

TEXT 1**Where Gender-Neutral Pronouns Come From**

by Michael Waters (4 June 2021)

- 1 On a very cold day in January, Ella Flagg Young – the first woman to serve as superintendent of the Chicago public-school system – took the stage in front of a room of school principals and announced that she had come up with a new solution to an old problem. 'I have simply solved a need that has been long impending,' she said. 'The English language is in need of a personal pronoun of the third person, singular number, that will indicate both sexes and will thus eliminate our present awkwardness of speech.' Instead of *he* or *she*, or *his* or *her*, Young proposed that schools adopt a version that blended the two: *he'er*, *his'er*, and *him'er*.
- 2 It was 1912, and Young's idea drew shocked gasps from the principals, according to newspaper reports from the time.
- 3 In the following weeks, her proposal became a national news story, leading to confused articles in local and national newspapers. Some embraced the new pronouns—but many dismissed them as an unnecessary complication for English language speakers, and others despaired that the introduction of gender-neutral pronouns would lead to an end to language as they knew it.
- 4 Today's gender-neutral English-language pronouns make space not just for two genders, but for many more. This serves as a way for people who fall outside the binary of 'man' and 'woman' to describe themselves. In recent years especially, they've become a normal part of dating apps, college campuses, and email signatures. In 2020, a Trevor Project survey found that one in four LGBTQI young people uses pronouns other than *he/him* and *she/her*, and the American Dialect Society named the singular *they* its word of the decade.
- 5 Meanwhile, commentators have predicted the death of language once again. A 2018 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed went so far as to claim that using *they/them* pronouns amounted to 'sacrilege,' and an Australian politician said that an effort to celebrate *they/them* pronouns was 'political correctness gone mad.' Last month, after the singer Demi Lovato came out as nonbinary, a conservative commentator called *they/them* pronouns 'poor grammar' and an example of 'low academic achievement.' The foundation of these arguments is the idea that gender-neutral pronouns are a new phenomenon, an extension of the internet that is only now spreading into other spheres—suggesting that the gender fluidity they describe is also a fad¹.

- 6 Likely the oldest gender-neutral pronoun in the English language is the singular *they*, which was, for centuries, a common way to identify a person whose gender was indefinite. Shakespeare used *they* in *Hamlet* to refer to Hamlet's mother. Jane Austen used *they* as a singular pronoun all the time. For a while in the 1600s, medical texts even referred to individuals who did not correspond with binary gender standards as *they/them*. The pronoun lost popularity only in the 18th century, when the belief that the singular *they* was grammatically incorrect came into vogue among grammar students and teachers.
- 7 In place of *they*, though, came a raft of new pronouns. According to Dennis Baron, a Professor Emeritus² of English at the University of Illinois, who wrote the definitive history of gender-neutral pronouns in his book *What's Your Pronoun?*, English speakers have proposed 200—250 pronouns since the 1780s. Although most of them became less common almost immediately after their introduction, a few took on lives of their own.
- 8 In 1970, a New York feminist, Mary Orovan, came up with a new pronoun: *co*. Orovan had worked in advertising and knew all about developing creative slogans. The word *co*—which roughly means 'together'—already had inclusivity built into its linguistic roots. Orovan made the case for *co*—and its other variations, *cos* and *coself*—in a pamphlet she published called *Humanising English*.
- 9 Popularising a true gender-neutral pronoun like *co*, Orovan thought, would finally get rid of the supposedly neutral *he*, and would at least begin including women officially in language. 'We saw this *he* being used everywhere, and were we included or not included?'
- 10 The researcher Jolane Flanigan found in 2011 that members of a cooperative community in Virginia often used *co* to refer to someone whose gender was not known. *Co*'s development—in which the pronoun invented in 1970 to solve a language limitation came to describe a new relationship with gender—would probably surprise anyone who thinks these ideas are a recent invention.
- 11 In fact, gender-neutral pronouns are more widespread today than ever before. The backlash to them, however, is nothing new.

[Adapted from: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/06/gender-neutral-pronouns-arent-new/619092/>>]

GLOSSARY:

¹fad: something that becomes extremely popular and then loses its popularity in a short period of time.

²Professor Emeritus: a retired professor who is still relevant in her/his/their scholastic field.

TEXT 2A**Billionaires in Space: Privilege or Progress?**

By Ron Carson

It's only been a few weeks since billionaires Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos earned their astronaut wings in separate, back-to-back flights to the edge of space. However, in many ways, the debate over whether or not the billionaire space race benefits this planet and its inhabitants is just getting started. At the centre of the debate is whether these private sector exploits are merely self-indulgent adventures of the wealthy, or precursors for solving some of the world's most arduous challenges, from climate change, to poverty, world hunger and disease.

Former NASA Chief Historian Steven J. Dick wrote, 'Our entry into space has altered the intellectual landscape of the 20th and 21st centuries in ways large and small, broadening our horizons in ways we sometimes fail to recognise.'

While critics argue that resources spent on space exploration would be better spent here on Earth, competition can create transformative new industries and technologies, which can add trillions to the world's economies over time. For example, NASA currently has more than 700 active international agreements for various scientific research and technology development activities, and the International Space Station, which has been in operation for more than 20 years, is a significant representative of international partnerships, representing 15 nations and 5 space agencies. All of this activity creates jobs and revenue in countries and communities in the United States and throughout the world. In addition, SpaceX, founded by Elon Musk in 2002, is a successful commercial business with more than 100 rocket launches, astronauts sent to the International Space Stations, and NASA and military contracts.

[Adapted from: <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rcarson/2021/08/17/billionaires-in-space-privilege-or-progress/?sh=28402e093e36>>]

TEXT 2B

A Twitter thread:

Elon Musk (@elonmusk): those who attack space maybe don't realise that space represents hope for so many people

* **Dan Moynihan (@donmoyn):** and yet other people/ would simply like billionaires/ to pay their taxes/ and fix earth's problems

* **Qasim Rashid, Esq (@QasimRashid):** No one's attacking space. We're attacking the fact that billionaires are exploiting workers, avoiding taxes, & getting Govt handouts while 80% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck & 60M Americans are food insecure. You aren't the victim here, bud.

[Source: <<https://news.knowyourmeme.com/news/elon-musks-poem-about-space-gives-twitter-much-to-think-about-and-meme-on>>]

TEXT 3

I AM NOT MEDICINE

At least one rhino is killed every day due to the mistaken belief that rhino horn can cure cancer and hangovers.

 **STOP WILDLIFE CRIME**
IT'S DEAD SERIOUS

worldwildlife.org/wildlifecrime



I AM NOT A RUG

As few as 3,200 wild tigers remain. Poaching for their skins, bones and other parts is the greatest immediate threat to their survival.

 **STOP WILDLIFE CRIME**
IT'S DEAD SERIOUS

worldwildlife.org/wildlifecrime



I AM NOT A TRINKET

Tens of thousands of elephants are killed every year for their ivory tusks, which are made into everything from knickknacks to souvenirs.

 **STOP WILDLIFE CRIME**
IT'S DEAD SERIOUS

worldwildlife.org/wildlifecrime



[Source: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/20/business/media/world-wildlife-fund-anti-poaching-campaign-avoids-violent-images.html>>]

TEXT 4A

Ryan, 11 Founder of Ryan's Recycling

Ryan from California started recycling eight years ago, when he was only three years old. Today, the sixth grader runs his own recycling business.

[Source: <<https://www.hm.com/za/4022-role-models/>>]

TEXT 4B

Tegan, 9 SuperHear-o

Tegan from Alberton is the inspiration behind the Magic Ears Foundation, which raises funds for underprivileged children in South Africa.

[Source: <<https://www.hm.com/za/4022-role-models/>>]

TEXT 5**8 Facts About Emoji Around the World for World Emoji Day**

by Richard Brooks (20 July 2017)

- 1 Emoji were invented in Japan in 1999 by Japanese designer Shigetaka Kurita.
- 2 Why Japan?
- 3 'Spoken, written, lived Japanese is rich with context, honorifics, and layers of meaning. Perhaps more than anybody speaking English or a European language could imagine, Japan needed some way to indicate the tone of a text.'
- 4 Keith Broni of Ireland is the world's first Emoji Translator. His job is to 'translate' emoji used in marketing, making sure they convey the right meanings and that the target audience won't misinterpret them or find them offensive.
- 5 That's more difficult than it sounds, because ...
- 6 Emoji are not a universal language – in fact, they can be difficult to translate.
- 7 We may use emoji to clarify meaning, but they can still get lost in translation.
- 8 The same emoji can look startlingly different on different devices, in different places, languages and cultures. And that means users may interpret it differently.
- 9 A smiley-faced emoji on an iPhone might look uncomfortable or unhappy after arriving in a message on Android, for example. A gun on Android turns into a water pistol on Apple.
- 10 People's perceptions of emoji are affected by cultural influences. The innocent 'thumbs up' we've all come to know and love takes on a completely different (and much less favourable) meaning in the Middle East.

[Adapted from: <<https://www.k-international.com/blog/emoji-around-the-world/>>]