Variation in the Acceptability of Singular *They* in Singapore English

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1 Introduction

Despite longstanding prescriptivist critiques, the English pronoun *they* has been used for centuries to refer to singular antecedents, and particularly to epicene antecedents, meaning those of unknown gender (Bodine 1975). Recent work proposes that singular *they* is expanding in North American Englishes, both with regard to its overall use and range of functions, with some younger speakers now using *they* to refer to singular antecedents of known gender (Bjorkman 2017). This shift may be linked to the increasing use of *they* as a preferred personal pronoun and a more general rise in the visibility of non-binary gender identities. Indeed, acceptance of singular *they* by speakers in these communities has been found to correlate with individual attitudes regarding linguistic prescriptivism and non-binary gender (Bradley 2020).

Previous research has focused on the use and evaluation of singular *they* in 'Inner Circle' Englishes (Kachru 1985), referring to communities such as the United States where English is typically spoken as a first language. It is unknown whether singular *they* has experienced a similar trajectory in other world Englishes, and specifically whether the shifting functions of this feature in North American Englishes has diffused to other communities. The patterning of singular *they* in world Englishes presents an interesting case for investigation because, while Inner Circle varieties are traditionally the source of prescriptivist norms in other English-speaking communities, this feature contradicts prescriptivist discourses and is imbricated with current cultural debates over gender norms and identities.

In the present study, we investigate the linguistic and social factors that shape the acceptability of singular *they* among speakers of Singapore English. This variety is classified in Kachru's (1985) framework as an Outer Circle English, which conventionally indicates that English is widely used institutionally but is not typically learned in the home as a first language. The Outer Circle status of Singapore English has been problematized in recent decades, however, as English has dramatically expanded in use to become the most commonly spoken home language in the country (Singapore Department of Statistics 2015). Nonetheless, as argued by Park and Wee (2009), in certain respects Singapore English retains the ideological positioning of an Outer Circle variety, with many speakers continuing to view Inner Circle varieties as more legitimate sources of English norms. The Singapore speech community also experiences frequent exposure to Inner Circle Englishes and cultural norms via media consumption and interpersonal contact (Starr 2019). At the same time, however, use of singular *they* and/or the adoption of innovative functions of singular *they* may be limited in Singapore due to prescriptivist discourses and conservative social ideologies. These possibilities are further considered in the sections below.

2 Background

2.1 Singular *They* and Gender-Neutral Pronouns in English

The absence of a gender-neutral 3rd person singular pronoun in English has been addressed by speech communities via a number of forms with varying degrees of gender neutrality and prescriptive status. One of these strategies is the use of singular *they*, which more precisely refers to any form in the plural 3rd person pronoun set *they*/*them*/*their* used to refer to a singular individual, as in, "someone has left *their* jacket here". This usage dates back to at least the 14th century (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.) and was unstigmatized in English until the 18th century, when prescriptivist grammarians began to frame singular *they* as ungrammatical and to instead promote the use of epicene *he*, which notionally may refer to an individual of either gender (Bodine 1975). Epicene *he*, in turn, came under criticism as overly androcentric in the late 20th century, and declined in use in favor of more explicitly inclusive forms such as *he or she* (Bodine 1975; Baron 1981).

Regardless of shifts in the preferred prescriptive form for gender-neutral 3rd person singular reference, singular *they* has remained prevalent as a casual form in colloquial communication. An effort to reclaim singular *they* as a standard form began in the late 20th century, when it was touted by second-wave feminists as a truly epicene and less clumsy alternative for *he or she* (Miller & Swift 1977). In recent decades, singular *they* has gained further ground as a gender-neutral pronoun that transcends the gender binary and can be used to refer to individuals whose gender identities are unknown or non-normative. This era has also seen a rise in the adoption of singular *they* as a preferred personal pronoun by individuals who do not wish to be referred to as *he* or *she* (Bjorkman 2017). Following these sociolinguistic changes, institutionally mandated prescriptive norms have begun to shift in the past few years, with major style guides approving the use of singular *they* for certain contexts. The American Psychological Association, for instance, approved the use of the singular *they* in the 2019 edition of its style guide in cases of generic antecedents, for individuals whose gender identities are unknown or irrelevant, or for individuals who identify as nonbinary (Lee 2019). Nonetheless, given the recency of these top-down changes, the long history of singular *they* stigmatization, and the ideological associations between singular *they* and socially liberal stances, the proscription against singular *they* in standard language retains considerable currency among some individuals in English-speaking communities.

Bjorkman (2017) distinguished between two distributions of singular *they*: 'conservative' and 'innovative'. The conservative distribution, referring to how singular *they* has been used historically, applies to singular *they* when it functions as "a bound variable (with quantificational or indefinite antecedents), and with genuinely epicene antecedents, those of indeterminate, mixed, or unknown gender" (Bjorkman 2017:5), as in, '*Someone* left *their* bag at the restaurant'. The innovative distribution refers to the use of singular *they* with "specific definite singular antecedents of known binary gender" (Bjorkman 2017:5), as in '*John* left *their* bag at the restaurant'. Based on preliminary evidence from consultation with other speakers, Bjorkman (2017) suggested that younger speakers in North America are more likely than older speakers to accept the innovative distribution.

Aside from age, Bradley's (2020) study of North American English speakers found that grammaticality judgements for singular *they* were influenced by respondents' prescriptivist beliefs and attitudes towards gender. Specifically, respondents who scored higher on an assessment of linguistic prescriptivism rated singular *they* as significantly less grammatical, as did respondents with a higher level of 'benevolent sexism', referring to attitudes consistent with the gender binary and traditional Western gender norms. Participants who reported knowing an individual who uses *they*/*them* pronouns were significantly more likely to give positive grammaticality judgements for singular *they*. Turning to linguistic factors, singular *they* was judged to be more grammatical when referring to generic rather than definite noun phrases (e.g., 'all passengers' versus 'the passenger'). Additionally, stimuli involving named referents (e.g., 'John') were rated as significantly less grammatical than unnamed referents, whether the name was traditionally masculine, feminine, or ambiguous.

In addition to singular *they*, Bradley (2020) investigated participants' assessment of 'name-pronoun mismatch', meaning their ratings of stimuli in which the gendered pronoun does not agree with the gender traditionally associated with the name (e.g., '*John* left *her* bag at the restaurant'). Non-binary respondents gave these stimuli significantly higher grammaticality ratings than respondents who reported a binary gender identity. No other factors, including those that predicted singular *they* rating, were found to significantly affect the rating of name-pronoun mismatch cases, suggesting that acceptance of singular *they* did not entail a general disregard for pronoun gender among these participants.

2.2 The Singapore Context

2.2.1 English and Prescriptivism in Singapore

Singapore, a former British colony that became an independent nation in 1965, recognizes four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil. English is the language of instruction in schools and has expanded in use as both a community and home language since the mid-20th century. As noted in the introduction, English is now the most commonly spoken home language; this is particularly the case among Singaporeans under 30, two thirds of whom report speaking primarily English at home (Singapore Department of Statistics 2020).

The colloquial form of Singapore English, or 'Singlish', is a contact variety shaped by other local languages that has become a salient symbol of national identity. Wary of the impact that this variety might have on Singapore's competitiveness in the global marketplace, the government has historically discouraged the use of Singlish. Beginning in 2000, these efforts were formalized in the Speak Good English Movement (SGEM), an annual campaign involving events and advertising that has featured slogans such as, "Grammar Rules Matter. Use Good English" and "Get it Right" (Wee 2014). In 2015, the government softened its stance towards Singlish (see Lim 2015) and SGEM materials have subsequently acknowledged its cultural significance; however, a prescriptivist aim to "create an environment of good English in Singapore" remains central to the campaign (Speak Good English Movement 2024). Thus, in contrast to speakers in Inner Circle English nations, Singaporeans have long been exposed to widespread, prescriptivist government messages about the dangers of non-standard English.

As observed by Schneider (2007), Singapore English is in the process of endonormative stabilization, as norms for English shift from externally to internally oriented. Prior work has observed that younger, educated speakers increasingly use local phonological norms in careful speech, while older speakers of similar backgrounds are more likely to use features consistent with non-local English norms (e.g., British English) (Starr 2021). Scholars have proposed that parallel to this phenomenon there is also a possible Americanization of Singapore English underway (see Starr 2019, 2021) as a result of extensive exposure to American English via Singaporean consumption of traditional and new media, as well as interpersonal contact with American English speakers from foreign workers and international travel and study. While evidence for Americanization of phonological features is limited, the diffusion of American English lexis has been widely observed, both in Singapore and in other varieties of English around the world (Chong 2020; Ilbury 2020). This phenomenon suggests that the increasing acceptability of singular *they* in North America may also be seen among Singaporeans, although certain nuances in the usage and patterning of this feature among Singapore English speakers may not be consistent with what has been found elsewhere.

2.2.2 Sociopolitical Climate and Gender Identity Issues in Singapore

The legacy of British colonial-era laws, conservative views on sexuality among many religious traditions active in Singapore (Gunia 2022), and the cautious approach of Singapore's government towards social change have all contributed to conservative policies and attitudes regarding many LGBTQIA+ issues in the country, particularly regarding homosexuality. Singapore's colonial law criminalizing gay sexual activity, for example, was not fully repealed until 2023 (Goh 2023).

In line with Southeast Asian regional traditions of diverse gender identities, however, Singapore's approach to transgender issues has not been as restrictive as its stance towards homosexuality. The country has historically been home to a substantial transgender population and was a pioneer in the area of gender affirmation surgery. In the 1970s, Singapore was the first country in Southeast Asia to grant transgender individuals a range of legal rights, including marriage and amending one's officially registered gender (although certain legal challenges still remain for transgender individuals) (Kaan 2017). Crucially, these policies have maintained the structure of a gender binary, with transition assumed to target a normative male or female identity and gender presentation.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people continue to be relatively visible in Singapore; a 2024 IPSOS survey finds that 14% of Singaporeans report having a relative, friend, or colleague who identifies as transgender while 15% have one who is 'non-binary, gender non-conforming or gender-fluid', both higher than the world average and comparable to the percentages in the United States. This stands in contrast to the rate of knowing someone who identifies as gay, which is substantially lower in Singapore than the United States (38% versus 54%). Singaporeans also show stronger support than respondents in almost every Western country polled for a range of transgender rights, such as the right for adolescents to receive gender affirming care (IPSOS 2024).

Singaporeans' attitudes towards transgender issues have been shaped across the sociopolitical spectrum in recent years by exposure to Western concepts relating to gender identity and 'culture war' discourse (Osman 2021). More young people in Singapore appear to be adopting nonbinary and other non-normative gender identity frameworks originating in the West and using *they*/*them* as their preferred pronouns; at the same time, social conservatives have increasingly critiqued aspects of the transgender rights movement and warned against 'wokeness' and 'cancel culture' regarding

gender identity issues using language that echoes rhetoric from the United States and United Kingdom (e.g., Teoh 2021). As a result of this diffusion, many Singaporeans are likely to be aware of the political stances associated with the use of singular *they* in Inner Circle English communities.

3 Research Questions and Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

This study explores the linguistic and social factors that influence the acceptability of singular *they* in Singapore English via the following research questions:

1. Is the acceptability of singular *they* increasing in apparent time?
2. Do linguistic factors influence the acceptability of singular *they*?
3. Do social and attitudinal factors influence the acceptability of singular *they*?
4. Does acceptance of name-pronoun mismatch correlate with acceptability of singular *they*?

3.2 Methodology

After obtaining institutional ethics approval, these research questions were explored by means of an online questionnaire, which was created and administered via Qualtrics from September 2022 to October 2023. The questionnaire comprised three main sections: rating of sentence stimuli, assessment of linguistic prescriptivism, and a demographic background survey.

3.2.1 Sentence Stimuli

The first section of the questionnaire included 54 sentence stimuli – 36 grammatical sentences and 18 ungrammatical (filler) sentences – presented to participants in randomized order. The 54 sentences were adapted from Bradley (2020) and modified to better suit the Singaporean cultural context (e.g., "Sarah couldn't pay the tuition, so the counselor told them to double check with financial aid" was revised to, "Sarah could no longer afford the school fees, so the principal told them to apply for financial aid."). Following Bradley (2020), items were split equally across three sets of pronouns: *she/her*, *he/him*, and *they/them*.

All grammatical sentences involved a human antecedent and one of the aforementioned pronouns. Two-thirds of the sentences referred to definite antecedents: six specific determiner noun phrases (e.g., *the cashier*), six prototypically masculine forenames (e.g., *Mark*), six prototypically feminine forenames (e.g., *Leanne*), and six invented, gender-neutral names (e.g., *Cres*). The invented names were used in order to circumvent preconceived notions about gender associations of certain forenames, thereby ensuring their gender neutrality (Bradley 2020:4). The sentence set for each pronoun included names from all three gendered categories, meaning that two thirds of the names occurred in sentences that exhibited 'name-pronoun mismatch', in which the gender typically associated with the name did not match the pronoun used (e.g., "*Michael* went to the dentist because *her* tooth had been aching all day.").

The remaining 12 grammatical sentences referred to generic antecedents (e.g., *a student*). Within each of these antecedent categories, half of the sentences involved a nominative case pronoun (i.e., *he*, *she*, *they*) and half involved non-nominative case, meaning accusative or genitive pronouns (*him*/*his*, *her*/*her*, *them*/*their*).

Each pronoun set was also included in six filler sentences; all of these were ungrammatical on the basis of case (e.g., * "Brandon didn't see *he* behind the bushes."). Pronoun case was divided in the same manner as for the grammatical sentences. One filler sentence was excluded from the final analysis because it was mistyped in the questionnaire such that it was no longer ungrammatical.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of features in the sentences involving *they*/*them* pronouns. The same breakdown of features was used for the 18 *she*/*her* and 18 *he*/*him* sentences, yielding 54 sentences in total. In the rating task, participants were asked to indicate the grammaticality of each sentence on a 5-point scale (*not at all*, *a little*, *somewhat*, *fairly*, *very*).

Pronoun	Sentence grammaticality	Antecedent type	Definite antecedent type	Pronoun case	N
they/them	Grammatical	Definite	Specific determiner-NP	Nominative	1
				Non-nom.	1
			Masculine name	Nominative	1
				Non-nom.	1
			Feminine name	Nominative	1
				Non-nom.	1
			Gender-neutral name	Nominative	1
				Non-nom.	1
		Generic	--	Nominative	2
				Non-nom.	2
	Ungrammatical	--	--	Nominative	3
				Non-nom.	3

Table 1: Overview of sentence stimuli breakdown for the 18 items involving *they*/*them* pronouns.

3.2.2 Linguistic Prescriptivism

For the assessment of prescriptivist beliefs, 15 statements were adapted from Bradley (2020:4-5), which targeted five classes of attitudes linked to prescriptivism, as shown in Table 2. Certain revisions were made to Bradley's (2020) assessment to more specifically target the Singapore context (e.g., "Singlish is not proper English."). Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with each of the 15 statements on a five-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *neutral*, *agree*, *strongly agree*). Items were presented in randomized order, with some statements inverted so that more prescriptivist stances did not consistently correlate one side of the rating scale (e.g., "I rarely feel the need to correct others' grammatical errors.").

No.	Language attitude	Sample statement
1	Inherent superiority of some language varieties	American English and British English are better than Singapore English.
2	Annoyance at deviations from standard English	It annoys me when others use 'your' and 'you're' incorrectly.
3	Knowledge of/interest in standardized rules	I don't think using grammatically correct English is important.
4	Attributions about others based on their language use	Having an expansive English vocabulary is a sign of intelligence.
5	Resistance to language change	Children should not be allowed to use slang.

Table 2: Five prescriptivist attitude classes identified in Bradley (2020) with sample statements.

3.2.3 Participant Demographics

Participants were recruited via snowball sampling using personal contacts of the first author. All participants included in the analysis were at least 18 years old and had lived in Singapore for at least ten years. Almost all participants identified as either male or female, with only one identifying as nonbinary. Thus, while in future analyses we aim to gather more non-binary participant data to allow for further investigation, the single non-binary participant is excluded from the present analysis. 108 participants were included in total.

A breakdown of participants' demographic information is given in Table 3. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 76; however, the mean participant age was 31.19, with many more younger than older participants. With the aim of contrasting younger ('Gen Z') participants with older generations, as well as providing age classes with a balanced set of participant numbers, participants are categorized in this analysis as either 'young', meaning ages 18 – 24, or 'old', meaning ages 25

and above. Due to the social network of the first author, female, university-educated, Indian, and Hindu participants are oversampled in the data relative to Singapore's population. For the purposes of the present analysis, given the link between religious affiliation and social conservatism in Singapore, participants who explicitly stated a non-religious affiliation (atheist or agnostic) will be contrasted with other participants.

Demographic information			**N**
Age	Young (18-24)		57
	Old (25 – 76)		51
Gender	Female		78
	Male		30
Education	No university degree	O-levels	2
		A-levels	3
		Polytech	4
	University degree	Undergraduate	74
		Postgraduate	25
Race	Chinese		39
	Malay		2
	Indian		65
	Other		2
Religion	Religious	Buddhism	9
		Catholicism	3
		Protestantism (and other Christian)	13
		Hinduism	55
		Islam	8
		Taoism (and other Chinese religions)	4
		Other	7
		Prefer not to state	1
	Non-religious	Agnosticism	2
		Atheism	6

Table 3: Summary of participants' demographic information (N = 108).

Finally, turning to the linguistic prescriptivism, each participant was categorized as either 'high prescriptivism' (51.85% of participants) or 'low prescriptivism' (48.15%) based on their reported levels of agreement with the 15 statements in the assessment.

4 Findings

Participants' grammaticality judgements were first *z*-score transformed in order to minimize the potential impact of any scaling issues. The lmerTest and lme4 packages in R (Bates et al. 2015) were then used to carry out linear mixed-effects modeling, the results of which are detailed below. Both models incorporated *z*-score judgements as the dependent variable and random intercepts and slopes for both participants and sentence stimuli.

4.1 Pronoun Grammaticality Judgements

The strongest model predicting grammaticality judgement ratings for the target sentence stimuli is given in Table 4. Several significant interactions were identified between pronoun type (*they* versus *he*/*she*) and other linguistic and social factors. First, regarding linguistic factors, for the singular *they* it is the case that indefinite antecedents are rated significantly more highly than definite antecedents; this finding is consistent with the conservative distribution of singular *they* described by Bjorkman (2017). No significant three-way interaction was found between age and these two factors, indicat-

ing that young respondents continue to prefer singular *they* when in reference to an indefinite antecedent, rather than adopting the innovative distribution that allows for definite antecedents.

Fixed effect	Est.	Std Error	df	*t*-value	*p*-value
(Intercept)	4.20275	0.49285	111.91589	8.527	<.001 ***
Pronoun (they)	0.31314	0.26649	547.86717	1.175	0.24049
Age (young)	0.23107	0.60778	107.54574	0.380	0.70455
Gender (male)	0.12209	0.23209	107.54574	0.526	0.59995
Definiteness (indef)	-0.01910	0.12807	31.99177	-0.149	0.88239
Religiosity (religious)	-0.41404	0.48158	107.54573	-0.860	0.39183
Pronoun (they) * Definiteness (indef)	0.50289	0.22182	31.99177	2.267	0.03027 *
Pronoun (they) * Gender (male)	-0.72115	0.11262	3740.00540	-6.404	<.001 ***
Pronoun (they) * Age (young)	-0.59636	0.29492	3740.00541	-2.022	0.04323 *
Age (young) * Gender (male)	-0.55104	0.36296	107.54574	-1.518	0.13190
Pronoun (they) * Religiosity (religious)	-1.17735	0.23368	3740.00541	-5.038	<.001 ***
Age (young) * Religiosity (religious)	-0.02411	0.61049	107.54574	-0.039	0.96857
Pronoun (they) * Age (young) * Gender (male)	0.50743	0.17612	3740.00540	2.881	0.00398 **
Pronoun (they) * Age (young) * Relig (religious)	0.96455	0.29623	3740.00541	3.256	0.00114 **

Table 4: Linear mixed-effects model predicting sentence stimuli ratings. A more positive *t*-value indicates higher grammaticality judgement rating. ('***' = $p<.001$, '**' = $p<.01$, '*' = $p<.05$)

For social factors, significant interactions are found between pronoun and gender, age, and religiosity, such that singular *they* is rated as more grammatical among women, young respondents, and non-religious respondents. Two three-way interactions are found between pronoun and the combination of age and gender and the combination of age and religiosity. Regarding the former, although men in both age groups find singular *they* less acceptable than women do, this gap is significantly wider within the older age group. Similarly, for age and religiosity, the gap in the older generation between religious and non-religious respondents is significantly larger. In fact, only religious older respondents are less accepting of singular *they*; non-religious older respondents show no difference in their ratings of *he*/*she* versus *they*.

Despite exhibiting a trend in the expected direction, such that high-prescriptivism respondents gave lower grammaticality judgement ratings to singular *they* than low-prescriptivism respondents did, this factor was not a significant effect in the model. This lack of significance may be due to correlations between prescriptivism and two factors that were significant in the model, age and religiosity. Specifically, 60.8% of older respondents fell into the high prescriptivism category, in contrast to 43.9% of young participants, and 53% of religious respondents versus 37.5% of non-religious participants were high prescriptivism. Thus, prescriptivism does not explain significantly more of the variation in the data than is accounted for already by these two other factors.

4.2 Name-Pronoun Mismatch

Our second analysis repeats the linear mixed effects modelling process above with sentence grammaticality judgement rating as the dependent variable, adding an additional independent fixed effect of name-pronoun mismatch tolerance, referring to the mean rating participants gave for sentence stimuli in which the gender of the pronoun did not match the traditional gender associated with the personal name in the sentence (see Section 3.2.1).

Table 5 gives the best model for predicting sentence rating when incorporating name-pronoun mismatch tolerance. In this model, none of the social background factors (e.g., age) or attitudinal factors are significant; rather, variation is accounted for via main effects of pronoun category, with *they* rated as lower than *he*/*she*, mismatch tolerance, meaning that participants with higher ratings for name-pronoun mismatch sentences gave higher ratings to the stimuli overall, and most crucially, an interaction between pronoun category and mismatch tolerance, indicating that those participants with higher mismatch tolerance did not give singular *they* lower ratings than *he/she*, in contrast to those with lower mismatch tolerance.

Fixed effect	Est.	Std Error	df	*t*-value	*p*-value
(Intercept)	2.49924	0.15646	148.58668	15.97	< .001 ***
Pronoun (they)	-2.19536	0.15540	124.15384	-14.13	< .001 ***
Mismatch tolerance	0.43093	0.04171	122.33231	10.33	< .001 ***
Pronoun (they) * Mismatch tolerance	0.48463	0.03293	3744.00040	14.72	< .001 ***

Table 5: Linear mixed-effects model predicting sentence stimuli ratings, incorporating name-pronoun mismatch tolerance. A more positive *t*-value indicates higher grammaticality judgement rating. ('***' = $p<.001$)

5 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This study of singular *they* in Singapore English has identified several parallels in the trajectory of this feature in Singapore and Inner Circle Englishes, as well as certain distinctions. First, regarding whether the acceptability of singular *they* is increasing in apparent time in Singapore as it is elsewhere in the world, the answer is evidently yes; respondents ages 18-24 gave significantly higher grammaticality judgement ratings to sentences involving singular *they* than older respondents did.

Contrary to the suggestion of Bjorkman (2017) for North American English, however, younger participants showed no signs of adopting an innovative distribution of singular *they* that allows for both definite and indefinite antecedents; across age groups, indefinite antecedents were significantly preferred for singular *they*, with no significant interaction between age and definiteness. At the same time, because Bjorkman (2017) does not involve quantitative data, we cannot conclude definitively that the pattern found in Singapore is distinctive.

Turning to social factors other than age, gender also had a significant impact on grammaticality judgements; men gave singular *they* sentences significantly lower ratings, particularly among the older generation. Religiosity showed a similar effect, with religious participants, particularly in the older generation, dispreferring singular *they*. Given the small number of non-religious participants, however, the latter finding must be regarded as preliminary.

Unlike the Inner Circle finding in Bradley (2020), while the present study observed a trend in the expected direction for prescriptivism, so that high-prescriptivist respondents were less tolerant of singular *they*, this effect was not significant when controlling for other social factors, including age and religiosity, which correlated with the prescriptivism rating. In the context of Singapore, this finding suggests that increasing endonormativity and the rising status of Singlish as a symbol of national identity has been accompanied by waning prescriptivist attitudes among younger speakers. Thus, although singular *they* is a feature of English that originated in Inner Circle varieties, because it is a colloquial feature, older speakers who are in some respects more oriented towards external, Inner Circle varieties of English are less tolerant of this feature than younger speakers. This finding underscores the importance of 'norm' in the notion of 'endonormativity'; the generational gap in

Singapore is not simply one of older speakers orienting more towards external, prestigious varieties of English and younger speakers orienting more towards local English. Rather, older speakers are specifically more oriented towards external norms for standard English, while younger speakers are more open to non-local colloquial features.

Finally, regarding name-pronoun mismatch, again contrasting with the findings of Bradley (2020), which did not find a correlation between singular *they* rating and tolerance for name-pronoun mismatch, participants in this study who gave higher ratings to name-pronoun mismatched items were also significantly more tolerant of singular *they*. There are several potential accounts for this finding, including that a portion of those participants who gave high ratings to singular *they* were simply giving high ratings to all of the sentence stimuli. It is also possible that those Singaporeans who are more tolerant of singular *they* are also more likely to be flexible regarding the genders associated with names.

The present study of singular *they* has provided preliminary data that suggests future directions for research. One major limitation of the dataset is the small sample size and skew of the data, in which certain demographic groups are overrepresented. Additionally, while religious affiliation data has provided us with a loose metric of the sociopolitical stances likely held by the respondents, more specific measures of stances on a range of issues would better capture correlations between various ideologies and acceptance of singular *they*.

The apparent rise of singular *they* in Singapore English is a concrete example of diffusion of a colloquial feature from Inner Circle Englishes into a postcolonial variety, illustrating the ongoing, complex impact of the Inner Circle on world Englishes. Further research examining media consumption patterns and interpersonal interaction is needed to account for the mechanisms through which colloquial features such as singular *they* diffuse across regions and are adopted in communities such as Singapore.

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