Queer Identities and Expression in Romance Languages

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Keywords
gender politics, gender identities, queer identities, non-binary, transgender, gender pronouns, cisgender, language and social cognition, lingua franca, creative writing

Disciplines
Anthropology | French Linguistics | Language Interpretation and Translation | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies | Other French and Francophone Language and Literature | Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures | Reading and Language | Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature

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Queer Identities and Expression in Romance Languages

By

Taré Floyd

In

Anthropology

Submitted to the

Department of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Lauren Ristvet

2020
Abstract: This article outlines and illuminates the relationship between sex and gender, as well as reflects upon the linguistic expression of identities on the widening gender spectrum. Using ethnographic methods, including in-person and online interviews, I document the range of pronouns that non-cis people from native Romance Language backgrounds create in order to accommodate their languages and to include their identity through the introduction of new gender-neutral pronouns into contemporary vocabulary. Moreover, I note challenges met by my informants, and others, by being on the frontier of the global and ever-expanding revolution in gender. I also include discussions of language and social cognition to complicate the relationship between the English language as the present worldwide lingua franca and the adaptation of the ‘they’ pronoun to express non-cis identities for people of non-native English language backgrounds and settings. Additionally, a creative writing component further elaborates upon, and incorporates, the ethnographic process and these diverse identities.

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Les Identités et l’Expression Queer dans Les Langues Romanes

Taré Floyd

Résumé : Cette étude décrit et éclaire la relation entre le sexe et le genre, ainsi que reflète sur l'expression linguistique des identités sur le spectre du genre qui continue à s'élargir. En utilisant des méthodes ethnographiques, y compris des entretiens en personne et en ligne, je documente la gamme de pronom que les personnes non cis d'origine linguistique romane créent afin de s'adapter à leur langue et d'inclure leur identité grâce à l'introduction de nouveaux pronom non sexistes dans le vocabulaire contemporain. De plus, je note les défis rencontrés par mes informateurs, et d'autres, qui sont à la frontière de la révolution mondiale en constante expansion en matière de genre. J'inclus également des discussions sur la langue et la cognition sociale pour compliquer la relation entre la langue anglaise en tant que lingua franca mondiale actuelle et l'adaptation du pronom « they » pour exprimer des identités non cis dans des contextes et des contextes non anglophones. De plus, une composante d'écriture créative approfondit et intègre le processus ethnographique et ces diverses identités.

Mots-clés : politique de genre, identités de genre, identités queer, non-binaire, transgenre, pronom de genre, cisgenre, langage et cognition sociale, lingua franca, écriture créative
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Case Study: The Gravity of Gender

In January 2019, CBC News of Canada interviewed Alexander Reid, the vice president of a local transgender and allied support center in Winord-Essex, Canada about various difficulties that non-binary Canadians faced. He said, “health care and other services can be challenging to access in French for non-binary people… gender-neutral language is not commonly used in French.”¹ According to the article, non-cis Francophone Canadians are forced to search and travel to services offered in English despite the fact that it is not their native language. The issue here is not that the English service centers house better resources. The issue is the differing nature of the two languages. Several of the people interviewed described expressing their gender identities as “too complicated in French.”² While gender-neutral pronouns have been posited, such as the “iel” French pronoun referenced in the article, “most people don’t know how to use them.”³ In their native French, many resort to using a cis pronoun such as *il*, or ‘he.’ Per another interviewee, “trans discourses and non-binary identities are more accepted and recognized in the Anglophone world.”⁴ Unlike French, the English language affords the flexibility to express gender neutrality. My research has shown that Francophone Canadians are just one of the entire global population of non-cis people incorporating English to express their gender identities.

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
Background

In linguistics, gender signifies grammatical agreement. That is, gender is a property that follows specific grammatical functions and that accords nouns with other verbs, adjectives, pronouns and so forth. The Romance Languages, for example, adhere to a strict binary grammatical gender; nouns and pronouns are generally either grammatically feminine or grammatically masculine. In many cultures, the social classification of biological sex is coded as gender, and these socially constructed genders are also often binary in nature. As a result, genetic sex and ascribed gender categories have blurred and blended to the point where the social norms, reproductions and reinforcements over the performance of gender are often held to be instinct. If the gender of an individual person is as fixed and intrinsic as the grammatical gender of a noun, then it may follow that social and cultural conceptions of gender cannot be challenged.

Français

That is, social gender is often seen as strict as grammar laws.

Of course, this is hardly the case. Today, binary classifications of social gender identity are being challenged irrespective of language. In anglophone America, where individuals with an almost genderless mother tongue have traditionally also long been confined to a gender binary for socially constructed gender identities, people are mending the language to accommodate non-binary genders. These language

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5 Moore, Samuel. "Grammatical and Natural Gender in Middle English." PMLA 36, no. 1 (1921): 79-103.
changes are mostly pronominal as the rest of the language is generally gender ambiguous, as will be discussed below. The most obvious of these changes is the adoption of the third-person plural pronoun ‘they’ as a genderless singular pronoun. However, ‘they’ is not restricted to use by non-cis people as a form of gender affirming language. In the past five years, ‘they’ has been increasingly employed in common speech to refer to a singular person whose gender has not yet been identified. Though these adjustments are inherently more difficult in Romance Languages because of the necessity for grammatical accordance, as stated above. Nevertheless, regardless of native language and other constraints, creative solutions are rising all over the world to make languages more inclusive and effective means of identity expression.

What does it mean to be non-cis?

In introducing Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders (2017), Richards, et al. admit to the difficulty that academia, and the public, has faced in understanding the global gender revolution as it expands and transforms at a swift rate. However, we recognize that non-cis is an umbrella term that denotes any gender that is not normative—neither strictly feminine nor masculine. Gender identity is irrespective of genetic sex, because gender is a social construction. Nonetheless, some identity terms do include

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<td>- ell</td>
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information about the individual’s assigned gender and sex at birth. For example, transgender identities do not agree with the gender they were assigned or ascribed. Some transgender people choose to include ‘ftm’ (female to male) or ‘mtf’ (male to female) in describing themselves. These identities are not cis, but they can be expressed using familiar pronouns: ‘she’ and ‘he.’ In Romance Languages too, transgender people can take advantage of the facility afforded by the extant grammar. For instance, Seine, one of my informants, is a mtf transwoman. In lieu of ‘il,’ or he, she uses ‘elle’ as her preferred pronoun. For other gender identities, such as agender, non-binary or genderfluid, expression can be more difficult to find in any language. People that identify as neither ‘he,’ nor ‘she,’ have invented new words and pronouns to communicate their gender. In English, ‘they/them’ as a singular genderless pronoun is widely used and recognized. There are also entirely novel pronouns like xe/xir/xyr and ze/ zir/ zirs. Though these new pronouns are not yet well-known, their employment is straightforward because pronominal changes do not heavily affect English because the language provides gender ambiguity.

Consider the following:

\begin{quote}
Alex was happy when she left her room.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
She was happy when she left her room.
He was happy when he left his room.
They were happy when they left their room.
Ze was happy when ze left zir room.
\end{quote}

Here we see that, in English, the use of pronouns, gender neutral or otherwise, is interchangeable because it does not greatly affect adjectives, verbs and other structures of the sentence. Now, please compare the following literal French translation of the text above:

Alex était heureuse quand elle est partie sa chambre.

Elle était heureuse quand elle est partie sa chambre.
Il était heureux quand il est parti sa chambre.
Iel était heureux.se quand iel est parti.e sa chambre.*

*An accepted but not standard gender-neutral translation, because there is no standard at this time.

Unlike in English, French and the other Romance Languages have a grammatical gender binary that is not easily malleable\(^\text{12}\). In the example provided above, we see that the gender identity of the speaker changes the pronunciation of the sentence and the agreement between the speaker with adjectives and verb conjugations. In the example sentence using ‘iel’ as the subject, the adjective and the conjugation of the verb are perforated to include neutrality via equal representation of the grammatically feminine and grammatically masculine. However, to verbally express, rather than to write, these gender-neutral alterations welcomes new challenges because they are not neutral when spoken. For example, heureux.se is indistinguishable from heureuse, the grammatically feminine form of ‘happy,’ despite its accordance with its gender-neutral subject pronoun, ‘iel.’ Notice that the word above for ‘room,’ or chambre, has its own feminine grammatical gender, as well. If even inanimate objects are gendered, it begs the question of the impact the feminine/masculine dichotomy has on shaping minds and morals. If

the gender binary is ubiquitous in one’s native language, is it even possible to conceptualize and comprehend the thought of gender neutrality?

**Português**

Cis:
- Ela, dela, nela = she, her, hers
- Ele, dele, ele = he, him, his

Ncn-cis:
- el@, del@, nel@
- elx, delx, nelx
- elu, delu, nelu
- el, del, nel
- & more

---

16 Ibid.
and does not, determine intelligence. Instead, explorations into the relationship between language and thought reveal the linguistic and social diversity around the world. For example, Lera Boroditsky, a leading scholar of linguistic relativism, has found “that language can play a causal role in constructing mental timelines.”\footnote{Boroditsky, Lera. 2018. "Language and the Construction of Time through Space." \textit{Trends in Neurosciences} 41, no. 10 (2018): 651-653.} What, then, happens when an individual speaks more than one language? In my ethnographic research, which spanned nations via both travel and online communication, I found that we live in a world of polyglots, but more relevant, we live in a world of English learners.

English is our contemporary lingua franca. Globally, the English language is being employed in far more contexts than those that only involve native speakers\footnote{Pitzl, Marie-Luise. "World Englishes and Creative Idioms as a Lingua Franca.” \textit{World Englishes} 35, no. 2 (2016): 293-309.}. In a study by Andreas Langlotz, groups of non-native English speakers from diverse language backgrounds, using “English as a lingua franca, …are able to construct an authentic and personal…identity by means of creative communication strategies.”\footnote{Pishwa, 205.} Likewise, in my online [n]ethnographic research, I found that people use English to articulate their identities more accurately than in their native language.

\textbf{Ethnography & [N]ethnography}

\textbf{Methods:}

My research was conducted in two spaces: on and offline. Offline, I engaged in ‘deep hanging out’ in France with queer peers at a local LGBT+ center and in queer friendly spaces in Montréal. Le Centre LGBT de Touraine, as part of their strategy to address the need for the
public to understand new terms, published literature that outlined the explanation of queer identities. These explanations offered clear definitions of ‘coming out,’ intersexuality, sexuality and gender identity terms (fig.4).

Personne transgenre, or transgender person, is defined here as someone that does not agree with the gender that they were assigned at birth and that will go through a social or medical transition. Appropriate terms: transman, transwoman, non-binary person. Personne non-binaire, or non-binary person, is defined here as someone that does not recognize themselves in a strict categorization of either gender: woman or man. Personne cisgenre, or cisgender person, is defined here as a non-transgender person; a person that agrees with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Under “Quelques Chiffres,” the center provides several statistics, one of which states that 44% percent of transgender people have said that faced discrimination in searching for employment, and 35% have said that they have been discriminated against at work, in the past year.
Aside from participating in weekly meetings at the center, outside of this larger participant observation, I conducted one-on-one informal interviews with some informants from the center, and some that I found using social media. Through photography, I also documented the expression of queer identities via street art and flyers in Tours, France (figs. 5 and 6).

Online, I used various social media sites (Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter and Quora) to recruit and contact informants. In this manner, I conducted ‘nethnography,’ a method of “participant-observational research based in online fieldwork.”^20 My participant observational methods consisted of reading responses on forums, recording common themes and sentiments, and documenting novel pronouns that I found in Romance Languages (figs, 1-3). I also interviewed informants individually via either direct messaging or video call.

**Results & Discussion:**

In conducting research for this project, I found that the topic of gender is heavily debated and relevant in all spheres, ranging from small French towns to storefronts in Montréal (fig. 8). I decided to start my ethnographic research in Tours, France in the month of June 2019, LGBT Pride month. Le Centre LGBT de Touraine was in the process of organizing a city-wide demonstration of their Pride March for the

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50th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York. In addition to their Pride March, the center organized an exposée to commemorate LGBT historical figures who changed the world (fig. 7). The center’s devotion to the community was not only expressed by these public events, it also provided free private counseling to anyone questioning their sexuality or gender identity.

I met with a counselor to ask about the non-binary population in France and how I could linguistically express myself as a non-binary person within the French language. The counselor offered pronouns such as ‘iel,’ or ‘on,’ a versatile French pronoun that could mean ‘us’ or ‘they.’ However, the counselor added that neither of these pronouns function within the language as a singular genderless pronoun. I received the familiar, “eh, en français, c’est un peu compliqué,” in French, it is a little complicated. In the consultation, I gathered, again, that there is not an effective means to express any gender neutrality in the language, although he was the first to name “les règles militantes de l’Académie Française,” or the French Academy’s strict rules, that govern the grammar of the French language, as the cause for the inadaptability of the language. He held that, because the Academy refuses to acknowledge
gender affirming language, efforts to express oneself in a neutral way, such as ‘iel,’ would remain as typographical errors. Nevertheless, I was determined to hear the stories of non-cis people from Romance Language backgrounds that succeeded to find a pronoun that accurately expressed their identity.

I turned to Twitter in search of people from non-binary identities. It was difficult to find people who considered themselves gender neutral. Alternatively, I frequently came across the term bigenre, or bigender. To my bigender informants, the identity meant that they would use either ‘she,’ or ‘he’ dependent upon what felt the most accurate at any given moment. When I asked my bigender informant, Rhine, how to express myself in French as a neutral gendered, non-binary person, they first asked,

Tu te considères … un peu + garçon ou un peu + fille ?

---

Do you consider yourself to be … more a like a boy or like a girl?

From their answer to my question, I started to doubt whether the French language permitted native speakers to conceptualize the concept of gender neutrality, or if non-cis Francophone people with neutral identities accommodated their self-expression to be one that could be articulated within their cultural and linguistic communities. I returned to the United States after having struggled to find any informants that identified as gender neutral, and to find anyone that would use the iel pronoun in person. Ultimately, I decided to take an in-depth online [n]ethnographic approach to finding non-cis communities from other Romance Language
backgrounds and to see if anyone used the ‘iel’ pronoun, or other neutral language, online.

One of the most curious aspects of my online ethnographic research was discovering the extensive metalinguistic discourse online about gender, pronouns, and language. On Quora, people from all national origins and language backgrounds ask each other questions, in English, about ways to express their identities, to incorporate neutral pronouns and language practice and to seek advice from others. As in the study by Langlotz, many of my informants explained how they were able to construct an authentic and personal identity using the English language online. One informant, Loire, describes the expression of their gender in English and in French:
Mes pronoms…pour simplifier c’est « il » mais je commence à ne plus vraiment me sentir à l’aise avec… x). En anglais, j’imagine que serait « them. » En français, ça correspondrait à « iel » mais ce n’est pas non plus un pronom qui me convient…

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My pronouns…to simplify is “he” but I am starting to not feel comfortable with [it]… x). In English, I imagine that it would be “they.” In French, that would correspond to “iel,” but that is no longer a that suits me…

In the Romance Languages represented by my informants, gender-neutral pronouns showed a pattern of removing the defining gender characteristic, like the final ‘o’ or ‘a,’ and replacing it with @, x, * or other signs, none of which can be pronounced. Because of this ‘complicated’ nature of expressing themselves as non-cis people, similarly to the Francophone Canadians discussed above, are choosing to use English in their online communities and their other cis gender pronouns in their daily lives. My informant, Rio, called the trade-off of their identity expression “extremely frustrating,” and that their native Spanish tongue “rejects their entire existence.” Rio is grateful to have found an adequate method of expression by learning English and by utilizing the ‘they’ as a singular genderless pronoun online. They engage with other likeminded people online, using the English language as a safe and inclusive realm. English, as a foreign language, supports native and non-native speakers alike in accurately expressing and articulating their true non-cis identity.
Conclusion

To quote Charlemagne, “to have a second language is to possess a second soul.” Each of my informants spoke at least two languages: their native language and English. To return to the concept of linguistic relativism, each informant had a worldview shaped by their cultural and linguistic context. To further the debate around language, cognition and linguistic relativism, I add that our worldview is shaped by language but not entirely by our native language; each language offers novel structures and ideas. Where one offers constraint, another affords flexibility. When one is ambiguous another can portray the world as much more nuanced. Where one is gendered, one is not. Like many of my informants, “bilinguals activate their two languages jointly…with some interaction between the two.” Then, what Charlemagne stated above might not be entirely false.

The key here is that, yes, each language possesses distinctive modes of thought and perception that guide speakers to think in certain ways and not others. However, we are able, especially in a globalizing world, to be exposed to many other languages, and thus, different manners of thought, perception and expression. And, to disagree with a widely held conception, I argue that foreign language receptivity and influence does not decrease as one ages. Learning a language outside the period of natural acquisition, that lasts up until adolescence, does not mean that one is predestined to uncomprehend the full extent of a foreign language. Rather, learning a language, as my informants have with English, extends a bilingual advantage. This

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means that bilinguals can switch back and forth between their languages to find a relevant and correct means of expression. For many non-cis people, English, as a both a native or learned language, provides a more accurate means of self-identification. For everyone, a polyglottic and interconnected world can make room for all genders, identities and forms of expression.

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24 Ibid.
Creative Writing

Preface

The following pieces were written to capture the voices of my informants, and my own, as a response to the intellectual stimulation that is inherent in research and the ethnographic processes.

It is imperative to state that the views represented in my writing can not capture the diversity of opinions, experiences, values and views of all my informants. I acknowledge and thank all of my informants, including those not represented by a written piece, for their time and the thoughts that they shared, as well as for inspiring me.

These pieces are largely free verse and reflect my personal style & creative choices. Each is followed by an artist statement to be read after the piece, and hopefully, before the piece is reread. I wish that these imaginative works will incite creativity that can be channeled into other media than our traditional way of representing, and reflecting upon, our data as a discipline.

I welcome you to these pieces, and they welcome you and your open mindedness.

-Taré Floyd
At your fingertips,
on QWERTY keyboards,
space bars and mouse clicks,
a world to explore,
beyond nation limits.
“The Field” is boundless;
countless informants,
direct messages,
social media,
broaden our scope of
@cademia.
All of the above
help us stay virtually connected
and guide us to unearth the unexpected.
On [N]ethnographer

“[N]ethnographer” introduces my reflections as an ethnographer whose work was largely performed on the internet with the help of social media platforms. In this poem, I aim to share that cultural anthropologic and ethnographic work is legitimate even if not physically performed outside of one’s setting or country. Online platforms, and the use of direct messages or online video calls, do not restrict one’s ability to capture and analyze.

A surprising amount of a person’s identity is conducted and presented online, and thus can not be shared if the researcher is only present with them in person. My method of examining, for example, someone’s profile in addition to interview, obtained the greatest possible information from my informants, and could possibly benefit other projects with different research aims.

My poem “[N]ethnographer” is a call to arms for all anthropologists to view the internet as a provider of a wealth of information and a portal to a world of amazing informants like those that I had the opportunity to meet.
Purple

neither Pink,
nor Blue,

but, something in between,
or more accurately—

Something of an entirely different realm.

You’d like us to think that we feel “trapped in the wrong body,”

but We are not.

You are trapped in a binary way of thinking,

but We are not.
On “Purple”

“Purple” was inspired in part by Julia Serano’s book, *Whipping Girl: a Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. In her chapter “Experiential Gender,” she writes about her experience as a trans woman and the projections of the cis world on her gender identity. As she explains, there is no fault in being a transgender person, and that fault is certainly not that transgender people are somehow less fortunate than cis identifying people because they “were born in the wrong body.” She claims that these projections stem from a rooted and deeply mistaken view of the gender identity spectrum, and an imposed hierarchy that assumes that transgender people should be pitied for their inability to conform to what is normal or natural.
Frustration

This is…

Frustration.

All mess-ups,

and Hesitations.

Category is: Pronouns

Elle, a dit…
—excuse-moi

lél a dit…

Her boyfriend—

No, her partner*.

…but, he’s still a guy, right?

…well, the

way I was

raised…

¿Señorrrrrrra?

Suffice it to say:

They.
On Frustration

“Frustration,” in its first stanza is to be read in the same rhythm of the nursery rhyme of the version “Concentration” I played when I was a child. The game consists of two people that agree on a subject, here pronouns, to list while clapping without hesitating between counting off different objects that align with the chosen topic.

For Example:

This is (*clap, clap, clap*) Concentration.
No mess ups (*clap, clap, clap*) or hesitations.
Category is: Names
Sandra (*clap*)
Jordan (*clap*)
Lia (*clap*)
Uh…Cassandra— (this person would be ‘out’ for hesitating. The same goes for the next example).
Sandra (this person would be ‘out’ for repeating and thus would have lost the game).

In light of these rules of the nursery rhyme, I chose to write “Frustration” motivated by some of my informants from Romance Language backgrounds, such as my informant Loire’s who confided in me that even though they should use the equivalent of their non-binary pronoun in their native French, ‘iel,’ they did not feel as though the pronoun was as accurate or as accessible as ‘they,’ an English pronoun. They also found a considerable amount of difficulty expressing their non-binary identity to their family and community in France where they were met with confusion and countless micro-aggressions. Fortunately, they found facility, especially online, in using ‘they/them’ to express their non-binary identity. Through my research, I found that Loire was not alone in preferring the ‘they’ pronoun on online profiles despite of English language proficiency, native language or national background.
In addition to Loire’s views, captured concisely in the last two lines, the poem reflects upon a range of other attitudes, purposefully arranged in a confusing fashion to emblemize not only the range of attitudes and discourse around non-cis identities, but also the frustration of non-cis people caught in a world of confusion of and resistance to their identities.
Scammer

Being a [N] ethnographer first requires one to learn the culture of the internet.

Here are some key tips:

- Do accept that you will have to learn ‘text speech’ acronyms to communicate with your informants. This includes being familiar with colloquial and abbreviated phrases in any language you intend to use and anticipating that foreign language speakers might use words from the English language.

Here is an example of my reaction as a [N] ethnographer that was inspired by the above message:

   o Ok, they said “c’est fake tout sa,” in response to my initial message.

   o Well, I know what fake means, so that might be a bad sign.

   o Wait, “sa?” Don’t they mean « ça ? »

   o Ok, so they mean is, « c'est faux tout ça. »

   o Wait, that means that they said “That’s all fake…”
Ok, after doing the calculation into grammatically correct French, I still see that they think I am “fake.” *Sad researcher face 😞*

- So, Do not send out mass impersonal messages to direct inboxes as an attempt to initiate a conversation; people will think that you are a scam or bot.
- Do not send them a link to complete a survey; you will totally come off as a scam or bot.
- Do anticipate that, maybe, 20% of people will respond to your messages, but that 5% might have a complete interview with you.
- Do understand that being a [N]ethnographer means that you must keep your notification ringer on high and that you are always ON; if someone responds, you must be there, or else you could lose the informant forever.
- Do change your tone, and grammar structure, to fit in.
- Do be honest about who you are.
- Do trust that people, once they realize that you are not a scammer, will generally hear you out and will be excited to share their stories with you.
On “Scammer”

Scammer outlines my frustrations and learning process of how to become an effective [N]ethnographer within the realm of DMing, or direct messaging, to recruit, and communicate with, informants. However, it also outlines my growth and the fun I had troubleshooting while learning the culture of the internet that preceded my intended research aims.

One of the tougher challenges, stated in a point above, was about being incessantly ON. As someone that went from not using any social media platforms to having accounts on just about every site, it was difficult to adjust to constant notifications that disrupted meals, down time, classes and study time, not to mention the finesse it took to coordinate interview times that aligned with my informants’ schedules in different time zones, yea.

Though, as stated in the last point, it was very rewarding to meet and to talk to my many informants. I could feel their palpable enthusiasm from my screen despite them being sometimes 3000 miles away. They were ecstatic to find someone that was interested in their identity and journey. Someone that expressed that they cared and that used gender affirming language. Someone that celebrated them.
On Rivers

Each of my informants was named after a river from their homeland.

Rivers endure the tightest constraints and the toughest terrain, but they can not and will not be stopped.

My informants persevere through and overcome their challenges, all the while shining like the stunning forces of nature they are.
Epilogue

When I was in middle school, clothing was my external means of self-expression, and that much was very obvious. I was known around school, by students, teachers and administrators, for my outfits. In a parent-teacher conference, one of my teachers even told my mother that he only came into work every day to see what I was going to wear. I had too many earrings to count. Rhinestone studded eyes and fishnet gloves. Army fatigue with knee-high converse. I wore my hair straight, braided, kinky, curly, or any combination between. I came up with wild hair designs and turned to my mother to help those ideas come to fruition. She braided my hair into fauxhawks, one side of my hair braided and the other with a braid out. Even when I asked her to braid my hair so that it looked like they were lightning bolts, she managed to do that too (and by the way, that hairstyle looked especially awesome when paired with my lightning bolt earrings.) In any given week, I could vacillate between tutus and tuxes with bow ties.

I had all types of friends from all ‘cliques,’ and was also in the school band. I was a tenor sax, because that is what we did back then— a person was their instrument. For example, Joey wasn’t a kid who played baritone, he was simply a baritone. I was the only ~girl~ in the lower brass and lower woodwinds section.

I loved our concert nights the most because we were obligated to wear formal concert tuxedos, even the girls. Unlike the clarinet, and the flutes, I did not complain about the dress code. I found it fun and something to look forward to.

At the beginning of 8th grade, I moved to a new school. At this new school, uniforms were obligatory. I was crushed.
All of my new classmates were using an online platform I’d hadn’t yet been introduced to—Tumblr. With no means of self-expression, I, unintentionally, spent more time on Tumblr where I was able to create a blog that fit my style and that expressed my ideas. In doing so, I, through the magic of the internet and its algorithms, was introduced to a world of people like me and their discourse around gender identity and pronouns. I found many pronouns and read many testimonies from people that had realized that they did not want to be put into any binary gender categories. I had never thought about it before. I knew that I was not the kind of girl that boys liked, but that was neither important to me nor did it bother me. That sort of thing was never on my radar, and when I was expected to fit a certain look to do the normal thing and land a boyfriend, I slipped into a depression. Now, I realize and recognize that this was because of my internal issues about the gender binary and how it affected my view of myself. I did not want to fit a mold of what media portrays, and what society reinforces, as the ideal young woman. Furthermore, I was disturbed by how the gender binary governed how we, as children, were to look, how to act and how to treat each other.

The people that shared my sentiments on Tumblr called themselves non-binary or other identities that fell under the umbrella of queer genders. This online community was there to validate my gender identity and showed me that I was not the only one that had this issue about our social structure and expectations.
This project, “Queer Identities and Expression in Romance Language” is a product of almost 10 years in the making. It is the product of a young non-binary, and aspiring polyglot, kid that had the curiosity to commit countless hours of their life to exploring the internet, meeting people from almost every country, learning languages and witnessing how people are continuing to express themselves, in all spheres, all over the world.

It is my pleasure to share these voices, as well as my own, with you.

Taré Floyd
Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Dr. Lauren Ristvet, thank you for helping me in my time of need and for your continued support.

I appreciate my grandparents, Edgar and Reba, for welcoming me to their home without hesitation during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

To that note, I extend my heart out to my fellow class of 2020 all over the world, to all those pursuing their research despite university closures and to everyone everywhere as we endure this global crisis.

To my younger sibling, Brooklyn, who is currently navigating their gender identity journey, I want you to know that I believe in you and that I am proud of you.

I was named Taré, from the Ancient Egyptian gods: Ptah and Ré. Ré as in the Sun, from my mother, Dawn.

I dedicate this work to my mother because I would not be the person that I am without her as my life-long role model. She has instilled in me the positivity, determination and confidence that I hold within. She is the most wonderful person that I know of, and she inspires me even more every single day. I am forever grateful that I can call this outstanding, amazing, astonishing, miraculous woman my mother.
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List of Figures

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Cis:
- **Elle** = she
- **Il** = he

Non-cis:
- **iel**
- **Ul**
- **Ol**
- **Ille**
- **Æl**
- **Yelle**
- **E.i.l.e**
- & more

**Español**

Cis:
- **Ella** = she
- **Él** = he

Non-cis:
- **ell**
- **ell*”
- **ellæ**
- **ell@**
- **ellu**
- & more
**Português**

Cis:
- Ela, dela, nela = she, her, hers
- Ele, dele, nele = he, him, his

Non-cis:
- el@, del@, nel@
- elx, delx, nelx
- elu, delu, nelu
- el, del, nel
- & more
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Figure 6) Flyers and Resources Produced for Pride Month
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Figure 10) Montréal Storefront Featuring Books on Feminism, Sociology of Gender, and Gender and Sexuality Studies

Screenshot from direct messaging platform

C'est fake tout sa

French reCAPTCHA prompt