Say "Oui" to "We": A Longitudinal Analysis of Pronouns and Articles in French and English

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Thesis adviser(s): Dr. Eloise Sureau

Reader(s): Dr. Eloise Sureau: __________________ Date: 5/8/19

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Butler University

Say “Oui” to “We”

A Longitudinal Analysis of Articles and Pronouns in French and English

Colleen May Wilkes

Dr. Eloise Sureau

May 10th, 2019
From personal pronouns to the rhetoric surrounding emotion, the extreme binary contrast of masculinity and femininity dominate modern English. In recent years in France, a fierce debate has taken place over the gender embedded in the French language. Following the establishment of the Académie Française and the subsequent standardization of the French language, the masculine form of verb conjugations, nouns, pronouns, and article became the official default. The Académie Française’s official website notes that “le masculin est en français le genre non marqué et peut de ce fait désigner indifféremment les hommes et les femmes” (“Académie”). But what about gender-nonconforming, gender nonbinary, gender-fluid, transgender, or intersex people whose identities are not described by either masculine or feminine pronouns? These diverse, underrepresented identities have always existed among humans, and the interconnected, at times hyper-conscious society of today is finally starting to recognize this population.

The questions at the heart of this study are the following: why did gendered articles fall out of use in English, and why are they still present in French? What social, political, and cultural events in England and France have influenced this linguistic evolution?

The last two centuries have seen the right of workers in France and the United States – all workers, be they women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, etc. – blossom, creating the need for the language surrounding jobs to be inclusive of those who fill those positions. An easy example in English is the term “weatherman”. This sounds normal to American English speakers; however, to change the term to specify and reflect the gender of a woman who is

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1 Académie Française is a governing body for linguistics and language use, established in 1635 and currently consists of 36 individuals: 5 white women, 30 white men, 1 black man. Their purpose is “La principale fonction de l’Académie sera de travailler, avec tout le soin et toute la diligence possibles, à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences (Article 24 des statuts.) ”. (“Académie ”).
predicting the weather on television, “weatherwoman” sounds stilted and odd. The blanket inclusivity of “weatherperson” seems to allude to a meteorological alien rather than a reporter on the news, and thus is often dismissed as being too careful or too politically correct. There are phrases to get around this problem in English: one might say “The lady who does the weather” or “the channel five weather desk is my favorite”. In French, the same problem exists, but involves the further nuance of pronunciation. An equivalent of the English example is a “chanteur” is a singer who is a man and a “chanteuse” is a singer who is a woman. The suffix of the word indicated gender, much as “man” and “woman” indicated gender in “weatherman” and “weatherwoman”, respectively. A woman teaching a college course, a “professeure”, cannot be distinguished based on pronunciation alone from the man teaching down the hall, a “professeur”, but the context of the sentence ultimately acknowledges the woman’s gender. A student saying, “Ma professeure est intelligente” uses two markers of gender, “ma” and “intelligente”. The article “ma”, meaning “my”, must agree with the noun “professeure”, and thus is in its feminine form. The second marker, the “e” at the end of “intelligente”, is another form of agreement, this time between adjective and noun. Because the noun is feminine, the adjective must also indicate femininity in its construction; thus an “e” is added at the end of the word which indicates to the speaker that the final consonant, in this case a “t”, must be pronounced. This also signals to the listener that the “professeure” is a woman.

**Significance**

Why do gendered articles matter? Or rather, why are these grammatical constructions significant to us as Modern English speakers, whose language does not use gendered articles anymore? The answer is two-fold: first, the concept of gender is embedded within language and
subtly or overtly influence a person’s performance of gender$^2$; second, English in its oldest form used articles to mark gender in a way that is similar to how French still does today. English has its roots in Proto-German and is a Germanic language. French stems from Proto-Latin and is one of the Romanic languages (that is, of Rome). Why did the gender markers in English disappear?

It can be argued that they have not left English, they have merely undergone a transformation (e.g. “the hostess” uses the “-ess” suffix to indicate femininity but the article “the” is neuter).

This study is more interested in why gender markers have undergone this transformation. Language is a partial reflection of how humans think; a century ago, it would have been foreign to say, “The firewoman saved me!”, or to picture a woman wearing flame-protective gear when one heard the word “firefighter”. Because language is both systematic and systemic, changes in vocabulary, syntax, and social values and connotations can be slow at best and lethargic at worst.

So: what caused gender markers in English to change?

History tells of a lengthy reciprocal exchange between the peoples living in southern England and northeastern France. The Gauls, tribes of people living in modern day France, spoke now-extinct Celtic languages following their fall to Rome. The sociopolitical and economic advantages of a common language for trade and diplomacy made learning each other’s languages popular and sometimes necessary for wealthy and/or educated citizens in what is now modern-day England and France. Silva presents “une synthèse des influences des langues gauloise (celte) et franque (germanique) sur la langue d’accueil, le latin parle/le roman, et . . . la rapide acculturation des Gaulois et des Francs” (805). Because the Gauls lived in tribes, “nous ne pouvons pas parler de nation, mais de très nombreuses tribus autonomes qui se battaient fréquemment” (Silva 805), and as such, every tribe spoke a different language or dialect of a

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$^2$ “Performance of gender” references Judith Butler’s definition of gender as performative (Butler).
neighboring Celtic language. After “la conquête de la Gaule par César” in 52 B.C.E., Latin was imposed “comme langue de l’administration et du pouvoir, c’est-à-dire comme langue officielle” (Silva 806). Romans living in gaulois villages “ont créé des écoles où les jeunes gaulois de l’aristocratie ont appris rapidement le latin” (Silva 806). However, linguistic traces of the Gauls are few and far between in Modern French because the Gauls, in particular the druids (the spiritual, scholarly, and medical leaders of a village), maintained an oral tradition and expressly forbode writing of any kind (Silva 807). Silva cites Thévenot’s description of the imposition of Latin as the Gauls’ “perte de leur langue et de leur âme” (807). With the arrival of the Francs in the 5th century, “les Francs . . . avec les Gaulois, [ils] seraient les parents biologiques des Français” (Silva 808). Unlike the Romans, the Francs did not impose their own language, “le francique”, because like the Gauls, “les Francs ressentirent la culture latine comme à bien des égards supérieure [sic] à la leur” (Silva 809). There was a substantial amount of language contact, or “contact quotidien”, and eventually, “ce people a été plus ou moins bilingue. Ce bilinguisme serait évident dans les régions où les Francs étaient en minorité. Pour cette raison, les commerçants . . . ont appris rapidement le gallo-romain” (Silva 811). This bilingual relationship amongst the Gaul/Franc/Roman people of what is now France created “le proto-français” by the end of the 10th century (Silva 811). This development directly influenced the present study’s choice of written works with which to begin the analysis.

Perhaps the greatest impetus for this study comes from the concurrent struggle within Modern French and Modern English for gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language. Gendered articles and pronouns have evolved throughout the progression of both languages, and Western Europe has seen a massive increase in the rights of women and in the awareness awareness of gender equality. Today’s English seeks to reconcile the singular “they”. The American podcast
Lexicon Valley describes the prescriptivist view that “they” should be used only in the plural sense, especially in written and/or formal usages (“Rise” 21:27). Vuolo, one of the hosts of Lexicon Valley, cites style and construction guides3 from the 19th and early 20th centuries as the roots of the American prescriptive attitude that “they” can only be used in a plural sense (“Rise” 20:30). Furthermore, Vuolo notes that “all of these were written by men” (“Rise” 21:49), implying a lack of diversity amongst language policing. French is no stranger to this struggle, considering the male-majority Académie Française. Modern France is grappling with the publicly expressed need for “la langue inclusive” and the Académie Française’s refusal to prescribe a deviation from using the masculine form as a default or as an unmarked form. In December of 2017, the Académie Française “formule une « solennelle mise en garde » contre l’écriture « dite » inclusive . . . les changements orthographiques et grammaticaux destinés à améliorer la visibilité des femmes dans la langue feraient courir à cette dernière un « péril mortel »” (Rérolle 1). Indeed, the Académie’s biggest fear in this debate seems to be “créant une confusion qui confine à l’illisibilité” (Le Monde 1). Claude Hagège, a linguistics professor at the Collège de France, theorizes that “ce n’est pas langue elle-même qui est sexist e. Ceux qui le sont, ce sont les hommes” (2). He goes on to further claim that : “Ce n’est pas l’intervention sur la langue qui transformera les comportements sociaux. C’est l’évolution des comportements sociaux qui s’inscrira dans la langue” (Hagège 2). The parallel natures of these two modern reckonings on gendered language point to a unifying question: did the language contact between French and English early in the lives of these two languages influence the gender embedded within each language?

3 For example, Strunk and White’s Elements of Style.
Literature Review

The present study uses methodology modeled after the work of Brown and Gilman in “The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity” (1960). For primary evidence, the Brown and Gilman study presents that they “… have drawn on plays, on legal proceedings … [and] contemporary usage from literature” (253). Following Brown and Gilman’s methodology, the present study uses three texts, two from the 16th century and one from the 11th century. One of the 16th century texts is in Modern French, and the other two are in English⁴, Old and Modern according to their respective eras. The present study also seeks to affirm Brown and Gilman’s assertion that:

… in a fluid society crises of address will occur more frequently than in a static society, and so the pronominal coding of power differences is more likely to be felt an onerous.

Coding by title and name would be more tolerable because less compulsory. (70-71)

Brown and Gilman’s study examines the choice of pronouns used in French (either the singular and informal “tu” or the formal and/or plural “vous”). Their theory of a power asymmetry within this choice suggests that “human cognition favors the binary choice without contingencies” and that “the larger social changes created a distaste for the face-to-face expression of differential power” (Brown and Gilman 69). When applied to the choice of gendered personal and object pronouns, this suggestion raises the question of how intricately linked our conception of gender and our use of language are when extended to people and objects. For example, when an individual’s gender expression is not clearly feminine nor masculine, the choice in English of using “he” or “she” can reveal the speaker’s inherent conceptualization of gendered appearance

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⁴ Both English texts are in British English, as necessitated by texts available from the given timeframes.
and, depending on the political and social context within which the speaker is functioning within, views on the gender binary generally. Because the grammatical gender of inanimate objects in French is arbitrary and superficial, the prescribed choice of feminine or masculine object pronouns for a given object create a subtle link between that object, its functions/purposes, social connotations surrounding the object, and the grammatical gender assigned to it.

In November 2017 a proposed bill in the French government addressed the issue of inclusive language and the difficulties the structure of French poses to using more inclusive language. When this bill was introduced, it raised questions about the French government’s true stance on and support for gender-inclusive language. The Minister of National Education said that, “Il y a une seule langue française, une seule grammaire, une seule République” (Battaglia et al.). This article, published online on LeMonde.fr, addresses the attitude among many French people that “on doute qu’il soit possible . . . de faire table d’évolutions linguistiques qui . . . sont aujourd’hui sinon courantes, du mois d’un usage de plus en plus large” (Battaglia et al.). The present study analyzes the use of gendered articles and pronouns in French but is not predicting the evolution of this usage. The attitudes expressed by the Minister of National Education, however, as well as other government employees cited in the Battaglia et al. article point to a struggle deeply embedded within the French language and French culture. The latter quotation also highlights that linguistic evolution is a slow yet unstoppable force; it is difficult to predict the way change within a given language will unfold over time.

Hopquin further describes the “terrain glissant” of revisionist and prescriptivist language (1). This article in particular speaks to the difficulties in using an inherently gendered language in a free press organization, such as Le Monde. In a profession such as journalism, “les mots sont des outils . . . pas simple de marier un francais syntaxiquement et politiquement correct”
For just this reason, the present study aims to demonstrate the historical significance of gendered language. Negotiating language change, which occurs “dans la rue, dans le creuset des jours ordinaires, qu’elle bat le plus fort, qu’elle se régénère”, is not described here as a linear, smooth process, but rather as a reinvention “sans cesse” (Hopquin 2). Hopquin also qualifies his explanation of language change, saying that “n’en déplaise aux féministes, aux académiciens, et même aux journalistes, les rappeurs en captent bien mieux qu’eux les humeurs, comme les troubadours ou les poulbots d’hier” (Hopquin 2). His statement places the agency and significance of language change in common parlance.

One example of current language change within English is occurring in the United States with the official, prescriptive addition of a singular neuter personal pronoun: “they”. Other singular and plural neuter personal pronouns exist in American English and in other dialects of English; however, official documents are beginning to require a declaration of the pronouns used regarding a given person. The singular “they” has been employed in English since the 13th century colloquially but was never recognized as a proper grammatical structure. The British English dialect tends to use the term “one”, as in “One can find oneself in a pickle”, more often than in American English. French has the “clitic on which can be translated into English as meaning either ‘we’ or ‘one’ or the indefinite ‘they’ or ‘you’, depending on the context” (Blondeau 456). In Montreal, the francophone dialect of French spoken there began “replacing the nous with the on . . . a long time ago, and is now attested in many varieties of French” (Blondeau 456). Blondeau cited a study by Laberge in 1977 that explores the correlation between “the replacement of nous with on” and the “modification in the distribution of the generic pronouns tu and vous” (457). Blondeau summarizes that “sex and age played a crucial role in the variation between the use of these generic pronouns” (457). Relating this idea to the singular
“they” in American English, factors such as age, education level, and race are indicators of the educational prescriptivism a person was exposed to in youth and lend insight into their contribution to language change. Even today, a high school English teacher might formally teach the use of “his or her” rather than the neuter singular pronoun “their” as properly constructed English. While this is not incorrect, the use of “his or her” presumes the subject the pronoun refers to has a gender identity that falls within the binary of masculinity/femininity, and can also sound “clunky” and/or prescriptivist in daily speech. Written language is much often slower to change than spoken language, however. The use of the singular “they” can be situation-dependent. As Blondeau explains of the language change surrounding “on”: “the real-time increase in the use” of a language feature “shows how the semantic function . . . might have changed over time” (459).

French, however, does display a variation on the situation-dependent singular or plural pronoun, though not an equivalent of the English singular “they”: the formal second person singular “vous” and the formal and casual second person plural “vous”. French also has a second, more casual second person singular pronoun, “tu”. Raymond addresses the contrast between situations in which the formal and/or the casual second person singular pronouns are used in Spanish, another Romantic language and a linguistic cousin to French (Raymond 660). He states that:

the ground-level invocation and in-the-moment pragmatic meaning of social distance/intimacy is based not only on relatively ‘static’ aspects of identity such as social class, age, gender, and so forth . . . but also on the various interactionally emergent features of identity that are invoked through interactants’ pursuits of their goals for action (661).
The distinction in French between “tu” and “vous” depends on the social dynamics of the participants in a conversation. “Vous” must be used when directly addressing a group of individuals and may also be used when directly addressing one individual who is older or who has a more esteemed social role that the speaker – for example, a teacher, a doctor, or a friend’s grandparent. What Raymond’s findings demonstrate is that the initial choice between the formal and casual can be easily swayed by situational context and that “the negotiation of identity does not happen to speakers, but rather is co-constructed by speakers” (662). Oral tradition long precedes the written, and language change often occurs in speech before it can be found documented or evidenced in written language. With that principle at work, it is seems that the gradual transition from gendered to neuter pronouns and articles began in English as a verbal trend before it became a written practice among English-speakers. Naturally, this study can only examine written language from various eras of English for its analysis of language change; however, the texts selected for this study represent each major evolution of English, from Old English to Middle English to Modern English.

The present study builds upon the findings of Garnahm et al. in their 1995 article “Representations and Processes in the Interpretation of Pronouns: New Evidence from Spanish and French”. Sentences in English, French, and Spanish using pronouns to refer to people and things were administered to groups of volunteers to read; sentences were displayed on a computer that tracked the time spent reading, as well as their answer-response time and accuracy on follow-up questions. Garnham et al. assert that “all uses of pronouns are mediated by a representation of a suitable (and usually highly salient) entity for the pronoun to refer to” (43),

5 The French “vous” has meanings much like the American English plural “you” and its derivative expressions, such as “you guys” and “y’all”.
implying that violations of this mediation create a communication barrier. These violations could include the use of gendered personal pronouns to refer to objects (e.g. calling a ship “she”) or the circumstance of a person’s physical appearance does not fit a socially acceptable gender expression (i.e. nonbinary, gender fluid, gender queer, and/or transgender individuals). English personal pronouns are “marked for gender . . . number . . . and case” (43) to carry semantic effect and do not have a semantic effect, whereas French pronouns and articles do have a semantic effect. Garnham et al. cite work from Carreiras et al. in 1993 that supported the idea that “gender cuing can speed the interpretation of pronouns that refer to things”, referring to the English “a” and “the” and the French “le/la/les” and “un/une/des”. The results of the Garnham et al. study showed that comprehension increased with the use of gender cuing, such that “a cue speeded reading and question answering and increased question-answering accuracy . . . they were equally pronounced when the cue operated only at a superficial level” (55). Cuing in sentences with pronouns referring to people was also found to have a more significant effect on shortening reading than sentences with pronouns referring to things on shortening reading. Cuing was also found to increase question-answering accuracy for sentences with pronouns referring to people than sentences with pronouns referring to things. Gender cuing was also found to have an effect “considerably larger for sentences about people” in a later variation of the experiment, leading to the conclusion that “the sexes of the people, but not the grammatical genders of things are represented” (60) play a more significant role in comprehension. This finding supports that gender is a construct created by individuals regarding one another and suggests that gender and biological sex are inextricably linked. This is certainly true within linguistic features of French and English, but also in a broad social attitude. Most importantly, Garnham et al. posit that “if grammatical gender is intimately connected with semantic representations that determine the
selection of pronouns in language production, it is likely to be similarly connected in comprehension” (62) – which is the very question the present study seeks to address.

Methodology

This study uses the following methodology to examine gendered pronoun and article usage in French and in English. Samples of written language are analyzed for evidence of grammatical gender. The pronouns and articles of three literary works from multiple centuries, one in Modern French, one in Modern English, and one in Old English, will be catalogued based on case, number, and gender. There are two pairs of works; one comparing Modern English to Modern French and one comparing Modern English to Old English. The centuries selected equate to the approximate eras of Old English and Modern English/Modern French. From the 11th century, Beowulf serves as the Old English text, while from the 16th century, Marguerite de Navarre’s L’Heptameron and William Shakespeare’s As You Like It are the modern texts. These literary works are chosen because they are all regarded as classics within their respective cultures and eras. In the original time of telling, Beowulf as an oral legend could have reflected lexicographical borrowings, language contact, and linguistic evolution of their respective cultures. As Beowulf originates from a long-standing oral storytelling tradition, it is useful to keep Hopquin’s point about everyday speech as an agent of linguistic change in mind. Beowulf could reflect lexicographical borrowings, language contact, and linguistic evolution during the epoque of Old English. No one definite author or storyteller is cited, and it is one of the oldest surviving examples of written Old English. For Shakespeare’s As You Like It, while initially only published for London’s theatre community, he also tailored his plays for his audience – his company performed for both lower-class groundlings and Queen Elizabeth I, and his writing contains both the language of the elite and of the common man. As Shakespeare’s works have
endured more prominently, *As You Like It* is the best candidate for analysis of those two works.

*L’Heptameron* addresses similar issues of marriage and gender roles in French culture to the struggles of gender inequality and marriage in England in the same era as portrayed in *As You Like It*. While an originally published novel, rather than a play, it draws upon situational and dramatic humor to deliver its messages, much as *As You Like It*.

The articles and pronouns (personal, reflexive, relative, demonstrative, interrogative, definite, and indefinite) of each literary work are coded according to the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-person singular (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun, stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>I, me</td>
<td>Je, moi, me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person singular, masculine (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>He, him</td>
<td>Il, lui, se (singular), soi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person singular, feminine (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Dark purple</td>
<td>She, her</td>
<td>Elle, se (singular), soi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person singular, neuter (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Neon yellow</td>
<td>It, one</td>
<td>Il/Elle (object), on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Color</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person plural, masculine (subject personal pronoun, stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Mauve</td>
<td>Ils, eux, se (plural)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-person plural, feminine (subject personal pronoun, stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Light purple</td>
<td>Elles, se (plural),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third person plural, neuter (subject personal pronoun)</td>
<td>Coral</td>
<td>They</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-person singular (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>You (singular), thou, thee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-person and second-person plural (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>We, you (plural), us</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-person and second-person plural (subject personal pronoun, object personal pronoun (direct and indirect), stress pronoun, reflexive pronoun)</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Nous, vous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and possessive adjectives, singular, masculine</td>
<td>Slate Blue</td>
<td>Un, du, au, le, mon, ton, son</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and possessive adjectives singular, feminine</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Une, de la, à la, la, ma, ta, sa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and possessive adjectives singular, neuter</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>The, a/an, my, your (singular), thy, his, her(s), their(s) (singular), mine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles and possessive adjectives (singular subject), plural</td>
<td>Dark blue</td>
<td>Des, aux, les, mes, tes, ses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each row is given its own color; for example, “I”, “me”, “je”, and “moi” are all coded pink across all texts. The rationale for the division of the pronouns and articles as it stands is that there are certain parallels and equivalencies between those constructions in French and English. The differences between them highlights a difference in perspective. For example, in English, a speaker saying, “That’s my bag” and “That’s my fork” uses the same construction and the same article – “my”, indicating possession – in both sentences. A French speaker, however, would need to use different possessive adjectives, as they would need to make them agree with the gender of the noun: “C’est mon sac” and “C’est ma fourchette”. The “m” at the beginning of all three pronouns across both languages is an easy mental link for speakers of both languages – the /m/ sound indicates personal possession of the speaker. In French, the article changes slightly to acknowledge the gender of the objects, as a “sac” is designated masculine and a “fourchette” is designated feminine. When there are parallels between the languages, the same color is used to reflect this. Pronouns and possessive adjectives in French, for instance, designate the gender of the object and because English pronouns and possessive adjectives do not, the French constructions have their own colors.

Data Results

Case 1

The initial 10% of each of the works As You Like It and L’Heptameron were coded for pronouns, articles, and possessive adjectives (PAPA). Those test items were inventoried and
calculated as percentages of occurrence within the total number of PAPA and percentages of occurrence within the total number of words in the text sample (WITS) taken.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As You Like It</th>
<th>10 pages</th>
<th>Total number of test items</th>
<th>% test item occurrence per total PAPA</th>
<th>% test item occurrence per total WITS</th>
<th>L’Heptameron</th>
<th>53 pages</th>
<th>Total number of test items</th>
<th>% test item occurrence per total PAPA</th>
<th>% test item occurrence per total WITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He, him</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>2.048</td>
<td></td>
<td>528</td>
<td>14.761</td>
<td>2.729</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She, her</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.616</td>
<td>0.532</td>
<td></td>
<td>249</td>
<td>6.961</td>
<td>1.287</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It, one</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.817</td>
<td>0.573</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They, them</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.805</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (singular), thou, thee</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>16.499</td>
<td>3.358</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We, you (plural), us</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.817</td>
<td>0.573</td>
<td></td>
<td>233</td>
<td>6.514</td>
<td>1.204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>883</td>
<td>24.685</td>
<td>4.564</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The, a/an, my, your (singular), thy.</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>39.235</td>
<td>7.985</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are more singular-subject articles and possessive adjectives in French than in English. The French singular-subject articles and possessive adjectives make up 10.555% of the total number of words within the text excerpt of *L’Heptameron*, whereas the English singular-subject articles and possessive adjectives make up 7.985% of the total number of words within the excerpt taken from *As You Like It*. The third-person singular neuter pronouns occurred equally as often in both languages, with those test items occurring 0.573% within the English text excerpt and 0.393% within the French text excerpt. The third-person singular masculine pronouns followed this same trend, with English test items occurring as 2.048% of the words within that text excerpt and the French test items occurring as 2.729% of the words within that text excerpt. However, the third-person singular feminine pronouns occurred at a greater rate in French than in English, with respective percentages of 0.532% and 1.287%. Finally, the first-person plural-subject articles and possessive adjectives occurred at triple the rate in French compared to the occurrence in English, with those French test items making up 0.667% of the
words in the French text excerpt and those English test items making up 0.205% of the words in the English text excerpt.

**Case 1 Comparisons**

The percentages of test items per total PAPA and per total WITS from *As You Like It* and *L’Heptameron* are compared graphically below.
The data aligns with the morphosyntax of each respective language. Some gaps in the data also demonstrate the contrasting structures of these two morphosyntaxes. For example, French first-person plural-subject articles and possessive adjectives must agree with the number of the noun they describe; this can explain the higher occurrence of first-person plural-subject articles and possessive adjectives. There are no equivalent gendered articles in English, so there are three categories within the coding of the text excerpts that are only for French. The same is true for the third-person neuter plural pronoun and the neuter articles and possessive adjectives in English.

**Case 2**

The initial 10% of each of the works *Beowulf* and *As You Like It* were coded for pronouns, articles, and PAPA. Those test items were inventoried and calculated as percentages of occurrence within the total number of PAPA and percentages of occurrence within the total number of WITS taken.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beowulf</th>
<th></th>
<th>As You Like It</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.5 pages</td>
<td>Total number of test items</td>
<td>Total number of test items</td>
<td>10 pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I, me</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.156</td>
<td>I, me</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, him</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>He, him</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She, her</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td>She, her</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It, one</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.844</td>
<td>It, one</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They, them</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.688</td>
<td>They, them</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (singular), thou, thee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.344</td>
<td>You (singular), thou, thee</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We, you (plural), us</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.031</td>
<td>We, you (plural), us</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The, a/an, my, your (singular), thy, his, her(s), their(s) (singular), mine</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22.656</td>
<td>1.726</td>
<td>The, a/an, my, your (singular), thy, his, her(s), their(s) (singular), mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our(s), your (plural), their(s) (plural)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Our(s), your (plural), their(s) (plural)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are fewer test items analyzed from *Beowulf* than from *As You Like It*; these data do still reveal some interesting trends, however. First, there is about an equal usage of third-person singular, masculine personal pronoun\(^6\) between both texts. There is almost no use of the third-person singular, feminine personal pronoun\(^7\) in *Beowulf*. The test items for the third-person singular, neuter personal and object pronoun\(^8\) occur at similar rates and differ by a 0.5% occurrence within their respective works. The greatest difference is in the demonstrative articles and pronouns and singular possessive adjectives\(^9\). Old English has gendered demonstrative articles and pronouns and singular possessive adjectives, while Modern English does not; these constructions are all neuter in Modern English. Despite there being more delineations of this category of test items, there are still fewer overall in the *Beowulf* sample than the *As You Like It* sample.

**Case 2 Comparisons**

The percentages of test items per total occurrence, total PAPA and per total WITS from *Beowulf* and *As You Like It* are compared graphically below.

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\(^6\) “he/him” in Modern English and “he/hine/him” in Old English.

\(^7\) “she/her” in Modern English and “heo/hie/hire” in Old English.

\(^8\) “it/one” in Modern English and “hit/him” in Old English.

\(^9\) “The, a/an, my, your (singular), thy, his, her(s), their(s) (singular), mine” in Modern English and “se/seo/pæs/pær/þære/þæm/pa/pon” in Old English.
While the sample from *As You Like It* is composed of dialogue frequently between men, *Beowulf* has a single narrator describing warriors i.e. men. The plots and structure of each sample accounts for this trend. The plot of *Beowulf* also accounts for the lack of the third-person singular, feminine personal pronoun, as very few women are mentioned in the text. The significant difference between the demonstrative articles and pronouns and singular possessive adjectives can be partially attributed to Old English’s structure that includes articles and some demonstrative pronouns within the nouns they refer to, much as Old German and Modern German do. This suggests that even while Old English has grammatical gender, it does not always represent grammatical gender in separate constructions. Modern French requires articles, possessive adjectives, or demonstrative pronouns before every noun, which may be further marked to agree with the grammatical gender of the noun/phrase/sentence.
Discussion

Case 1 and Comparisons of Case 1

These gaps in categories underscore the universality of the modern struggles with inclusive language. The French and English languages are seeking ways to adapt the form, content, and use of their current respective languages to better acknowledge and include persons with fluid, trans, or nonbinary gender. Due to the modern constructions of each language, such as agreement according to gender and number in French, the common struggle for inclusivity in language manifests in different ways.

The modern English use of “they” as a singular pronoun runs parallel to the dual sense of the French pronoun “vous”: both can indicate a singular or plural subject, depending on context and social conditions. The data of the present study shows that the third-person singular neuter pronoun occurs much less frequently than the third-person singular masculine and feminine pronouns in both English and in French, exemplifying the historical lack of a genderless third-person singular pronoun. Gendered articles and possessive adjectives in French create an additional nuance among French speakers, as the arbitrary gender of a given object, concept, or common noun is unavoidable in French syntax. French does, however, have a third-person singular neuter pronoun: “on”. The use of “on” varies between French dialects, so its English counterpart is closer to “one” rather than the singular “they”. Because English articles and some possessive pronouns are not gendered the same way they are in French, the difficulty with constructing a gender-neutral personal pronoun in English lies in the social and cultural

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10 See Blondeau regarding French dialects spoken in France and Quebec.
acceptance of the singular “they” or an equivalent construction (e.g. “ze”\textsuperscript{11}). This linguistic gap in English complements the inflexibility of French gendered articles, possessive adjectives, in addition to the French equivalents of English gendered personal pronouns (i.e. “il” for “he”, “elle” for “she”).

Case 2 and Comparisons of Case 2

Case 2 provides an answer to the general inquiry of this study, albeit an unsatisfactory one. By comparing Modern English to Old English, the present study expected to find a clear transition and to be able to locate the hypothetical transition in history. The results of Case 2 shed insight but do not fully answer the questions this study posed. The less frequent use of neuter articles, demonstrative pronouns, and singular possessive adjectives points to the previously embedded construction of grammatical gender in Old English. Possession and agreement are indicated by suffix or another subsequent change in a noun, verb, or adjective in Old English. Compared to Modern English, which uses gender-neutral articles and does not have gendered verb agreement or gendered adjective agreement, Old English has more grammatical gender built into the language. One of the most noticeable differences in the data is the significantly greater occurrence of singular-neuter possessive adjectives and articles (e.g. “the” and “seo”) in Modern English. The separate construction in Modern English of these markers of possession and subject agreement follow the same rules as Modern French, as previously described in Case 2 Comparisons. Much as Modern French requires that every noun have an article, possessive adjective, or demonstrative pronoun, the comparison between Old English and Modern English shows a shift in morphosyntax that aligns more closely with the Latinate

\textsuperscript{11}“ze/zir/zirs” are singular, gender-neutral personal pronouns in Modern American English. While not commonly used, “ze/zir/zirs” most often are used by and/or used when referring to a gender-fluid, genderqueer, nonbinary, intersex, or transgender person.
language. This finding partially answers the broad question of whether French has influenced grammatical gender in English: Modern English now shares with Modern French a system of separating articles, pronouns, and possessive adjectives from their referents, whereas Old English does not share this. What this finding does not answer is the exact timing of this transition, nor what events, if any, directly brought about this evolution. Sociolinguistic contact between French-speaking and English-speaking cultures occurred largely after the era of Old English, which places this specific morphosyntactic evolution between the 12th century and the mid-16th century. The results of this study are not enough to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that sociolinguistic interactions between French-speaking and English-speaking cultures are a primary reason for this morphosyntactic shift, but they certainly do seem to support that theory.

If any conclusion is to be gathered from this study about the causes of the disappearance of grammatical gender in English, it is that there is not significant evidence to reject the natural, coincidental evolution of English to parallel Latinate languages in separately constructing articles, pronouns, and possessive adjectives and to excluding grammatical gender.

**Conclusion**

American and French societies are becoming increasingly aware of the multitude of gender identities and expressions that exist today. Linguists and scholars have traced the grammatical gender in French back to the declensions of Latin; Old English also exhibits grammatical gender, despite being a Germanic language, unlike the Latinate language of French. The present study’s analysis of pronouns, articles, and possessive adjectives presents parallel trends between Modern English and French. The need in English for a third-person singular neutral pronoun parallels the need for one in French, and French has the additional nuance of grammatical gender compounding the issue. Modern French uses “vous” in both the singular and
the plural sense of the English “you”. The use of “vous” is akin to English’s employment of “they” as both a singular and a plural third-person neutral pronoun. The higher frequency of first-person and second-person plural subject pronouns in French can be attributed to this other use of “vous” in the formal yet singular sense.

The results garnered from the present study did not answer the initial question of discovering why grammatical gender disappeared from English. The data do show, however, that the concepts of gender, both grammatical and physical, are embedded within the construction and usage of both of these languages. Without a thorough investigation of the major sociopolitical events, movements, and ideas that shaped concepts of gender across France and England, a full understanding of the relationship between the evolution of gender and the linguistic evolution of both languages is not possible. For future research, the present study suggests that research continue to be done on the full texts of each of these six works, including coding the remaining texts for pronouns, articles, and possessive adjectives. Further recommendations include pursuing the origins of the cultural and sociopolitical contexts of each of the texts, and expanding the texts chosen by the present study to include other texts from the chosen centuries and expanding into other centuries as well.
Works Cited and Referenced

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources – News:


**Secondary Sources – Academic Source:**


