



By: Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief

Language evolves but please don't weaponise it: Hands off Personal Pronouns!



“There ain’t no personal pronouns in the American Constitution!”

or

“Dude, one’s the first word!”

“It was a terrible experience for him and me”

“We, the People...”

I won’t patronise you with the correct answer. I simply want to point out that you might be judged for making this grammatical mistake, and we do, in speech, frequently.

I, you (singular and plural) he, she, it, they, are the simple personal pronouns we learn when we learn to speak, read and write.

It means that you speak before you think, rather than think before you speak. Which could have bad consequences if you are arguing a case or seeking to finalise an important deal.

But the complex world of Wokery has decided to push forward the barriers of human understanding and enlighten us further. Here’s a list of some important new personal pronouns of which you should be aware, lest you dare to cause offence:

In 2016, the Canadian government introduced Bill C-16 as an extension of the existing Canadian Human Rights Act.

“Ze/zir, xe/xem/xir, ze/hir/hirs, ey/em/eir”. Yes, life’s probably too short, but if you’re interested, here’s a list of definitions for your convenience: www.hns.nd.gov

It aims to protect a list of identifiable groups from discrimination. The groups include age, sex, religion and disability, amongst others.

And here’s the etiquette: If you attend a conference and helpful steward Darren’s name badge informs you that Darren, ze, can guide you to your desired location, you can know more about Darren and his background as you ask him where the toilet is.

The bill, which enshrines the rights of transgender or gender-diverse Canadians by including them under human rights and hate-crime laws, has sparked quite considerable debate.

The world will briefly be better and kinder for two single souls.

Critics have voiced concerns that the law will penalise citizens who do not use specific pronouns when referring to gender diverse people.

Are you mad, cis-Woman? Why do Personal Pronouns Matter?

You could be prosecuted for committing a hate crime for pronoun misuse

Choose between the following statements:

In other words, you could be prosecuted for committing a hate crime for pronoun misuse. If you fail to use a “gender-neutral pronoun” such as “they”, you are breaking the law. This is becoming absurd.

“It was a terrible experience for he and I”

Is this an over-dramatic interpretation? Can you actually go to jail for using the wrong pronoun?

Brenda Cossman, law professor at the University of Toronto and director of the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies, cites guidance from the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which states that you should say “they”.

Does the bill legislate the use of certain language? And could someone go to jail for using the wrong pronoun?

In the Criminal Code, which does not reference pronouns, Cossman says misusing pronouns alone would not constitute a criminal act. However, “it might”.

It is clearly not at the level of genocide, but Page 18 reads: “Gender-based harassment can involve: (5) Refusing to refer to a person by their self-identified name and proper personal pronoun.”

Is it likely to “It could happen,” Cossman says.” happen? “I don’t think so. But, my opinion on whether or not that’s likely has a lot to do with the particular case that you’re looking at.

s “The path to prison is not straightforward. It” not easy. But, it’s been used before in breach of tribunal orders.”

I don’t intend to get bogged down in legal jargonese: what is more important is how Canadians feel about whether this impacts on their lives.

I asked a Canadian recently whether they felt they should use the word “they” in normal conversation, and they said, “yes, we feel that we now need to say “they” rather than “him”, her or anything else.

This is not China, persecuting the Uyghurs by obliterating their language and seeking to destroy their very existence. This is Canada!

i, you, we, he, she, it, they need and deserve free speech.