibbey (2016) that “English language must reflect societal awareness of linguistic representation” (p.74). In this paper, a corpora analysis was used to explore the issue. This is explained in the following section.

Corpora Analysis

To analyze how pronoun references were used to refer to LGBT people, researchers may explore and study concordance lines and frequency lists (Evison, 2010; Lindquist, 2009).

Lindquist (2009) has defined concordance lines as “a list of all the contexts in which a word occurs in a particular text” (p.5). To determine the aspects of a particular word or phrase such as semantic prosody, semantic reference or lexico-grammatical patterns, researchers need to extract the authentic data from the ‘Key-Word-In-Context’ (KWIC) concordances. Furthermore, the node or search word will demonstrate the occurrences perpendicular in the center of the line (O’Keeffe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007). Hence, the contexts and items around the search word can be used to analyze the collocation by looking at the concordances (Evison, 2010).

The reliable frequency of each language token can be calculated through computerized corpora to compare language patterns in different contexts, genres, periods of time and written and spoken language (Lindquist, 2009). The list of the frequency can be automatically constructed through the electronic corpus in an alphabetical order or in a numerical order ranked from a high to a low frequency. Because of its reliability of the frequency, linguists value the frequency occurrences as useful evidence because they can obtain a range of frequency of information. Another point that makes frequency lists more believable is that it includes a statistical measure such as Mutual Information (MI scores) which can help to test collocational strength of a token (Evison, 2010).

In the present study, both frequency and concordance lines were used in a corpora analysis to extract LGBT pronoun references in concordance lines. The following describes how the present study collected a source of concordance lines for LGBT people in newspapers and magazines and how the results were analyzed.

Methodology

Data Collection

In the present study, two search words “*Hir*” and “*Ze*” were selected from McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2018); Knutson et al. (2019); and Darr and Kibbey (2016) (see Table 1). The reason for this is that these two words were regarded as non-binary pronouns which might not pose any bias in the analysis. Table 1 below presents the two search words.

Table 1

The Search Words from Non-Gender Specific Pronouns

Word Numbers	Non-Gender Specific Pronouns
1.	<i>Ze</i>

Next, the first-100 concordances presented in context of the NOW Corpus were selected to analyze. According to Davies (2011), the NOW (News on the web) Corpus is a corpus which is composed of 11.6 million words of authentic data from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010 and continues growing daily in terms of the size. It collects the texts which are written genre globally. Additionally, the host of this corpora is Brigham Young University (BYU) and the creator of this corpora is Mark Davies. Due to the different purposes of the study, Brigham Young University provides a number of different corpora among the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) which permit all researchers to carry out various kinds of searches, for example, concordance and collocation (Törmä, 2018).

Both Figures 1 and 2 below illuminate the context of the two major search words which are ‘Ze’ and ‘Hir’ obtained from the NOW Corpus. To recapitulate, the researchers searched for the results of the two nodes and then analyzed them from the first-100 concordance lines. Likewise, the two figures displayed in this present study show how the researchers selected the context from the concordance lines which reported the content related to non-binary issues/aspects in the digital news and magazine genres. Thus, the following Figures 1 and 2 present samples of the concordance lines drawn from the NOW Corpus collected from January to February 2021.

Figure 1

The Concordances Showing Context from the Search Word “Hir” on the NOW Corpus

NOW Corpus (News on the Web)	
SEARCH	CONTEXT
" Odyssey Theatre Ensemble opens its 50th anniversary season with the Los Angeles premiere of Hir , a darkly funny, shockingly absurd a	
72568494 Bollywood diva and actress Deepika Padukone celebrated hir 35th birthday on Tuesday. Her day without any doubt began wit	
sister, now named Max (Tom Phelan), takes hormones to better embody hir genderqueer identity. # What ensues is an examination of w	
balances criticality and entertainment. # I spoke with Mac to discuss the success of Hir , the state of performance art, and the fall of Willy!	
. # Queerness revolts in the Podunk setting of Taylor Mac's newest play, Hir , currently running at Playwrights Horizons. In the time that is	
* # Zachary Small: I am interested in the different tensions the characters of Hir experience. They are cramped together in their messy liv	
and the LDF clashed with each other. In some places like Kanjirampara in T hir uvananthapuram and Kummamkallu in Idukki, workers or,	
. When the diver surfaces s/he is supposed to take a few breaths, remove hir nose clip, produce the tag grabbed at the bottom, and say "	
been such a thing. Iconic transmasculine lesbian writer Leslie Feinberg is remembered primarily for hir writing about this. There's no way	
's future behavior accurately, often in a short amount of time. Senior executive hir ? ing mistakes outside the highest levels of government	
Don's house, for instance, is a burlesque bacchanal showcasing costume designer Joanna Hir 's flair for lewks that teeter enjoyably on the	
loaded yet, but your article continues below. Article content continued # Le Hir 's allegation is uncorroborated, and Simard, Chevette, and	
suppression by sovereignist voting officials began to emerge. # In 2005, Richard Le Hir , a Parti Qu? b? cois minister during the referendum,	
the caucus of PQ members of the National Assembly discussed such tactics. # Le Hir said delaying voting and rejecting valid No votes in r	
to compare SHRC to PYR. You may as well say that IF any company hir a few grand slams, it could be like PYR. I own a bit	
active cases reported till Monday in the state, 18 per cent were from T hir uvananthapuram. The district also reported 32 per cent of the t	
SDP pr? residential primaries, Babagana Kingibe, as running mate. Bas? hir Tofa won in the NRC; he picked form? er governor of the Cent	
to compare SHRC to PYR. You may as well say that IF any company hir a few grand slams. It could be like PYR. I own a bit	

Figure 2

The Concordances Showing Context from the Search Word “Ze” on the NOW Corpus

NOW Corpus (News on the Web) ⓘ 📄 ⬇		
SEARCH	FREQUENCY	CONTEXT
		the lunar eclipse on Wednesday, May 26, of course (not to mention ze blood moon. Mwahahaha!) Try tweaking your regime (in terms of wellness
		. " -Dwight, creating a GIF you've seen countless times while admitting " Ze KGB waits for no one. " # This episode displays Michael at his most
		, known as' Karume Cup', scheduled to continue on Sunday at Mao ze Dong and Maisara courts. # Zanzibar basketball players take part in a recent league
		to choose up to four pronouns from a much larger list, adding options for ze , ve, as well as others. This feature can be somewhat difficult to
		can pick from a wide variety of pronouns including he, she, they, ze and xe. # " The new field is available in a few countries,
		a list of dozens of options, including she, he, they, ze , ve and many others, to prevent users from adding inappropriate words. Instagram
		selected from a pre-approved list of common pronouns including she, he, they, ze , and others. # The company said users can edit or remove pronouns at
		old, but I had so many ideas that eventually became shows like Nirvana, Ze Comedy, Friday Night Live with in collaboration with fellow producers at the static
		, there will be no more vineyards, " said Silv? re Dev? ze , an employee with the local agriculture chamber. To make the solar panel installations
		it an underwhelming reveal to have the bumbling Buckells revealed as the Keyser S? ze of the whole thing? Maybe. # But I do think that's kind
		, and with the support of OpenGate's operations team. # Julien Lagr? ze , Partner and Head of Europe at OpenGate Capital, commented, " When we
		and du Plenty met in Seattle, as part of the queer performance-art troupe Ze Whiz Kidz, and soon formed a heavy glam band, the Tupperwares, ultimately
		de Gaulle coughed and said, ' Actually, ma cherie, I think ze English call it' appiness'. " Quotes of the Week # "
		her, he and him, they and them, ey and em, and ze and zir. Ari also ponders their own words -- pronouns, and also descriptions
		Level 3, and are in the position to move down again and give New Ze ... # By creating account you will get access to Hotstocks & personalised emails #
		not fit their narrative or advance the liberal agenda: It's Keyser S? ze -- poof, it's gone. 87099392 #
		Beta Film is handling world sales on Sisi while ViacomCBS Global Distribution Group is selling Ze Network worldwide as part of CBS Studios' first-look internet
		classic Sisi (think The Crown set in the 19th Century Austrian-Hungarian empire) and Ze Network, a meta espionage comedy starring David Hasselhoff as a
		under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. A 2016 study by Jean Dr? ze and Souparna Maji showed that West Bengal's Public Distribution System --
		life partner. In his French accent, he was like, ' Of course ze Pfizer is best.' " For what it's worth, the U.K. is
		? n Szab? ' s Golden Globe nominated " Napf? ny? ze " (Sunshine). # Her final film appearance was the lead role in
		1989 and Oscar-winner Istv? n Szab? ' s Napf? ny? ze (Sunshine). # Her final film appearance was the lead role in M
		on their screens and makes an announcement: ' You will now be presiding over ze world.' That's it. # And so they take control from their
		an interview with Cameroon Tribune, which ran a special report on the controversy, Ze Bella, the leader of the defunct group declared that while they were p
		mongameli woMzantsi Afrika # Ukuthetha kwakho sakuvava ngaphakathi # Kaloku thina sibek'iindlebe koko ukutshiloyo # Ze thina zimbongi sibonge ukuze s

After the two search words were extracted from the corpus, the percentage of search words denoting LGBT people/issues was calculated. The next stage was to focus on the context of the NOW corpus and to explore the concordance lines for thematic content analysis. This is to depict what aspects/types of pronoun references connote the meanings towards non-binary genders. Also, some concordance lines in which the context of the search words did not match with each other were excluded. Then, overlapping themes were refined and judged by a discourse analysis expert. Finally, each category was allocated with different colors of related themes in order to investigate the findings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures comprised the use of descriptive percentage, thematic content analysis and concordance analysis to answer the two major research questions in two parts. To answer the first research question, Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the percentage of each search word frequency. Then, to answer the second research question, the researchers extracted the authentic data of the top-100 concordances of each search word from the context, and then analyzed the meanings by looking at words or phrases nearby. The researchers categorized the data into different themes by using thematic content analysis and a concordance analysis. This is to reveal how search words were presented in terms of aspects/types of words or phrases nearby the two search words.

In the following section, findings of the study will be presented.

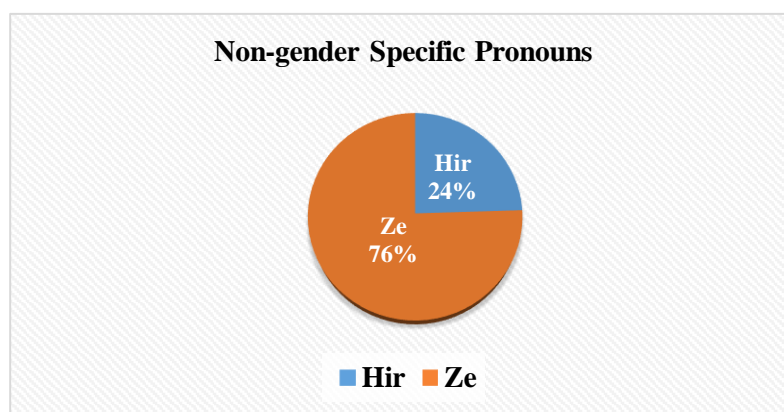
Findings

Frequencies of ‘Hir’ and ‘Ze’

From the NOW Corpus with the total of 4,804 words, the highest frequency came from the gender-neutral pronoun search word “Ze” with 76 percent (or 3,627 tokens). However, there were not as many non-gender specific pronoun search words for “Hir” which could be calculated as 24 percent (or 1,177 tokens) (see Figure 3). Consequently, to answer the first research question, it could be stated that the non-gender specific pronoun search word “Ze” was used more often in referring to LGBT people in news and magazines.

Figure 3

The Percentage of the Search Words of “non-gender Specific Pronouns”



It could be regarded from the data that both gender-neutral pronouns (*Ze and Hir*) revealed a small number of frequencies on the NOW Corpus. It could be inferred towards the findings that both non-gender specific pronouns are new terms, and they seemed to be uncommon words for the media or people in general to use. However, it does not mean that the use of these two recommended pronouns from the study of some scholars (such as McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Knutson et al., 2019; Darr & Kibbey, 2016) cannot resonate any reflection towards non-binary people. The use of these two gender-neutral pronouns could, at least, gain and raise an awareness in selecting words or pronouns for LGBT people in news reports, which was similar to Bevik's study (2013) towards the three gender pronouns in Swedish. To recapitulate, Bevik asserted that the use of the gender-neutral pronoun (*hen*) in Swedish could bring about an increased consciousness of gender inequality because gender in language could change with other changes in the world.

In extracting the concordance lines of both words, the following section describes how each word was used in contexts.

The Emerging Themes of 'Hir' and 'Ze' from the News on the Web Corpus (NOW)

This section illustrates thematic content analysis as a method of analyzing the first-100 concordance lines of each search word obtained from NOW Corpus. There were three major themes referring to LGBT people: (1) the masculine type; (2) the feminine type; and

(3) the neutral type. In terms of search words, non-gender specific pronouns (Hir and Ze) were used as a basis for concordance analysis to answer research question two.

1) Non-gender Specific Pronoun “Hir”

According to the concordance lines, it was evident that there were three themes which emerged from the data: the feminine type, the masculine type and the neutral type, through the use of words and phrases nearby.

Table 2

Types of References for the Three Themes of the Search Word “Hir”

The Themes	Types of References for “hir”
1. Feminine Type	Nouns - wife - princess - lady - diva - actress - a female - sister Subject pronoun - she Object pronoun - her
2. Masculine Type	Nouns - Patriarchy - Police

The Themes	Types of References for “hir”
	- Militants
	- boyish new muscles
	- god
	Subject pronoun
	- he
	Object pronoun
	- him
	Possessive adjective pronoun
	- his druthers
3. Neutral Type	- they
	- zie
	- hir
	- ze
	- his/her

It was apparent that the theme “feminine type” consisted of words that expressed femininity including the use of the following parts of speech: nouns (*wife, princess, lady, diva, actress, a female and sister*), a subject pronoun (*she*) and an object pronouns (*her*). The following exemplified this finding.

Feminine Type:

(1) *wife and honorable princess and chaist Lady, ever weill and verteiyslue exercid, keeping hir vidowit (widowhood) with great honor. "She had been regent for six (thenational.scot)*

(2) *dangerous coorses heald towardes us ", Elizabeth tells Sadler that " you may let hir understand that we wish **she** had been as carefull for the tyme past to have (The Guardian)*

(3) *Jesus Chryst, was desyrous to becom a Christian, Wherefore **she** made sute by hir said mistres to have some conference with the Curat ". # Examined in **her** (BBC News)*

As can be seen from the extracts 1 to 3 above, nouns, a subject pronoun, and an object pronoun co-occurred with the node “hir” in the context obtained from the NOW Corpus.

According to the feminine theme, words related to the feminine aspects/issues with different parts of speech were collocated and used to refer to non-binary people. To elaborate, nouns such as (*wife, princess, and lady*), subject pronoun (*she*) together with the object pronoun (*her*) from the three extracts collocated with the gender-neutral pronoun “hir”, surprisingly manifesting meanings related to the feminine aspects/issues using the words nearby the node.

Another crucial theme to be reported was the “masculine type”. As can be seen from the table above, words which manifested masculinity were a subject pronoun (*he*), an object pronoun (*him*), a possessive adjective pronoun (*his*), nouns (*police, patriarchy and militant*) and a phrase (*boyish new muscles*). Evidence of the finding is as follows:

Masculine Type:

(4) *When the diver surfaces **he** is supposed to take a few breaths, remove hir nose clip, produce the tag grabbed at the bottom, and say" (boingboing.net)*

(5) *the **police** told **him** that they had reports from Udhampur that **militants** were moving in hir vehicle. "Is this the way the police should behave with a legislator; (State Times)*

(6) *having a double **mastectomy** just to prove to hir parents, who didn't support hir identity or understand it, that **he** was different. I was moved by hir*
The (Globe and Mail)

It was evident from the excerpts 4 to 6 that the context from the NOW Corpus of the node “hir” revealed words with different parts of speech concerning non-binary people in digital news and magazines. A subject pronoun (*he*), an object pronoun (*him*), a possessive adjective pronoun (*his*), nouns (*police, patriarchy and militant*) and a phrase (*boyish new muscles*) co-existed with this node and were considered to be masculine to refer to LGBT people. As previously stated in the section on the feminine theme, the node “hir” seemed to be neutral. On the other hand, this node displayed the words related to masculinity which were considered not to be as neutral as they should be.

When it comes to the last theme “neutral type”, it is apparent that gender neutral pronouns, i.e., *they, ze, zie, his/her and hir* surround the search word “hir”. This means that non-gender specific pronouns have a tendency to be used to refer to LGBT people in news and magazines. The following concordances extracted from NOW Corpus depict the evidence:

Neutral Type:

(7) *nature. " # In January 2010 doctors declared that **they** were unable to determine hir as either male or female as **zie** has no gonads, the hormonal system was (PinkNews.co.uk)*

(8) *the nonplussed Isaac. " Any breach in decorum will cause **hir** to write in hir blog about how awful **hir** troglodyte fascist heteronormative mother is. It's fantastic. (Vulture)*

(9) has completed his/her portfolio... “Why not make it simpler:” hir”portfolio. But these words haven't caught on because a marginalized group (Toronto Star)

Overall, it is evident that the search word “hir” was utilized not only in a neutral way as claimed by its name “neutral” but also it expressed both masculinity and femininity to refer to the group of LGBT people, as advocated by Poon (2015).

The next section reports on the pronoun ‘Ze’.

2) Non-gender Specific Pronoun “Ze”

When it comes to the gender-neutral pronoun “ze”, there were two major themes which emerged from the first-100 concordance lines. These themes were the masculine type and the neutral type.

Table 3

Types of References for the Two Themes of the Search Word “Ze”

The Themes	Types of References	
	Subject Pronoun	Possessive Adjective Pronoun
1. Neutral Type	- <i>Ze plans</i>	- <i>ze luggage</i>
	- <i>Ze is</i>	- <i>ze nude</i>
	- <i>Ze insults</i>	- <i>ze hatchback</i>
	- <i>Ze chides</i>	
	- <i>Ze has</i>	
2. Masculine Type	Ze was used with (<i>he</i>)	Ze was used with (<i>his</i>)

The concordances from the NOW Corpus amplify the idea that the theme “neutral type” of the search word “ze” occurred more often than the theme “masculine type”. To

recapitulate, regarding the theme “neutral type”, it was found that this search word refers to the group of non-binary genders with less specific reference to masculine or feminine types of gender. Moreover, it is evident from the concordances that the pronoun “ze” seems to appear as a singular subject pronoun, for example, *Ze plans, Ze is, Ze insults, Ze chides and Ze has*. In addition, this pronoun also functioned as a possessive adjective pronoun as seen from *ze luggage, ze nude and ze hatchback*. Evidence of the findings is exemplified below:

Neutral Type:

(10) The contents will hopefully make the boss happy enough to authorize an invitation. Ze plans to have a big presser on the openness subject (including specifics) next (columbian.com)

(11) is a professor of higher education and student affairs at Bowling Green State University. Ze is on Twitter as (Inside Higher Ed)

(12) with 245 litres available for ze luggage. And I may look petite on ze outside, but I have space for four passengers and zey can all fit inside (Independent Online)

When turning to the theme “masculine type”, it was observed that the pronoun “ze” co-occurred with some words expressing maleness less than the neutral type. In the same vein, ze was used with a subject pronoun (*he*) and a possessive adjective pronoun (*his*). The following concordances extracted from the NOW Corpus illuminated the evidence:

Masculine Type:

*(13) been rushed to the hospital. # 9:24 PNC Constituency Chairman for Karaga, Alhassan Ze has died in an accident whilst on **his** way to cast **his** vote, the (GhanaWeb)*

*(14) whoever **he** wanna use if he can afford to risk ze top spot to ze rightful owners. This gonna be interesting. Terms of use: # The (KickOff)*

*(15) of prohibited grounds of discrimination. **He** is against using non-binary pronouns such as “ze” in reference to those wishing to be called something other than “he (London Free Press)*

Another interesting point is that the context of the top-100 concordances of this search word revealed the absence of words or phrases relating to the feminine type. To conclude, this search word could be considered as a gender-neutral pronoun to refer to LGBT people.

Discussion

According to some scholars (e.g. Wales, 1996; Duncan, n.d.), a pronoun has the characteristics of anaphoric reference or antecedent. It is used to refer back to other ideas for its meaning, and it is also used to avoid the recurrence of noun or noun phrase. Findings of the present study supported the idea of Wales in which pronouns were used to refer back to the other idea for its meanings. For example, the concordance lines (1) and (2) of the feminine type from the gender-neutral pronoun search word “Hir” revealed anaphoric characteristic in which a singular subject pronoun “She” is used to substitute for nouns, i.e. *wife, princess, lady and Elizabeth*. Nonetheless, this present study also shows some differences from the idea of Wales. It was observed that the non-gender specific pronoun search word “Ze” was used repeatedly and showed far less frequently to substitute for a noun or noun phrase.

Regarding the findings of the present study, the results regarding the two gender neutral pronouns (*Hir and Ze*) resemble the results of McGlashan and Fitzpatrick (2018) and Knutson et al. (2019). In their studies, these two gender neutral pronouns were found to be in everyday use in English native speakers' countries such as New Zealand and with non-binary genders in the North, on the coasts and in the large cities of America. However, in the present study, it was discovered that the gender-neutral pronoun "Ze" was more commonly used in a neutral way to refer to non-binary genders in online newspapers and magazines. The results of the present study also showed that the neutral type was more frequently found than the masculine type without the presence of the feminine type at all. On the contrary, the gender-neutral pronoun "Hir" was not only used in a neutral type, but it was also used to present both masculinity and femininity. It could be summarized regarding the findings that the non-gender specific pronoun "Ze" is more neutral than "Hir" in referring to LGBT people in online newspapers and magazines.

The non-gender specific pronouns "Hir and Ze" found in the present study resemble Darr and Kebbey's study (2016). In their study, the gender-neutral pronoun "Hir" derived from a pronoun in Middle English which referred to femininity. Apart from Darr and Kebbey's study, the feminine, masculine, and neutral types were found as pronouns used to refer to non-binary genders in news and magazines in the present study. This means that the global trend in terms of the use of language has changed. That is why the two new types, masculinity and neutrality, were found in the present study with the gender-neutral pronoun "Hir", while the feminine type remained. The gender-neutral pronoun "Ze" derived from "Sie" which refers to "She" in German (Poon, 2015). Later, the pronoun "Sie" was changed to "Ze" to make it more neutral and to also avoid a feminine aspect. The present study supports this point in which the gender-neutral pronoun "Ze" was more frequently used in a neutral way.

Spargo's study (1999) towards queer theory asserted that, regarding the specific group of people such as lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, binary people and so on, it is unnecessary to make any reference to them because identities comprise such a wide range of components that there is no way to group people together in one category. Regarding this instantiation, the use of gender-neutral pronouns (*Hir* and *Ze*) in the present study displayed how English in news and magazines was used in a neutral way to avoid injuring the feelings of non-binary genders. In addition, the present study also reexamined the concept of plurality, intersectionality and fluidity in discourse production as well as revealed the distinction in terms of reference used among non-binary people.

Conclusion and Implications of Study

From the concordance lines, the two search words from non-gender specific pronouns (*Hir* and *Ze*) revealed that the search word "hir" co-existed with three major themes: (1) feminine type (2) masculine type and (3) neutral type. On the other hand, the gender-neutral pronoun "ze" co-occurred with two main themes: (1) neutral type and (2) masculine type without the presence of feminine type. Regarding the two search words, the non-gender specific pronoun "hir" tends to be used far less frequently used in a neutral way in reporting in printed media because it still includes both masculine and feminine aspects towards LGBT people. However, a more neutral pronoun to refer to non-binary people is the pronoun "ze". Moreover, the frequency of this pronoun generated by the NOW Corpus is evidence to support the idea that gender-neutral terms tend to be used in printed media to refer to LGBT people.

The results of the present research contribute several implications regarding LGBT terms in news and media, machine translations, and pedagogical practices. Regarding news and media, readers can use the findings of this study to understand underlying meanings and contexts of LGBT pronoun references. This could result in more understanding of LGBT

people's feelings and identity. As for news and media content writers, the results of the present study explained, from a linguistic perspective, how generic and specific LGBT terms were used. Media can be aware of intended meanings of the terms in reporting on LGBT people and issues, thereby creating a mature understanding between LGBT people and the public. In terms of translation, especially in the aspects of natural language processing and machine translation, the findings of this present study could probably be used to resolve anaphoric relation. For example, the gender-neutral pronoun "ze" has a tendency to be more often used as a subject pronoun than the other types of pronouns, while the pronoun "hir" is mixed in use as pronouns. This could yield richer results towards the LGBT aspect where a program or software cannot serve this role.

Turning to pedagogical implications, the findings of this study could, at least, contribute considerably by yielding instructive results for both teachers and learners, especially, in secondary and higher education. In a classroom, teachers can make use of appropriate gender-neutral pronouns to refer to gender diverse students without using traditional gender pronouns. Moreover, the use of proper gender pronouns could be utilized to avoid calling students' first names repeatedly during teaching or doing class activities. This not only yields positive feelings for both teachers and learners but also restrains delays in reading as well. In addition, for writing-intensive courses, teachers could provide students with an opportunity to use these pronouns, such as "they/them/their" in their writing to refer to a singular person, rather than less gender inclusive options such as "he or she", "s/he" or defaulting to "he/him/his. When it comes to learners, they themselves could feel more relieved and relaxed by having gender neutral pronouns being set for them, thereby reducing the feeling of alienation in classroom activities. Hence, respecting and using gender neutral pronouns to refer to non-binary students can help students feel they belong to the classroom and be fully present in their academic experience.

The present study has some limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed for future research studies. First, the study focused only on the two search words ‘Ze’ and ‘Hir’, yielding only a micro-analysis of LGBT terms used in digital media. Second, the NOW Corpus used in the present study only represents an American aspect of reporting LGBT people/issues in digital news and magazines. Future research may explore other possible LGBT pronouns or words in other types of media, such as social or digital media, to extend the understanding of how language is used to portray gender issues. This way, the use of language in media in terms of gender equality, gender integrity as well as gender identity can be understood and used as a benchmark for society.

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