

Maria Butler replies to Stevens, recommending the use of the plural *they* to avoid the inelegance of a neologism. She calls for teachers and the press to lift the taboo on this usage, warning that the creation of new words will disturb the shade of Noah Webster. Stevens (November 1884) remarks in turn that history shows innovation to have improved the English language. We have already borrowed heavily from French, and Stevens offers to return some of those borrowings in exchange for *le*. He also furnishes an example of the use of his new paradigm: "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for *lim*, *le* will surely reach the goal of *lis* ambition."

Emma Carleton, also replying to Stevens's proposal, finds it shameful "that our language should so long have suffered for a simple pronoun, and no man [sic] have risen to supply the missing word." Consequently she offers the epicene pronoun *ip*:

It is a word unlike any pronoun now in use, yet with a family likeness to the impersonal pronoun '*it*,' and susceptible of being declined similarly. It has a short, sharp, distinctive sound which will prevent its being confused with any other word now in the language; its individual characteristics being as clearly defined as those of *if*, *it*, or *in*, the only words for which it might possibly ever be mistaken. As it will come into our language a total stranger, albeit with strong suggestions in its face of several illustrious old Latin families, it is therefore not handicapped by a previous record of any kind, and there appears no obstacle to our readily and rapidly becoming familiar with its appearance and signification.  
[1884, 186]

Carleton concludes her proposal with an example that carefully avoids the generic masculine: "If any man or woman has aught to urge against the eligibility of this word to the vacant office in question, let *ip* now speak or forever after hold *ips* peace."

James Rogers (1889) disapproves of *thon* "because every one has to be told how to pronounce it" and because it is too long. Rogers prefers "the shortest and easiest" pronouns, exemplified by his own creations, *e*, *es*, and *em*. Rogers derives *e* from *he*, while *em* comes from *them*, as in "Let 'em' come." Working at about the same time as Converse, though outside the literary mainstream, the language reformer Elias Molee completely revised the English pronoun system in his *Plea for an American Language* (1888). Molee created three gender-specific third person plural pronouns, masculine *hem* (*he* + *them*), feminine

*lem* (*lady* + *them*), and neuter *tem* (*it* + *them*), and he also devised a set of fully inflected singular and plural common-gender pronouns: *ir* (pronounced [ir]), *iro*, and *im* for the singular, and *thir*, *thiro*, and *thim* for the plural.

The following list presents a chronology of the epicene pronouns.

- ca.1850 ne, nis, nim; hiser. *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 7 August 1884, 3
- 1868 en. Cited by Richard Grant White (1868, 241–44)
- 1884 thon, thons. Charles Crozat Converse (1884, 55)
- hi, hes, hem. Francis H. Williams (1884, 79–80)
- le, lis, lim (from the French); unus; talis. Edgar Alfred Stevens (1884, 294)
- hiser, himer (hyser, hymer). Charles P. Sherman, *The Literary World*, 6 September 1884, 294
- ip, ips. Emma Carleton (1884, 186)
- 1888 ir, iro, im (sg.); thir, thiro, thim (pl.). Elias Molee (1888, 200–01)
- 1889 ons (from *one*). C. R. B., *Writer* 3:231
- 1890 e (from *he*); es, em (from *them*). James Rogers (1890, 12–13)
- 1891 hizer. Forrest Morgan (1891, 260–62)
- 1912 he'er, him'er, his'er, his'er's. Ella Flagg Young, *Chicago Tribune*, 7 January, Sec. 1, p. 7
- 1927 ha, hez, hem; on. *The Forum* 77:265–68; attributed by Mencken (1937, 460n) to Lincoln King, of Primghar, Iowa
- hesh (heesh), hizzer, himmer; on. Fred Newton Scott (Scott mentions earlier creation of *on*), *The Forum* 77:754; Mencken adds, "In 1934 James F. Morton, of the Paterson (N.J.) Museum, proposed to change *hesh* to *heesh* and to restore *hiser* and *himer*" (1948, 370).
- ca.1930 thir. Sir John Adams, cited by Philip Howard (1977, 95)
- 1934 she, shis, shim; gender-specific parallel to *he*, *his*, *him*. Cited by Philip Ballard (1934, 7–8)
- 1935 himorher; hes (pron. [hes]), hir (pron. [hir]), hem; his'n, her'n. "The Post Impressionist," *Washington Post*, 20 August, 6

- 1938 se, sim, sis. Gregory Hynes, "See?" *Liverpool Echo*, 21 September; cited by Mencken (1948, 370)
- ca.1940 heesh. A. A. Milne; cited by Maxwell Nurnberg (1942, 88–90)
- 1945 hse. Buwei Yang Chao (1972, xxiv)
- 1970 she (contains *he*), heris, herim. Dana Densmore, "Speech is the Form of Thought," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* (April); cited in *Media Report to Women* 3.1 (January 1975): 12.
- co (from IE \**ko*), cos. Mary Orovian ([1972] 1978)
- ve, vis, ver. Varda (Murrell) One, *Everywoman*, 8 May 1970, 2
- 1971 ta, ta-men (pl.); a borrowing from Mandarin Chinese. Leslie E. Blumenson, *New York Times*, 30 December
- 1972 tey, term, tem; him/herself. Casey Miller and Kate Swift, "What about New Human Pronouns?" *Current* 138:43–45
- fm. Paul Kay, April *Newsletter of the American Anthropological Association* 13:3
- it; z. Abigail Cringle rejects epicene *it*, preferring *z*. *Washington Post*, 2 May 1972, Sec. A, 19
- shis, shim, shims, shimself. Robert B. Kaplan, June *Newsletter of the American Anthropological Association* 13:4
- ze (from Ger. *sie*), zim, zees, zeeseif; per (from *person*), pers. Steven Polgar proposes the *ze* paradigm; John Clark offers *per*. September *Newsletter of the American Anthropological Association* 13:17–18
- 1973 na, nan, naself. June Arnold, *The Cook and the Carpenter* (Plainfield, Vt.: Daughters, Inc.)
- it; s/he. "A Woman's New World Dictionary," 3–4
- s/he; him/her; his-or-her. Cited and rejected by Gordon Wood, "The Forewho—Neither a He, a She, nor an It," *American Speech* 48:158–59
- shem; herm. Quidnunc, "Thon—That's the Forewho," *American Speech* 48:300–02
- se (pron. [ši]), ser (pron. [šir]), sim (pron. [šim]), simself. William Cowan, Department of Linguistics, Carleton University (Ottawa); *Times Two*, 24 May 1973
- j/e, m/a, m/e, m/es, m/oi; jee, jeu. Monique Wittig (1975)

- employs the slashed pronouns as feminines, and cites the latter two which employ the more traditional feminine *e*. ne, nis, ner. Mildred Fenner (1974, 110) attributes this to Fred Wilhelms.
- she (includes *he*). Gena Corea, "Frankly Feminist," reprinted as "How to Eliminate the Clumsy 'He,'" in *Media Report to Women* 3.1 (January 1975): 12
- en, es, ar. David H. Stern, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1974, Sec. 2, p. 4
- hisorher; herorhis; ve, vis, vim. Cited by Amanda Smith, (1974, 29), who prefers singular *they*.
- shem, hem, hes. Paul L. Silverman, *Washington Post*, 17 December 1974, Sec. A, 17
- 1975 hir, herim (facetious). Milton Mayer, "On the Siblinghood of Persons," *The Progressive* 39:20–21
- hesh, himer, hiser, herself. Jan Verley Archer, "Use New Pronouns," *Media Report to Women* 3.1 (January 1975): 12
- se (pron. [si]). H. R. Lee, *Forbes*, 15 August 1975, 86
- ey, eir, em; uh. Christine M. Elverson, *Chicago Tribune*, 23 August 1975, Sec. 1, p. 12
- h'orsh'it (facetious blend of *he*, *she*, or *it*). Joel Weiss, *Forbes*, 15 September 1975, 12
- 1976 ho, hom, hos, homself (from Lat. *homo*, 'man,' and prefix *homo-*, 'the same, equal, like'). Donald K. Darnell, in Donald K. Darnell and Wayne Brockriede, *Persons Communicating* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall), 148
- he or she; to be written as (s)he. Elizabeth Lane Beardsley, "Referential Genderization," in Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky, eds., *Women and Philosophy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 285–93
- she, herm; hs (facetious; pron. "zzz"). Paul B. Horton (1976, 159–60)
- it. Millicent Rutherford (1976, 11)
- ca.1977 po, xe, jhe. Cited as recent and ephemeral by Miller and Swift (1977, 130). Paul Dickson (1982, 113) attributes *jhe*, pronounced "gee," to Professor Milton A. Stern of the University of Michigan.
- E, E's, Em; one. *E* was created by psychologist Donald G.

- MacKay (1983) of the University of California at Los Angeles.
- 1977 e, ris, rim. Werner Low, *Washington Post*, 20 February, Sec. C, 6
- sheme, shis, shem; heshe, hisher, himmer. Thomas H. Middleton, "Pondering the Personal Pronoun Problem," *Saturday Review*, 9 March 1977, 59. *Sheme*, etc. proposed by Thomas S. Jackson of Washington, D.C.; Middleton also cites proposals for *heshe, hisher, himmer*.
- em, ems. Jeffrey J. Smith (using the pseudonym TINTAJL jefry), *Em Institute Newsletter* (June 1977)
- 1978 ae. Cited by Cheris Kramer, Barrie Thorne, and Nancy Henley, "Perspectives on Language and Communication," *Signs* 3:638–51, as occurring in fiction, especially science fiction
- hir. Ray A. Killian, *Managers Must Lead!* (AMACOM) press release; cited in "The Epicene Pronoun Yet Again," *American Speech* 54:157–58
- hesh, hizer, hirm; sheehy; sap (from *Homo sapiens*). Tom Wicker, "More About He/She and Thon," *New York Times*, 14 May 1978, Sec. 4, 19. *Hesh*, etc., proposed by Professor Robert Longwell of the University of Northern Colorado; *sheehy* by David Kraus of Bell Harbor, N.Y.; *sap* (facetiously) by Dr. Lawrence S. Ross of Huntington, N.Y.; Wicker adds that several readers offered blends of *he, she, and it*.
- heesh, hiser(s), herm, hermself. Leonora Timm (1978, 555–65)
- 1979 one. Lillian Carlton (1979, 156–57)
- et, ets, etself. Aline Hoffman of Sarnia, Ontario; cited by William Sherk (1979)
- hir, hires, hirem, hirself. Jerome Ch'en, Professor of History at York University, 6 January 1979, *New York Times*, 18
- shey, sheir, sheirs; hey, heir, heirs. Paul Encimer favors the first over the second paradigm. *The Peacemaker* 32:2–3
- 1980 it. Herman Arthur (1980, 30–32)
- 1981 heshe, hes, hem. Ronald C. Corbyn, "Getting Around Sexist Pronouns," *Anthropology Newsletter* 22:10–11

- 1982 shey, shem, sheir. Mauritz Johnson; cited by William Safire (1982, 30)
- E, Ir. Subject and possessive forms, created by the Broward County, Florida, public schools; cited by Paul Dickson (1982, 113)
- 1984 hiser. McClain B. Smith, 20 January, *Ann Arbor News*, Sec. A, 6
- hes. Ernie Permentier, *Ms.*, May 1984, 22
- hann. Steven Schaufele takes this from Old Norse, already the source of some English pronouns; it is analogous to Finnish *han*. *Colorless Green Newsflashes* 4 (November 1984): 3
- 1985 herm. Jenny Cheshire traces this to the magazine *Lysis-trata*. "A Question of Masculine Bias," *Today's English* 1:26

## PATTERNS OF NEOLOGY

There is often little or no information available to help us analyze the process whereby epicene pronouns come into being. For example, June Arnold uses *na* and *nan*, without comment, for all the third person pronouns in her novel *The Cook and the Carpenter* (1973), whereas in *Sister Gin* (1975) she silently reverts to conventional pronoun usage. Sometimes, however, the devisers of sex-neutral pronouns describe the process involved in the formation of their neologisms. This is the case with *thon*. It is also the case for the set *he'er, him'er, his'er* which was coined by Ella Flagg Young in 1912 and which, like *thon*, is included in the Funk and Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary*.

Under the headline "Mrs. Ella Young Invents Pronoun," the *Chicago Tribune* of January 7, 1912, reports that Young, superintendent of the Chicago schools, addressed a meeting of school principals as follows:

A principal should so conduct his'er school that all pupils are engaged in something that is profitable to him'er and where the pupil is required to use knowledge in school in accomplishing his'er task. . . . I don't see how one can map out the work for the fifth or sixth grade when he'er has always done the work in the grades above or below. [sec. 1, p. 7]