



British Pronoun Use, Prescription, and Processing: Linguistic and Social Influences Affecting 'They' and 'He'

Laura Paterson

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If you don't know whether *the tailor* or *the butcher* is a man or a woman which pronoun would you use to refer to them?

Traditionally your choice would have been restricted to *he*. Yet there is something that seems a bit strange using a masculine form to refer to people of either sex. Alternatively, you might choose to use *they*, but then you may feel the wrath of the grammar sticklers.

The present study considers the use of *they* and *he* for generic reference in post-2000 written British English. The analysis is framed within a consideration of language-internal factors, such as grammatical agreement, and language-external factors, including the rejection of generic masculines based on gender politics. Throughout the book it is clear that, despite any objections to its apparent singularity, *they* is the pronoun of choice when referring to a generic antecedent. This book will be of great interest to researchers and students of the history of English as well as language and gender courses.

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