

Gender and T–V on pronouns as form indexicals

Standard view Grammatical gender on human-referring pronouns is standardly assumed to contribute not-at-issue inferences about the social gender of the referent. Because these inferences do not project like regular presuppositions, they are often treated as indexical presuppositions (e.g., Cooper 1983; Yanovich 2010, 2012):

- (1) $\llbracket \text{she} \rrbracket^{c,g} = \text{female}(g(i))(c_w)$, where c_w is the world of the context of utterance c (≈Yanovich 2012, (7))

Schlenker (2007) also treats T–V features on 2nd person pronouns in languages like French or Russian as contributing indexical presuppositions that reflect the level of familiarity between the speaker and the addressee:

- (2) $\llbracket \text{tu} \rrbracket^c = \text{the speaker } c_s \text{ believes in } c_w \text{ they stand in a familiar relation to the addressee } c_a \cdot c_a$ (≈Schlenker 2007, (1b))

Proposal I propose that neither gender nor T–V on pronouns directly reflect anything objective about the referent. Instead, the choice of the relevant features is driven by the speaker’s reasoning about what the socially appropriate pronoun form is in a given context, which can be affected by various factors, including, but not limited to the actual or perceived social gender of the referent or the level of familiarity between the speaker and the addressee. The general semantics of such *form indexical* features is given in (3); I follow Esipova 2019 in that *phi*-features on pronouns are obligatorily non-restricting pronoun-internal modifiers of what starts out as $\lambda x.x = g(i)$ and, thus, do not contribute presuppositions lexically.

- (3) $\llbracket \text{FORM-}\phi \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda x.\text{the speaker } c_s \text{ believes FORM to be a socially appropriate way to refer to } x \text{ in } c$

Gains This lets us capture the much more varied usage patterns than presumed by the standard view in an explanatory way. **No one-to-one mapping** The proposed view acknowledges that there isn’t a one-to-one mapping between one’s social gender and their pronouns. E.g., people with non-binary gender identity can adopt binary pronouns; people can adopt multiple pronouns regardless of whether they identify within the binary (e.g., *she* and *they*); some people can adopt pronouns that do not match their gender identity as a form of gender-non-conformity (e.g., *he/him* lesbians, who still identify as women), etc. Relatedly, a speaker can choose to ignore the referent’s preferred pronouns for various reasons, which is also in line with (3).

Similarly, in the vast majority of cases the choice of the T or V form is rigidly determined by the convention adopted within a given speaker-addressee pair, but how said convention is established and (re-)negotiated depends on multiple social factors, of which familiarity is only one, and is subject to inter-speaker variation and change over time. An existing convention can, however, be temporarily overridden in exceptional cases (e.g., in Russia, two professors who use T forms with each other might switch to V forms in the presence of their students, even though nothing substantial changes about their actual relationship). **Counterfactuals vs. ignorance** We know that gender on pronouns doesn’t project like regular presuppositions. E.g., in (4a), the presupposition of *too* is not satisfied globally, but is in its local context (LC), so the use of *too* is felicitous, but in (4b), the pronoun must match Skyler’s actual gender, not the one from the LC. In (4c), I show that T–V patterns with gender.

- (4) a. If Mia was in the library, Lea would be there, too.
 b. *Context: Skyler is female.* If Skyler was male, I would buy {#him, her} flowers.
 c. Esli by my s vami byli na ty, ⟨#ty, vy⟩ by menja ⟨#nazyvala, nazyvali⟩ Anja.
 if IRR we with you.V were on you.T you.T you.V IRR me called.T called.V Anya
 ‘If you and I were on the T form basis, you would be calling me Anya.’ (Russian)

While the categorical preference for the actual form in counterfactuals is almost universal, when the actual form is unknown, speakers vary much more (contra the claim in Yanovich 2010 that LC-justified forms are universally allowed in such cases):

- (5) a. *Context: Skyler’s gender is unknown.* If Skyler is male, I would buy %{him, them} flowers.
 b. Ja ne pomnju, na ty my ili na vy, no esli na ty, %⟨možeš, možete⟩ nazyvat’ menja Anja.
 I not remember on you.T we or on you.V but if on you.T you.T you.V may.T may.V call me Anya
 ‘I don’t remember if we’re on the T or V form basis, but if we’re on the T form basis, you may call me Anya.’ (Rus)

The table on the right summarizes the results of a mini-poll for examples like (4b) and (5a), in which 10 English speakers (all PhD students born in late 1980s–mid 1990s) listed all the forms they accept for each example, indicating any preferences. The judgements for T–V are more complex and should be discussed individually. The standard view doesn’t offer a non-stipulative way of capturing this variation, because it lacks the social component and, thus, doesn’t take into account that people vary in how much social cost they assign to knowingly/unknowingly using an incorrect marked form, that Russian speakers vary in how socially marked the T form is for them, etc.—but the proposed view does. **Arbitrary gender** Divorcing grammatical gender on pronouns from social gender helps capturing arbitrary uses of gendered forms like (6), allowed by some.

- (6) If you make a friend, you should be kind to her.
 ↗ If you make a friend, it’ll be a female friend.

Her in (6) doesn’t refer to a specific person, so it can’t lead to misgendering and can, thus, be deemed appropriate without necessarily intending to convey any universal inferences about social gender. But under the standard view, one has to say that gendered forms are lexically ambiguous and/or that gender presuppositions project existentially—with extra stipulations.

Moving forward Intuitively, form indexical *phi*-features form a natural class with forms of address (i.e., titles and name versions), honorifics, etc. More fine-grained differences within this class can and should be explored in future work.

Refs. Cooper. 1983. doi:10.1007/978-94-015-6932-3. Esipova. 2019. PhD thesis. Schlenker. 2007. doi:10.1515/TL.2007.017. Yanovich. 2010. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-14888-0_22. Yanovich. 2012. Ms. <https://tinyurl.com/yanovich2012>.

<i>Counterfactual LC</i>	
actual form	8
actual form > <i>they</i>	1
actual form, LC form, or <i>they</i> , w/preferences depending on example	1
<i>Ignorance LC</i>	
<i>they</i>	3
<i>they</i> = LC form	3
LC form/LC form > <i>they</i> , dep. on ex.	2
<i>they</i> > LC form	1
<i>they/they</i> = LC form, dep. on ex.	1