Il, elle, on…iel est :

Queer (Socio)linguistics and Identity Amongst Franco-Anglophone Gender Non-Binary Young People in Montreal

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Abstract

The city of Montreal is known for its linguistic diversity, with both French and English being dominant languages in specific spheres. Montreal has also long had a strong LGBTQ presence, which is a draw for many queer people moving to the city. However, for many non-binary people in the city, linguistic expression is a challenge, especially as grammatical gender in French makes expressing oneself as a gender other than male or female quite difficult. Using Queer Linguistics, poststructuralism, and Rymes' (2014) concept of *communicative repertoire* as groundwork, this interview-based inquiry aims to create a better understanding of how young English-and-French speaking gender non-binary people living in Montreal navigate the French and English languages. This thesis explores how French grammatical gender has been adapted by these speakers. Factors found to be important were non-binary identities, changes in language use based on context, the social and linguistic spaces participants found to help foster self-understanding and inclusivity, and ways in which such spaces can be made more inclusive.

Keywords: non-binary, transgender, grammatical gender, gender-neutral language, gender-inclusive language, Montreal, French, identity expression, poststructuralism, sociolinguistics, safer spaces

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Résumé

Résumé: La ville de Montréal est connue pour sa diversité linguistique, le français et l'anglais étant les langues dominantes dans des domaines spécifiques. Montréal a également depuis longtemps regroupé en son sein une forte présence LGBTQ, ce qui constitue un attrait pour de nombreuses personnes queer qui rejoignent la métropole. Cependant, pour de nombreuses

personnes non binaires de la ville, l'expression linguistique en langue française est un défi, notamment à cause de son genre grammatical permettant difficilement de s'exprimer en un genre autre que le genre masculin et le genre féminin. En utilisant la linguistique queer, le poststructuralisme et le concept de répertoire communicatif de Rymes (2014) comme fondement, cette enquête basée sur des entretiens vise à mieux comprendre comment les jeunes personnes non-binaires, anglophones et francophones vivant à Montréal, naviguent les langues anglaises et françaises.

Mots clés: non-binaire, transgenre, genre grammatical, langage neutre, langage inclusif, Montréal, français, expression identitaire, poststructuralisme, sociolinguistique, espaces sécuritaires

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Glossary

Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)	When a person is designated as female based on genitalia (typically the presence of a vulva and vagina) observed at birth. This includes cisgender women, transgender men, non-binary people and others.
Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB)	When a person is designated as male based on genitalia (typically the presence of a penis and testes) observed at birth. This includes cisgender men, transgender women, non-binary people and others**.**
Cisgender	When a person's gender aligns with that person's sex assigned at birth.
Cissexism/Cissexist/Cisnormative	When cisgender women and cisgender men are presented as default or "normal" without taking transgender and non-binary realities into account. This is often done through equating sex organs with gender as in phrases such as "only women can become pregnant" and "only boys have penises."
Communicative Repertoire	Term coined by Rymes (2014) referring to the myriad of ways that a person communicates through language(s), text and gestures.
Intersex	When a person's genitals, chromosomes and/or other markers of sex cannot be easily categorized as being of either of male or female sex.

English-and-French-speaking/ Franco-Anglophone	Refers to people who communicate in English and French. A person may communicate in both languages with equal fluency or not, and may or may not speak an additional language or languages. These terms are used in order to go beyond the implied limits of the term *bilingual*.
(Gender) non-binary	An identity within itself and an umbrella term for any transgender individual who does not identify their gender identity within the strict male-or-female Western binary. In English, many gender non-binary individuals use the singular *they* pronoun*;* others may use a *neo-pronoun* (Hord, 2016) such as *xie* or *hir*; still others may use what is typically thought of as a binary-pronoun, *he* or *she.*
Gender non-conforming	When a person identifies themselves outside of gender norms/societal notions of masculinity and femininity**.** Cisgender and transgender people alike can be gender non-conforming.
TGNC	Abbreviation for transgender/gender non-conforming
Transgender	When a person's gender is different than that assigned or designated at birth. People who are transgender may transition socially through the use of a name, pronouns, honorifics and presentation aligned with their perceived gender and/or medically through hormonal replacement therapy and gender-affirming surgeries.
Young people	In the context of the study, *young people* refers to those typically associated as being youth, teens-mid-twenties, as well as people up to the age of 35. My reasoning behind this is that, based on my own observations, it is not uncommon for people to come to terms with their transgender/non-binary identities until later in life and are therefore young in their identities as well as, hopefully, a long life ahead of them.

Chapter One – Introduction

The close relationship between gender and language (Ayoun, 2007; Berschtling, 2014; Hord, 2016; Loporcaro, 2017; Zimman, 2014, 2017) has led to discourse on identity formation and expression as well as potential for language that affirms the identities of all speakers of a particular language. A push for more gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language is especially important as there is an increasing number of individuals who identify as gender non-binary, meaning that they neither (exclusively[2]) identify as women nor as men (Webb, Matsuno, Krishnan & Balsam, 2015).

Many anglophone non-binary individuals use gender-neutral pronouns. One of the most popular is the singular *they,* which some English language academics have contested (Baron 2017), but which has long been a part of colloquial speech and writing to refer to or include any person of unknown gender, in addition to non-binary people (Baron, 2017). Other non-binary individuals may ask to be referred to by less mainstream pronouns such as *zie* or *hir* (Hord, 2016). Still others use what are typically thought of as binary pronouns: *he* or *she.* It is,

2 Some gender non-binary people identify with a binary gender—male or female—in addition to identifying as a non-binary person.

therefore, important to note that a seemingly-binary pronoun is not indicative of a binary identity.

As a queer native English speaker from the United States, I have long witnessed the normalization of gender neutrality in speech and writing in my *quotidien* life, but I acknowledge that this is indicative of only one sociolinguistic experience. When I began to study French in middle school, I was introduced to the concept of all inanimate objects (as well as animate beings, as in English) having an assigned gender (*masculin* or *féminin),* a key difference between English and French grammar. Furthermore, I was surprised to learn that all adjectives and names of occupations differed based on the gender of the referent, as well as inanimate objects.

Through my study of French, I had the privilege to spend time in France, first as part of a summer-long exchange program in high school in 2010, then at a semester-long study and internship program while completing my Bachelor's degree, and finally on a seven-month contract as an English language assistant after I had received my degree in 2015. During my internship in Paris, I interned at a not-for-profit organization run by and for transgender women, who, to my surprise, were unfamiliar with the term *cisgenre* or cisgender. While giving a presentation to some peers in the program, our instructor bluntly responded *"Ca n'existe pas en France!"* when the concept of non-binary gender came up.[3] During my time as an undergraduate and recent graduate, I was questioning my gender identity, but was still living and presenting as female. Being referred to with feminine pronouns, noun-endings and adjectives led to intense feelings of anxiety and isolation, though otherwise I enjoyed my experience and had even made a close, intimate group of friends. I became hyper-aware of the shortcomings of traditional French, but at no point learned of any forms of gender-neutral French other than the "masculine

[3] She made the same comment when the concept of asexuality was brought up.

as default" (Ayoun, 2007, p.141). I began to wonder if there were others, including those who, unlike me, had grown up speaking French, who had similar feelings about the limitations and exclusivity of French grammatical gender.

I came to Montreal in August 2018 to pursue a graduate degree in Second Language Education at McGill University. To familiarize myself with the sociolinguistic context as a queer, English-and-French-speaking transgender person studying in Montreal, I have taken deliberate steps to immerse myself in the city's various landscapes. These steps have ranged from living in a predominately francophone residential neighborhood for the Fall 2018 semester, to moving to a multilingual and multicultural neighborhood for the following semester and beyond, to meeting McGill students from various departments and countries of origin. Some of the most personally applicable and fascinating of these landscapes that I placed myself in, however, were on the Internet, in the hopes of connecting with fellow queer-identified people in Montreal. I noticed that many queer francophone individuals would make use of pronouns other than the masculine *il(s)* or feminine *elle(s)* and use nontraditional noun and adjective-endings when referring to themselves or as general all-inclusive terms for people of any gender. Such a prevalent use of more inclusive and gender-neutral language in English and French alike made for a very different linguistic environment than that which I had experienced during my time living in France. It soon became apparent that queer, especially transgender and non-binary, Montrealers would have much to say on the subject of language and gender, particularly when comparing the city's two major languages, French and English. Within a few months, thanks in great part to the Internet, I found out about and got involved in various volunteer and social opportunities and had many casual and complex conversations about gender and language with new acquaintances and friends. The more integrated into the queer community in Montreal I

became, the more I realized how timely it is to investigate how English-and-French-speaking gender non-binary young people in Montreal navigate the two languages.

I approach this research with the intent to gain a deeper understanding of the realities of gender non-binary people, a deeper understanding of the city of Montreal and how this population and this city impact one another. Furthermore, this research is a ground-up or grassroots effort, as I am working with members of a community that I am a part of. This work will be a part of the growing body of literature on Queer Linguistics (Ilbury, 2020; Jacobs, 1997; Leap, 1995; Livia, 1997; Motschenbacher, 2010; Shiau, 2015; Zimman, 2014, 2017), specifically as an investigation into the relationship between grammatical gender and non-normative gender identity. This investigation is both into language-as-identity-formation as well as the potential ways that language can be made more inclusive without completely upending an entire grammatical system.

In this introductory chapter, I have presented what led me to pursue this topic, based on both observations and personal experience, and have highlighted my approach to this research. In Chapter Two, I will ground my study and establish a framework through a review of the literature falling into one or more of the following themes: queer space and identity formation, Queer Linguistics, grammatical gender in language, the sociolinguistic context in Montreal, and poststructuralism. I then move on to an overview of the methodology and research design in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I will present and analyse the results of the data, focusing on trends that emerged during the study and implications of the data as it relates to the guiding research questions. Chapter Five will act as a conclusion, presenting the contributions and limitations of this study as well as how these findings can apply to various arenas, such as the development of queer-and-gender-inclusive pedagogy. The conclusion chapter will also include

a discussion of current social developments related to the thesis work and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two – Literature Review and Context

This chapter will serve as an overview of existing literature on topics relevant to this thesis work. First, I will review literature on LGBTQ/queer-affirming spaces and the myriad of ways that transgender people come to terms with their gender identities. Next, I will discuss various articles that fall under the umbrella of queer linguistics. I will then discuss several works on the topic of grammatical gender in language. This will be followed by a section about the history and sociology of language and identity issues specific to the city of Montreal. I will conclude this chapter with a section on poststructuralism and how it relates to more complex notions about gender, language and identity-formation.

Queer Space and Coming to Terms with Gender Identity

One of the most popular and accessible spaces for LGBTQ people is the Internet. Wuest (2014) describes how coming-out videos on YouTube can be powerful for young LGBTQ people because of the "visibility and acculturation" (p. 27) these videos provide. Wuest takes the term *acculturation* from Goodwin's (1989, p. 3, cited in Wuest, 2014) five-step process for gay men which begins with coming to terms with a gay identity and seeking out others like them and finding community, to one day guiding gay men looking for acceptance and community as they, themselves, once did (Goodwin, 1989, p. 3, cited in Wuest, 2014). Furthermore, O'Neill (2014) explains how YouTube videos of transgender people's transition journeys, including discussions on coming out and showing the process of the physical changes that come with hormones and/or surgery can be inspiring and informative for transgender youth and insightful for cisgender people. YouTube is a platform that allows young queer people to learn more about themselves, and to receive and offer advice.

Although my research will not focus on visual media, such as the videos Wuest and O'Neill describe, it is still important to keep in mind the various ways that LGBTQ people find inclusive spaces. Online spaces are particularly important because they are accessible from nearly anywhere in the world and allow young people to connect with people whom they would not be able to meet and interact with otherwise. Regardless of where they live, young people are able to glean information about different identities, come to terms with themselves, and otherwise inform themselves. However, it should also be noted that, even on the Internet, young LGBTQ people are not immune from discrimination. Tropiano (2014) states that online bullying and harassment of LGBTQ youth is a common occurrence, whether by people that the victims know or strangers online. Therefore, it is inaccurate to posit the Internet as a glowing beacon of hope without fault; the Internet may be a *safer* space, but it is not an inherently *safe* space. Still, it is apparent that the Internet will continue to be an essential part of life for LGBTQ youth as the Internet provides information that many youth would not otherwise learn and a space to connect with and share information with others.

For this research, an analysis of safer online spaces for LGBTQ youth is not a focal point for the investigation itself, but such safer spaces have been vital in securing participants as all participants were recruited via Facebook groups. I will further discuss the recruitment process in the following chapter on methodology.

The Internet is especially important for those with less common, less widely-recognized identities, such as gender non-binary people. To this day, there is relatively little information on non-binary identities, but the American Psychological Association's "Non-Binary Gender Identities Fact Sheet," (Webb, Matsuno, Krishnan & Balsam, 2015) is still quite accessible on the Internet. This document is one of the most comprehensive resources on non-binary identities

that I have come across, and even includes an approximation of how many people in the world identify as gender non-binary—as much as 25-35 percent of transgender people (James, Herman, Rankin et al, 2016; Barr, Budge, Andelson, 2016; Mikalson, Pardo, and Green, 2014, cited in Webb, Matsuno, Krishnan & Balsam, 2015). However, numbers are not nearly as important as the other information the fact sheet provides, such as information on different pronouns, titles, honorifics, neutral language and care recommendation for practitioners and providers. The fact sheet is accessible in terms of both being easy to find and easy to read, is well-researched, timely, and comes from a highly recognized organization, making it a crucial document in the literature on non-binary identities, but is, unfortunately, limited in its scope and focuses on an anglophone, Western context.

Queer Linguistics

In this study, I will seek to understand not only how gender non-binary English-and-French-speaking young people in Montreal use their *communicative repertoires* (Rymes, 2014) to refer to each other, but how they use language in various contexts and spaces. I hope to get a better insight both into language as identity formation and expression amongst the population I am studying and potential limitations of gendered language. I situate my research as part of the growing body of literature on Queer Linguistics, also known as lavender linguistics (Leap, 1995, cited in Jacobs, 1997), or the ways that specific queer communities use language to communicate and to express identity. As I reviewed this literature, it became evident that the vastness of queer identities around the world and the cultures that emerge through these queer identities that Queer Linguistics is a subset of ethnolinguistics (Underhill, 2012). This research is thus a study of members of a specific culture, or speech community, through the lens of the written and spoken word.

Motschenbacher (2010) outlines the various approaches to Queer Linguistics as well as how the gender binary is not only enforced but created through language; even the term *non-binary*, which is meant to move outside the binary, unintentionally brings notice to the idea of a binary[4]. In turn, language can be one of the main tools to destabilise this binary, rather than a one-size-fit all approach that may replace one limiting system with another:

> To destabilise gender binarism, linguistic means of gender neutralization, pluralization and subversion can be used. Pluralisation, i.e. representation of more than two gender categories, however, must also be viewed critically because all category models tend to create exclusions and develop normative discourses. Care has to be taken to avoid merely shifting the problems of gender binarism to a system of more than two categories. (Motschenbacher, 2010, p. 40)

With its emphasis on pragmatics and interdisciplinarity, Queer Linguistics makes for both a fluid and sustainable approach to the study and deconstruction of language.

One particularly fascinating, culturally-specific Queer Linguistics inquiry that I have come across is Shiau's (2015) qualitative study of a group of gay Taiwanese men. It serves as an example of grassroots research, as Shiau is studying a community that he is a part of, which is how I situate myself in my research, as well. Shiau reveals that many Taiwanese gay men use language typically used to determine kinship ties such as "*Jie-Jie*" or "*Mei-Mei*," the Mandarin terms for *big sister* or *little sister*, to refer to a close friend who is older or younger, respectively. Gay men referring to each other by feminine terms is a common theme in Queer Linguistics about gay men (Graf and Lippa, 1995, cited in Jacobs, 1997; Livia, 1997). Also common

[4] I will, however, continue to use the term *non-binary* throughout this thesis.

amongst Taiwanese gay men is self-alignment with terminology related to sex workers and to wealth and celebrity.

Another study on the language use of gay men of a specific cultural background is Ilbury's (2020) textual analysis of tweets (posts on the social networking website, Twitter) in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) written by ten young, gay, white men in southern England. This study was conducted in response to observing a trend of gay, white men incorporating AAVE into conversation as a stylistic device, based on media exposure, especially as it relates to drag culture, which heavily features AAVE (p. 250). Ilbury found that through appropriating AAVE, the writers of the tweets appeared to create a sort of exaggerated self, rather than align themselves with African American culture, or even drag culture, which was the more likely point of reference. Through this exaggerated self, some of the young, white gay men brought attention to negative qualities of themselves and other young, gay men, whether peers or as a population as a whole in an aggressively playful or "sassy" manner. This exaggerated persona brings forth the stereotypical image of the "Sassy Queen" persona often use to ridicule and pigeonhole African American women (Ilbury, 2020, p. 257). While Shiau's (2015) study is insightful into language as identity formation and community-building amongst a particular population of queer people, Ilbury's (2020) study examines the ways in which some linguistic choices inadvertently lead to the othering of other populations.

Lal Zimman has researched and written extensively on transgender linguistics. In "The Discursive Construction of Sex: Remaking and Reclaiming the Gendered Body in Talk about Genitals among Trans Men," Zimman (2014) describes a corpus analysis of an online forum for transgender men to discuss topics ranging from dating to hormones to gender-affirming surgeries. Zimman (2014) notes the different terms that men on the site use to discuss their

genitals, which in a cisnormative lens is viewed as indicative of female anatomy. Through the use of terms ranging from *dick (*Zimman, 2014, p. 11) to *boy cunt (*Zimman, 2014, p. 15), users of the forum did not so much draw away from discussions of female anatomy as affirm their anatomy as inherently male, regardless of appearance. Zimman argues that not only gender but also biological sex is a construct and that what makes anatomy male, female or neither is based on the gender of the person who has that anatomy rather than labels assigned to the anatomy, many of which are essentially internal or external versions of the same organ (Zimman, 2014, p. 5). Zimman references Laqueur's (1992) research on the Western history of the construction of sex, which presented female[5] bodies as interior versions of male anatomy. Laqueur's (1992) original work reveals that the single-sex model was popularized by thinkers for thousands of years. One of these thinkers,

> Galen, who in the second century A.D. developed the most powerful and resilient model of the structural, though not spatial, identity of the male and female reproductive organs, demonstrated at length that women were essentially men in whom a lack of vital heat—of perfection—had resulted in the retention, inside, of structures that in the male are visible without…In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles (Laqueur, 1992, p. 4).

Laqueur later reveals that many centuries later, when the single-sex model was no longer a popular discourse,

> advances in developmental anatomy (germ-layer theory) pointed to the common origins of both[6] sexes in a morphologically androgynous embryo and thus not to their intrinsic

[5] To be in line with the terminology used at the time and how it relates to preconceptions of gender, I am using *female anatomy* to refer to internal reproductive organs and *male anatomy* to refer to external reproductive organs.

[6] *All sexes* would be more appropriate, to be inclusive of intersex people.

> difference. Indeed, the Galenic isomorphisms of male and female organs were by the 1850s rearticulated at the embryological level as homologues: the penis and the clitoris, the labia and the scrotum, the ovary and the testes, scientists discovered, shared common origins in fetal life (Laqueur, 1992, p.10).

Although this thesis is in the domain of sociolinguistics and not biology, it is still worth noting that, when applying Laqueur's findings to Zimman's, it becomes evident that the language used amongst transgender men in the platform is not only an affirming means of self-expression, but scientifically accurate.

Transgender and gender-non-conforming people, of course, do not only exist in online communities where they speak to those of shared experiences about intimate matters. In "Transgender Language Reform: Some Challenges and Strategies for Promoting Trans-Affirming, Gender-Inclusive Language," Zimman (2017) outlines the importance of normalizing non-male or binary centric language and avoiding generalizing statements based on a person's gender identity or perceived gender. Zimman argues that more inclusive language is beneficial to people of all gender identities and expressions as it shifts from a system of assumption to one of self-determination.

Although analysis of participants' voices will not be central to this thesis, Zimman's (2017) article on transgender voices aligns with this research as it centers the importance of a constructivist approach, rather than a determinist one, in analyzing gender identity expression. A constructivist approach is more holistic in that it not only factors in biological or hormonal factors, but cultural and social factors as well, as many transgender people express their identity and agency through manipulation of their voices (Zimman, 2017, p. 5). Voice becomes part of

the myriad of ways that transgender people use to express themselves along with factors such as dress, name choice and pronouns.

While this review of literature includes a range of inquiries into specific subsets of Queer Linguistics, it is far from comprehensive. Instead, this literature review has served as an overview of identity formation through language, with particular focus on how members of transgender communities define themselves on their own terms.

Grammatical Gender and Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language

In order to understand the relationship between gender identity and language, I will review the literature about grammatical gender in various languages, with a focus on English versus French.

The connection between grammatical gender and Romance languages has existed since the development of Latin, which had three noun classes; masculine, feminine and neuter (Loporcaro, 2017, p. 12). Latin's three noun classes themselves descended from (Proto-)Indo-European, or PIE (Loporcaro, 2017, p. 26). Few modern PIE-derived languages have three noun classes, notably Greek, most of Slavic and some Germanic and Indo-European languages (Loporcaro, 2017, p. 28). With the exception of Romanian, all Romance languages and several other PIE-derived languages have only two grammatical genders: masculine and feminine. However, to say that the transition from Latin to Romance languages was simply getting rid of a third gender oversimplifies the gradual changes and complexity of language. Loparcaro notes that at various points in history, the neuter has been used in many dialects and that neither grammatical gender development nor language development as a whole progress in the same way over time amongst all Romance languages (p. 282).

French is one of the Romance languages that has a two-gender system, consisting of what is referred to as *le masculin* or *le féminin.* Each noun, whether animate or inanimate, is assigned a gender, as indicated by *le masculin* (*le)* or *le féminin (la).* Although gender assignment for French common nouns is somewhat random, a sentence is still considered grammatically incorrect if the wrong article is connected to the noun. Ayoun (2007) found that even some native French speakers struggle with identifying correct grammatical gender usage in sentences. Lyster (2006), however, found ending phonemes are a reliable indicator of grammatical gender for both inanimate and animate nouns, such as animals. While how to correctly assign grammatical gender to inanimate objects and animals in French is central to linguistic and pedagogical discourse, this thesis will focus on ways to appropriately gender *people* in French. When referring to an individual person or group of people, however, gender is far from arbitrary as seen in what Ayoun (2007) refers to as the "masculine-as-default" (p. 141), wherein the masculine is accepted as the neutral when a referent's gender is unknown or if there is even one male amongst a group of female subjects.

Contrary to speakers of conventional French, speakers of North American English have taken more strides to include a wide range of gender-neutral language. While many English adjectives have long been gender-neutral, i.e., *French* (as all-encompassing) this is not the case in the French language itself: *français* (masculine singular), *française* (feminine singular), *français (*masculine plural) or *françaises (*feminine plural).

Knisely (2020a) reveals the issues, notably the reinforcement of gender binarity, that arise in regard to grammatical gender (GG) and social gender (SG) in French:

> Although *woman* and *shovel*[7] are both members of the F class, the latter classification is perceived as arbitrary while the former is not, illustrating the frequent conflation of GG with…(SG)…However, for NB[8] individuals…this conflation is deeply problematic (Provitola, 2019; Shroy, 2017) because GG fails to provide ways of encoding experiences of SG outside of a male/female framework. It is thus not only a question of being subordinately positioned in a language—as is the contention of *écriture inclusive* [inclusive writing] and feminist language movements (Charaudeau, 2018; Lloret & Crouzet-Daurat, 2017; Viennot, 2014) —but, for NB people, it is a question of not being positioned at all. (p. 851)

Knisely brings forth the concept of grammatical gender as erasure or a lack of means for people to even be able to conceptualize social gender outside of a male/female binary system if there is no language to reflect this. Furthermore, Ibrahim (1973) reveals that grammatical gender developed as an extension to natural or social gender. This is apparent through how grammatical gender is classified as masculine, feminine and/or neuter in Indo-European languages and that similar grammatical systems exist in several non-Indo-European derived languages as well (p. 30). Thus, grammatical and social gender have been interdependent since the advent of languages that contain them and any conflation between the two is not entirely incidental.

Ayoun's (2007) analysis of French grammar, Knisely's (2020a) research into the relationship between French grammar and non-binary gender, Ibrahim's (1973) work on the origins of grammatical gender and Baron's (2017) discussion of the history of singular *they* in English give insight into what issues may arise in terms of gender when referring to a non-binary person as well as to a hypothetical person of unknown gender or belonging to a mixed-gender

[7] *Femme* (F) and *pelle* (F), respectively
[8] A common abbreviation for *non-binary*

group. I have also come across the example of a non-binary person who is fluent in another traditionally heavily gendered language, Spanish, as well as English. *They Call Me Mix/Me Llamen Maestre* (Rivas, 2018) provides a young audience, as well as older readers, with an accessible, age-appropriate representation of non-binary identity and a more inclusive, grammatical gender system in Spanish. As seen in the title, Rivas uses the English gender-neutral honorific *Mix*, as opposed to the feminine *Ms.* or masculine *Mr.* and the Spanish title *maestre* (teacher) as opposed to the feminine *maestra* or masculine *maestro.*

There is a small but growing body of literature that straddles discussions on grammatical gender, non-binary identity formation and queer linguistics. A notable example is Berschtling's (2014) series of interviews with six *ezrahay kall haholam* (which translates to "citizens of the whole world" and what Berschtling refers to as *genderqueer*) Israeli Hebrew speakers. Participants in the study were diverse in terms of sex assigned at birth, age, occupation, sexual orientation and even in terms of how they defined, conceptualized and understood their gender within or outside of mainstream, binary understandings. With Hebrew being a highly-gendered language, participants used linguistic creativity in order to express themselves and, in turn, create a new linguistic system that is both within and outside of standard Hebrew grammatical gender. Such creativity included alternating between feminine and masculine morphological forms, the use of *inverse gender pronouns* (p. 8), as described below, and the use of neologisms (p. 19).

When alternating between feminine and masculine morphological forms, participants position themselves as a gender neither exclusive to female nor male. They therefore draw on both to express their identities. However, this practice may prove difficult for participants who identify strongly as a gender other than female or male and, thus, reifies gender binarity. This also touches on Berschtling's likely unintentional reinforcement of a cisnormative gender binary

when she identifies a common linguistic practice amongst transgender people as using *inverse gender pronouns* or "pronouns that belong to the gender category 'opposite' to the speaker's biological sex (cf. Bunzl 2000)" (Berschtling, 2014, p.8). Berschtling presents *inverse gender pronouns* as a subversion of grammatical gender without acknowledging that, especially for binary transgender people, pronouns are used *in line* with perceived gender rather than merely in opposition to the gender assigned at birth. For instance, an anglophone transgender woman who uses *she/her* pronouns uses these pronouns because they are in line with how she identifies, as a woman; a trans woman is not a man who uses typically female pronouns.

Many of Berschtling's participants used neologisms (p. 19) that were created by combining the common feminine and masculine forms of various words. For instance, the neologism *chaverimot* (friends) (Ohad, cited in Berschtling, 2014, pp. 19) is a combination of the masculine *chaverim* and the feminine *chaverot* (English Hebrew Dictionary).

What also stood out in Berschtling's study is the investigator clearly stating her positionality as a heterosexual, cisgender woman. The study was, therefore, not only an inquiry into navigating grammatical gender in Hebrew, but in understanding individuals' experiences as non-binary in a binarist society and, on a self-reflective level, how Berschtling, herself, has contributed to this binarist system of thinking. She even states that, since beginning the research, she has made a conscious effort to use more gender-inclusive language when speaking to her peers.

No study has provided a foundation for my own more than Hord's (2016) mixed-methods study on the language use and attitudes of transgender, particularly non-binary, young people who spoke fluent English or were bilingual speakers of English and Swedish, English and French, or English and German. Hord (2016) identifies English and Swedish as "natural" gender

languages, where gender only comes up when talking about a person or people, and even then disclosure of gender can often be avoided. German and French, on the other hand, are "grammatically" gendered languages where all nouns and adjective-endings have a gender associated. Hord (2016) found that non-binary participants who spoke German or French felt distress and anxiety with the language and that they felt they were forced to choose an identity that misaligned with their true selves, as traditional French and German are centered on a strict binary gender system that is prevalent throughout the language.

While Hord's study is of great importance in understanding queer linguistics and how it can relate to non-binary identity, the study is not without its faults, several of which Hord, themself[9], addresses. For instance, the survey, a mix of multiple-choice and open-answer questions, was completely anonymous with neither the researcher nor the participant knowing the identity of the other. This lack of connection may have impacted both the number of participants and their responses. Furthermore, the languages spoken were unevenly represented, which may limit the understanding of language use and attitudes. Thankfully, the drawbacks to Hord's study were not echoed in my research, as all participants speak English and French, and I met face-to-face with participants after getting to know them as individuals.

Over the past several decades, there has been evidence of the different ways that queer and transgender francophones have manipulated the traditional system to better reflect their identities. Livia (1997) reveals that some 20th century assigned-male-at-birth transgender French writers refer to themselves with both masculine and feminine pronouns, noun- and adjective-endings at various points of their personal accounts.

[9] Hord uses singular *they* pronouns. I will be using the word *themself* throughout this thesis as the third-person pronoun for an individual who uses singular *they* pronouns.

Over the past few years, certain francophone spaces have begun to introduce gender neutral and inclusive pronouns such as *iel, ille, ul and ol* (Divergenres) as well as more inclusive adjective- and noun-endings. The blog Divergenres features a page dedicated to "Regles de grammaire neutre et inclusive" (https://divergenres.org/regles-de-grammaire-neutre-et-inclusive/), an accessible social and pedagogical tool for informing others about examples of gender neutral and inclusive language in French that was one of the most insightful pieces of literature I found during the research process. This shows that non-formal sources such as blogs, written by members of the community they represent, are among the most important and valid sources in the dissemination of information.

Knisely (2020a) also completed an inquiry into potential gender-neutral French social grammatical systems. Similarly to this thesis, Knisely (2020a) drew on the insights and experiences of non-binary French-speakers to determine some of the ways that French-speakers can navigate social grammar in French through alternative pronoun usage and accords. Knisely made note of the usage, familiarity with and popularity of particular pronouns[10] (such as *iel, yel, ol* as well as alternating between *il* and *elle*), determiners[11], and articles[12] among participants. Unlike this thesis, Knisely also featured insight from binary gender French-speakers to determine the comprehensibility of various proposed terms and phrases. Binary and non-binary participants alike indicated their thoughts towards proposed pronouns, determiners and articles. Furthermore, Knisely's inquiry was survey-based and featured both Likert-style questions and open-ended questions (p. 854), rather than interview-based and had a far greater number of participants than featured in this thesis.

[10] Proposed third-person pronouns included *iel, yel, ol* as well as alternating between *il* and *elle*. Proposed demonstrative pronouns were *cellui* and *celleux* (with no proposed alternatives).

[11] *Maon, taon,* and *saon* were most popular.

[12] *Lo.e* was the proposed indefinite article and *un.e* was the proposed definite article.

The Montreal Context

Montreal makes for a fascinating case study due to its unique sociolinguistic history[13] as well as its status as an epicenter for various social movements.

Transgender scholar Viviane Namaste's (2005) *C'était du spectacle! L'histoire des artistes transsexuelles à Montréal, 1955-1985,* draws on both archives and interviews to discuss transgender women who worked as performers in Montreal. Cabarets allowed transgender women a place to not only make money but affirm themselves in their female identities and find community with other transgender women. Many of these cabarets were quite popular even amongst heterosexual, cisgender patrons. Namaste also reveals the negative factors that impacted the lives of many transgender performers, including the fact that, during the 1960s and 1970s, the mafia were in control of many of the nightclubs (p. 26) and there was difficulty in obtaining hormones, gender-affirming surgeries as discussed in the chapter "*La santé des transsexuelles: Questions d'accès."*

Namaste's work, like this thesis, is centered on a specific transgender community in Montreal and the contrast between interactions among members of this community and the predominately cisgender and heterosexual society surrounding them. Furthermore, the featured interviews, which took place decades after the thirty-year time period the book focuses on, bring insight that would not have existed had Namaste relied exclusively on archives for her research. It also affirms the validity of various perspectives of trans women of different experiences, ages, and linguistic backgrounds. Several graduates of McGill University have written theses and

[13] See Levine's (1991) *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City*

dissertations focusing on LGBTQ issues in Montreal. One of these works is Doyle's (1996) MA thesis on queer space and identity formation in the city, specifically the Gay Village. Doyle begins with a personal account of a police raid on a popular gay nightclub in the Village which occurred less than two years before the completion of his thesis. He discusses the way this incident impacted his personal development as a young gay man and the relationship between queer people and authority. Furthermore, since the incident occurred less than two years before the thesis was completed, the timeliness and the relevancy of the thesis topic became quite clear. This introduction inspired me to draw on my own experience as a queer person in Montreal and how it has impacted the focus of my research.

Throughout his thesis, Doyle draws on various aspects of queer theory such as James Miller's concept of "outscape" (cited in Doyle, 1996, p.12), i.e., the movement for openly queer people to be out and visible in predominately cisgender and heterosexual society, or "straightscape" as in the case of protests (Miller, cited in Doyle, 1996, p. 12). As it relates to my thesis, outscape represents the movement of gender-inclusive and non-binary-affirming language from the margins to mainstream understanding and acceptance across linguistic contexts. Furthermore, Doyle draws heavily on Judith Butler's (1990) discussions of gender, which I discuss in detail below in the section on post-structuralism. Doyle's work, like Levine's book, was published in the 1990s. It serves as both part of an archive of Montreal history and a means to conceptualize the city's current reality. Doyle discusses queer space before the rise of the Internet, and at the beginning of gentrification, but much of what he describes about the Village, social realities in Montreal, and queer space still hold much validity. Furthermore, Doyle's methodology aligns with the one I apply to this study, as both involve personal accounts, positionality, and interviews.

Through a review of more recent literature (Banque de Dépannage Linguistique, 2017; Knisely 2020), I have learned that there are more awareness and initiatives in place in Quebec in than in more traditional francophone organizations in Europe such as *l'Académie Française* (2017). For example, the *Banque de Dépannage Linguistique* (2017) has created a document about non-binary identities, pronouns, noun-endings, and verb endings. This awareness is reflected in the progressive francophone spaces where I have situated myself in Montreal, compared to other francophone contexts I have familiarized myself with. Not even in seemingly more progressive spaces in diverse, metropolitan areas of modern France have gender non-binarity and language activism taken steps to create new language systems; rather, the focus is to work within the system in place. As Knisely,(2020b) puts it,

> Franco-French individuals, be they TGNC or cisgender, orient themselves toward and appeal to linguistic authority, such as that of *l'Académie française,* given dominant narratives of language and citizenship in France. It is, however, remarkable that a marginalized community of practice, such as Franco-French TGNC speakers, does not appear to readily trouble and move past such appeals to linguistic authorities in order to talk back to and challenge the dominant discourses—the very discourses that marginalize them—put forth by *l'Académie française* in the twenty-first century. (p. 160-161)

In contrast to places such as France, where authorities such as *l'Académie française* are woven into the cultural landscape, Montreal's long-held dynamism both sociolinguistically and socially allows city residents to embrace change as a constant that is inherent to Montreal's identity as a whole.

Poststructuralism

In creating a broader framework for my study, I will draw on poststructuralist thought. Like the translinguistic (Garcia & Wei, 2014) and related approaches that are increasingly prevalent in applied linguistics, poststructuralism seeks to dismantle more traditional black-or-white, linear approaches to understanding and instead to embrace the multifaceted, complex identities and systems that we inhabit. These interdisciplinary approaches serve as an explicit criticism of a Chomskyan direct cause-and-effect model of Universal Grammar (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; Garcia &Wei, 2014). Instrumental to my conceptual framework is the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Judith Butler (1990).

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari discuss the concept of the *rhizome* to draw attention to the complex ways people understand themselves and connect with one another. In both a physical and a metaphorical rhizome, there are many different ways that entities connect and that phenomena occur. In linguistics, the rhizome serves as a critique of the Chomskyan model:

> Chomsky's grammaticality…is more fundamentally a marker of power than a syntactic marker: you will construct grammatically correct sentences, you will divide each statement into a noun phrase and a verb phrase…Our criticism of these linguistic models is not that they are too abstract, but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough…A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles…there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. (p.7)

Here, Deleuze and Guattari reference the diverse ways people learn and communicate with languages. A rhizome represents the different connecting internal and external factors that impact and create language, identity, and community. There is no one way to identify and no one way to communicate meaning across all linguistic communities, including non-binary English-and-French-speakers in Montreal, who can be diverse even within a specific community. By applying the concept of the rhizome to the interviews I conducted, I did not look for one set way in which non-binary young people in Montreal use French and English, nor did I attempt to determine one set way in which non-binary people conceptualize their gender identity.

The Douglas Fir Group [14](2016) references the image of the rhizome in its discussion on transdisciplinarity in approaching second language acquisition (p. 24). Here, the rhizome serves as a network of information connecting people and ideas with one another through technology, such as the Internet, and the many individual, social, cultural and ideological factors (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p.25) that impact self-expression, learning and communication. Through a rhizomatic approach, non-binary people have found safer spaces, both online and in-person, given and received advice, and found language to express themselves.

In addition to the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of the *Body without Organs* and *smooth and striated space* challenge the idea of a single system or way of being that is better or more natural than others. The *Body without Organs (BwO)* is in opposition to the *organism* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p.153) or the traditional societal and political structures and stereotypes that often pigeonhole people. This organism creates the organs in the body, but a *Body without Organs* can create its own organs once it is free of the organism.

[14] A collective of several scholars in the field of applied linguistics

> The BwO is not opposed to the organs; rather, the BwO and its "true organ," which must be composed and positioned, are opposed to the organism, the organic organization of the organs…The organisation is not at all the body, the BwO; rather it is a stratum on the BwO, in other words, a phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation that, in order to extract useful labor from the BwO, imposes on it forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences (p. 158-159).

When applying the concept of the *Body without Organs* to *quotidien* life, one should not rely on preconceived notions of people. Rather, one should view each person as a blank slate, shaped not by determinism, but by the individual's unique identity and experiences. No society or *organism* should impede the well-being of any individual even when their identity is outside of a pre-conceived notion of normality of the gender binary.

In regard to *smooth and striated space*, Deleuze and Guattari propose a mixture of the traditional or linear (*striated*) with the nomadic or open-ended (*smooth*) in order to account for the complexity of society and the arts. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this mixture through the image of a patchwork quilt which takes uneven scraps and makes something with a distinct shape and pattern, even if the final product has no beginning or end or top or bottom (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, p. 477). Language and people occupy a mixture of these two spaces as well and often build on, adapt or even reject traditional structures, such as grammar and the Western gender binary, and, in turn, people of diverse identities can create new structures and language that allow for more possibility and self-affirmation. Deleuze and Guattari's interlocking concepts are particularly relevant when creating more open, inclusive spaces for queer and transgender people as they account for a multitude of valid experiences and ways of being.

Butler (1990) is, perhaps, most well-known for her discussion of gender as *performativity*, where gender is neither a strictly-defined unquestionable fact nor a complete fiction; rather, it is a state of doing (p.33). While this framework is valuable when seeking to affirm the existence of transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary identities, *performativity* does not represent the totality of Butler's argument. Her analysis of the contested concepts of *man, woman, masculine, feminine, gender,* and *sex* hold relevance to this day in part because she acknowledges that understandings of these concepts may change over time. Butler argues that various discourses hold a limited view of what these terms mean and if and how they are constructed. As she puts it, "Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time" (Butler, 1990, p. 22). Butler's arguments are particularly important in laying the groundwork of my thesis work; they bring forth the issues of both determinism and misunderstanding of the concept of constructionism (p. 12), which may both be used as rhetoric that invalidates transgender identities. A constructionist approach must not portray gender as random or a choice; rather, constructivism must allow for a holistic approach to identity formation where gender is experienced, expressed, and performed in as many ways as there are people on this planet.

By bringing attention to the impacts of discourse and presenting various understandings of identity, it may be possible to understand how non-binary individuals move within and outside discourses of gender, sex, race and more. Furthermore, moving past the confines of determinism may bring insight into how gendered systems of language can be re-evaluated and how such systems may be fluid rather than fixed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed existing literature on queer space and coming to terms with gender identity, Queer Linguistics, grammatical gender and gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language, linguistic and LGBT issues in the city of Montreal, and poststructuralism. While there is a vast amount of academic work that falls under one or more of these themes, it became apparent through research that there is a gap in the literature in regard to research that falls under all five of these themes.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Research Questions

This research was grounded in the following questions:

1. In what contexts do French-and-English-speaking gender non-binary young people in Montreal use English more often? In what contexts do they use French more often? In what contexts do they switch between the two languages?
2. How do Franco-Anglophone gender non-binary young people negotiate grammatical gender in French?
3. What are the different spaces (physical and/or virtual) that have allowed Franco-Anglophone non-binary young people in Montreal to come to terms with their gender identities and to flourish in their identities?

Participants

All participants were English-and-French-speaking gender non-binary residents of Montreal between the ages of 18 and 35. I use the term *English-and-French speaking* to mean anyone with a high proficiency in both languages; participants may use both languages equally, use one language more than the other, know only English and French, or know additional languages. I maintain that there is no right or wrong way to be a speaker of French or a speaker of English. By *gender non-binary,* I am referring to any person who identifies as such and/or does not identify with the Western male-or-female binary. Furthermore, I define a Montreal resident as anyone living in the city at the time of the study; participants ranged from Montreal natives to people who had only been living in the city for a couple of years.

Throughout this study, participants will often be referred to as *young people.* By *young people,* I am referring to anyone between their late teens and early thirties. The reasoning behind this is that I realize not all transgender and/or non-binary people come to terms with their identities until later in life, whether due to a lack of language to describe how they felt, lack of resources, pressure to socially conform, or, simply, by not knowing. Others may have experienced trauma that did not allow them to thrive as youths. Therefore, a person in their thirties may still feel "young" in their identity. Furthermore, this study was not limited to students; the participants in this study come from a range of occupations, interests, and experiences. On this note, participants in this study were of various racial, national, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants were not asked ahead of time if they were assigned-male-at-birth, assigned-female-at-birth, or if they were intersex, as this question would be invasive, inappropriate, and unnecessary for the research.

There was a total of seven participants in this study. All seven were interviewed individually. Additionally, four out of these seven were interviewed as a group after all individual interviews had been completed.

Recruitment

All participants were recruited online. A flier (see Appendix A) outlining the focus of the research and requirements for participants, honorarium amount, and my contact information was posted on several Facebook social groups for LGBTQ+ Montrealers. One of the groups I posted on was an all-BIPOC (Black, Indigenous or Person of Colour) group, as I wished to reflect diverse experiences of non-binarity. After someone who saw the post messaged me, indicating interest in being a participant, I sent them a permission form (see Appendix B) for them to sign and return through a print and scan or a digital signature. Those interested in participating had the option to indicate whether they consented to participating in only the individual interview or

in both the individual interview and the group interview. The first seven to fill out and return the form were the seven participants for this research (see figure A).

I managed to recruit all seven participants within a matter of hours of posting the recruitment flyers. I attribute this to being a fellow young, English-and-French-speaking queer person living in Montreal and to the honorarium I was able to provide through funding from Jeunes Queer Youth, a local organization that funds various LGBTQ youth-led and benefitting projects. This honorarium was initially listed as $50 per participant, but I was able to increase this amount to $70 per participant as Jeunes Queer Youth allows for a $500 maximum for funding. The increase in honorarium amount was approved by the Research Ethics Board at McGill University (See Appendix C). Each participant received a single honorarium of $70 regardless of whether they participated in one or both interviews.

As I posted on Facebook groups that I was already active on, I acknowledged the possibility of people that I already knew applying to participate. By happenstance, none of the participants were people I knew beforehand. I acknowledge that had I known the participants before the recruitment process, it is possible that the results could have been quite different. Based on Brewis' (2014) reflection on the matter, issues that could have arose from interviewing friends include feelings of betrayal on either side for sharing a friend's intimate thoughts and feelings in the academic realm, or being presented as two-dimensional as opposed to complex individuals. The content of the interviews may have been different as well.

Research Settings

All interviews were recorded in person in autumn 2019 at locations, dates and times decided upon by the participant and me. All participants chose to meet in a public place where they felt comfortable expressing themselves. Locations ranged from a community center to cafes, the most popular choice, to a private room at McGill University's main library.

Data Collection

All interviews took place in autumn 2019 and were recorded on a USB-equipped voice recorder. After the interview, the interviews were saved as mp3 files to a password-protected OneDrive. Some participants chose to be identified with the first name that they use in everyday life, which may or may not be their given name, and others chose to be identified with a pseudonym. Participants answered in English or French depending on context and comfort with one language over the other.

Participants were first interviewed individually. For the individual interview, each participant was asked a total of six main questions, two in each of the following three categories or themes: *English vs. French, Identity and Safe Spaces* and *The Montreal Context* (see Appendix D). These questions were read off the screen of my personal computer. During the interviews, any non-verbal means of communication were noted. This included gestures and the participant reading the questions off the computer screen.

The length of each interview varied, depending on the amount of detail with which the participant responded and the number of follow-up questions from the investigator or participant. Factors such as needing me to repeat, paraphrase or translate research questions due to background noise or having difficulty understanding the question as written also impacted the length of the interview. Individual interviews ranged from just over nine minutes in length to just under thirty minutes.

Four out of the seven participants consented to being part of a group interview as well. A date and time were decided on by mutual agreement. The same three themes of the individual interview applied to the group interview, but participants were asked one main question per theme rather than two (see Appendix E). This allowed ample time for each participant to answer each question in detail and still have the time and energy to respond to any follow-up question or

comment posed by me or a fellow group member. The group interview lasted just over forty minutes.

Interviews were transcribed manually, with the aid of oTranscribe, a free HTML5 web application recommended by one of the participants who had experience conducting interviews. Using oTranscribe, I was able to slow down and easily repeat parts of the recording. I made the choice not to use a voice-to-text web application, as participants often switched between French and English and sometimes used unconventional or context-specific grammatical structures, pronouns, and nouns.

All participants were sent an mp3 recording and a transcript of their interview to validate whether the data was an accurate auditory-to-written translation of their words as well as an accurate portrayal of their thoughts and ideas. Some participants later asked that I omit certain place names or phrases to protect their privacy and/or the privacy of others, and I did so.

Data analysis

After all interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants for approval and verification, each transcription was broken down by utterance, in a Microsoft Excel document with one spreadsheet per individual interview and one for the group interview. Each utterance was listed in the first column then coded. There were three main subcategories for coding the individual interviews: *language of utterance* (English, French or both) *linguistic codes* and *paralinguistic codes*. There was a total of twenty codes for the individual interviews (see Appendix F)

Figure 1:

Participants' pseudonyms and interviews participated in

Participant	Participated in group interview (Y/N)
Hassane	Y
Angel	N
Sam	N
Puddle	N
Prakash	Y
Eliane	Y
Fred	Y

The group interview had a total of thirty codes, as there was an additional subcategory for identifying the speaker. Furthermore, there was slight difference in questions asked in the group interview versus the individual interviews. The four subcategories of codes for the group interview were as follows*: speaker of utterance* (Hassane, Prakash, Eliane or Fred), *language of utterance* (English, French, or both), *linguistic codes*, and *paralinguistic codes* (see Appendix G)

All linguistic codes were related to one or more of the interview questions, while paralinguistic codes related to noticed or perceived speech patterns, underlying feelings, and relating to me or their fellow interviewees. One of the most common paralinguistic codes was for *uptalk*. All seven participants used *uptalk*, a common speech feature involving rising intonation at the end of phrases or sentences (Warren, 2015, p. 1). Although *uptalk* is commonly thought to be the same intonation as asking a question (Warren, 2015, p. 1), linguists who have studied the phenomenon in different English-speaking communities have found there to be many differences in intonation (Warren, 2015, p. 2). As participants came from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, for the purpose of this research, I have decided to define *uptalk* as any noticeable

rising intonation at the end of a word, sentence or phrase that is not a question. I acknowledge that *uptalk* is easier to identify in English than in French, especially as participants may use different speech patterns in the two languages. While uptalk may be an unconscious speech feature, there were times when it seemed to be used as a tool to check for understanding from the investigator or fellow participants, or to express self-doubt..

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the methodology of this thesis project. This chapter began by introducing the three guiding research questions that became the basis for interview questions. Next, I described the inclusion criteria for participant recruitment, mentioning that there was a total of seven participants. This was followed by a description of the recruitment process, which, after gaining REB approval, was quite a quick, unchallenging process in great part because recruitment was done on the Internet and used the incentive of an honorarium. In the next section, I described the data collection process, including the types of locations where data was collected and how the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The final section of this chapter described the data analysis process.

Chapter Four – Results and Discussion

Overview

In this chapter, I will present the results of the data and discuss the results as they relate to the three overarching research questions. During the processes of data collection and analysis, several trends emerged. This chapter will present three central linguistic themes. These themes were determined by referring to the three overarching research questions:

1. In what contexts do French-and-English-speaking gender non-binary young people in Montreal use English more often? In what contexts do they use French more often? In what contexts do they switch between the two languages?
2. How do Franco-Anglophone gender non-binary young people negotiate grammatical gender in French?
3. What are the different spaces (physical and/or virtual) that have allowed Franco-Anglophone non-binary young people in Montreal to come to terms with their gender identities and to flourish in their identities?

In this chapter, the linguistic themes are identified as follows: **contexts of language use, negotiation of French grammatical gender and linguistic creativity,** and **coming to terms with non-binary identity and safer spaces.** Furthermore, this chapter will briefly touch on two paralinguistic themes that emerged from an analysis of the interview data and that were outside of the scope of the guiding research questions: **expressing or implying participants' level of self-esteem**, and, especially during the group interview, **encouraging, supporting and affirming others.**

After an overview of the themes that emerged from the results, this chapter will include a discussion of the three guiding research questions, which will draw on both the results from the interviews and previous literature in one or more of the following domains: queer space and coming to terms with gender identity, Queer Linguistics, grammatical gender and gender-neutral and inclusive language, the Montreal context, and poststructuralism.

Linguistic themes

Contexts of language use

All seven participants spoke both English and French, but to varying degrees, as indicated by how often they answered interview questions in one language versus the other as well as the frequency of grammatical errors[15]. Furthermore, several, but not all, participants spoke a language in addition to English and French. Contexts and frequency of language use varied by participant.

> I use French 90 percent of *my times.* In general, when I use English, it's almost always with *queer community or trans community*. And I also speak Arabic, but I don't use it that much. And in general, it's also with Arabic speakers in the trans community or the queer community (uptalk) that they don't understand French or English, so I use. I do the translation for them, but it's not a language that I'm really comfortable with.
> - *Hassane*

Out of all the participants, Hassane was the one who spoke in French the most often during the individual interviews. During the group interview, however, all group members spoke in French at some point, as all had a strong command of the language.

Furthermore, Hassane reveals limited use of a third language, at least for the past several years, which is also the case for Angel, Puddle, Prakash, and Eliane. Although five out of the seven participants had at least some knowledge of a third language, all five only mentioned the language briefly. Only Angel somewhat mentioned grammatical gender in Spanish, but even

[15]This does not include errors in grammatical gender as challenging norms of grammatical gender is central to this thesis.

then, they[16] did not speak much about the language or give examples of what gender-inclusive Spanish may look like:

> I do also speak not much Spanish, but I speak (*pause*) enough of it (*laughs*) and I have a few Hispanic friends who I speak with on a regular basis and that's also been a difficulty. I think it's weird having an experience of something that's you feel is objective in a way and having it subjectively modified based on language. – *Angel*

Angel also expressed a more equal division between use of English and use of French:

> English I speak specifically more so at school and at home. My family's English…Things changed 'cause I went to school my whole life in French… So my schooling experience, was, uh, mostly in French and then at home was English. And so now I mostly speak French in social situations, like in,a cafe, for example… ordering anything at a restaurant usually I speak in French just because of accessibility reasons. - *Angel*

For someone like Angel, who grew up equally exposed to both languages, switching between French and English has an inherent part of their communicative repertoire and is a seamless transition in communication. However, when finding language to refer to themselves and to have others refer to them, this transition is not as seamless. Angel recounted having a difficult time at the francophone *CEGEP* (*Collège d'enseignement général et professional)* they attended in a small town outside of Montreal where they came out as non-binary. People at the *CEGEP* were not able to refer to Angel in a way that reflected their identity. At the anglophone university Angel later attended, they were able to be gendered in a way that was far more affirming. Angel suggests that, for them, over the past few years, French has become more utilitarian and practical, whereas English is more useful in social contexts and other contexts where revealing their identity is necessary.

[16] Angel's pronouns in English are *they/them*

In addition to Angel, four other participants grew up in Quebec and have a high command of both English and French. When asked about contexts of language use, Sam revealed the following:

> I usually use English most of the time, just because it's a lot easier to have a gender-neutral language in English than it is in French. Making French gender-neutral is, like, more work and often people don't necessarily understand, like, the, like the words that have been created in the last few years. So, like, for example if I say *toustes*, like, if I'm talking to someone who is not queer usually they don't really know what that means and so they'll be kind of taken aback by it and I usually get comments and stuff, so I just stay in English; it's just safer that way. I'll use French when I'm speaking with like, my family members, or like friends who only exclusively speak in French, (pause) which are very few or if I can't think of, like a word in French (did they mean to say "English"?) That's pretty much it. - *Sam*

Sam not only has a difficult time speaking in a French that is gender-inclusive and that most francophones would understand, but has experienced confrontation, even safety concerns during the times they have tried to use more inclusive language. They[17] revealed that they are typically referred to in the masculine by francophones who don't know them:

> Often people will just assume, If I say *y* they'll think, like, *il* and, therefore, they'll use, like all masculine endings, which, I'm, like, not opposed to (uptalk), but, it's like, I'm never asked, *as well*, you know? And, if I one day say, like: "*Well, actually, I prefer to have neutral endings," A*nd, like start using those when I'm speaking… People are usually kind of taken aback and it's weird, and it's not fun and it's uncomfortable, so I just kind of revert to, masculine endings just in a cishet world, just to (*breathes in through teeth*) you know, do what I need to do and not be met with awkward situations.- *Sam*

Puddle grew up in a mainly francophone context and, at the time of the interview, was a student at an all-French-language university in Montreal, but still uses English in certain contexts:

> I grew up with my mother, francophone …I guess I use English for all of my, activism (draws out word) stuff at this point in my life, mostly for reasons related to gender and politics. I would say maybe a little bit more than half of my friends are anglophones. Um, and, and with my partner we use, French even though he's an anglophone, but his

[17] Sam uses singular *they/them* pronouns in English

> Engl—(*self-corrects*) his French is better than my English, (*lowers voice*) so that's… We chose it, to speak French… My friends are all *queers* and trans and (*pause*) they know about my gender, and my mother knows all of, like…Since I went back to school, I've slowed down a lot of my activism but I still…I'm organizing (*sic*) for **(name redacted)** since *2013*, and so, for me, that is the space I feel very comfortable and--- I think that's where I get to meet, new people without feeling scared…I feel like I have those *two (*pause*) mes;* the me that speaks French (*pause*) that is a scientist (*laughs*)-- that doesn't bother about those things (*pause*) and the other me, (*both laugh*)…I feel better recon-- putting those two together now. - *Puddle*

Puddle also revealed a non-social context in which English is used:

> For my study field (*sic*), I'm in biology and everything's in English…You cannot really study science in French. The classes are gonna be in French, but all the material is English… some of the books will be translated in French, but when you have to, when you publish, it has to be in English--'cause English is the international language.

Eliane described a vast range of contexts of English and French usage:

> I use English more often at home with, I would say, fifty percent of my close friends as well as with my partner-- both of my partners right now. Most people, a lot of people, I date are mostly English-speaking. I only use French with my family, I use French...Oh, I also use English, I would say. I have many jobs that I do work in a nightclub where I mostly use English as well, I have a nightlife-related job I tend to use more English. I use more French when, yeah, with my family, at school.
>
> Right now, I do, like an internship in an org (short for *organization*), LGBTQ org that's strictly in French and I would say that I also, like, manage a community org and I would say that I use a lot of French there to speak with...I would say that at my job managing the community org I switch between the both of them, kind of all the time. (I) definitely use French. I go to therapy in English but I, I-I (repeats) interact with, like, the healthcare system in French. -*Eliane*

As they[18] spoke, Eliane appeared to remind themself of how often they used both English and French; they seemed to use English and French a more-or-less equal amount in both social and practical situations.

Fred, like Angel, Sam, Puddle and Eliane, was born and raised in Quebec. They described growing up speaking exclusively French, then moving to the predominately-anglophone city of Toronto.

[18] Eliane uses *they/them* pronouns in English

> I use English in most if not every social setting, I guess. At home, my partner only speaks English, most of my friends outside of school too. I did my BA in Toronto, so I have a lot of people that I know from there who also only speak English, but I grew up speaking only French until I was, like, sixteen, seventeen. I currently go to school at (****redacted****),so in French. Pretty much everything outside of work is just all in English and I find it so much easier to navigate than French and then at school it's almost exclusively in French, even though everyone has a working knowledge of English like, we don't have conversations in English. – *Fred*

Prakash shared their experience of being an anglophone who moved to Montreal in recent years to attend an English-language university after living in Ontario and being raised by Tamil-speaking parents:

> I'm anglophone so, I guess that most of my friends, social life is mostly in English. I go to (****redacted****) so it's also mostly in English. But since moving to Montreal from Ontario I've spent a lot of time working in French at, the Quebec French offices, so… professional contexts are when I'm doing French and I have some friends who are francophone, in which (*sic*) I also switch to French…Some of my students are francophone and some of my colleagues are francophone, so, lots of contexts I'll speak to them in French, but most of my...Yeah, I would say probably eighty percent of my life right now is French and English. I don't speak any other languages. I do understand Tamil, 'cause that's what my parents speak… but they will, like, speak to me in Tamil and I'll reply back to them in English. - *Prakash*

Contexts of language use, whether English, French or another language, were indicative of the range of interpersonal and cultural experiences of each participant, whether or not these experiences had anything to do with their gender identity. Each participant's unique *communicative repertoire* lent itself to unique ways that each participant negotiated French grammatical gender and linguistic creativity as both self-expression and communication.

Negotiation of French grammatical gender and linguistic creativity

Although there was some difference in participants' English pronoun usage[19], there was much more diversity in terms of how participants navigated French grammatical gender. Some participants revealed that they use pronouns other than *il* or *elle:*

> In French I use the pronoun *y* (pronounced "ee") instead of, the most common *ille* or *iel* just because, it's a little bit more *undercover* and people tend to notice less, so that's kind of like how I mitigate, because if I'm using gender-neutral language, in, like the cishet[20] world, usually, you're kind of met with, like, weird looks, or people not understanding or asking to repeat, and it's just really uncomfortable. -*Sam*

Here, Sam acknowledges that interacting with the general public, particularly those not versed in, or even opposed to, LGBTQ issues, can be stressful, but that there are ways to compromise between mainstream understanding of gender identity and their true, less common gender identity. Sam uses the word *undercover* to indicate that the pronoun *y* goes mostly unquestioned or unnoticed by francophone Quebecois, especially as Sam would rarely be referring to themself in the third person.

For some participants, figuring out how to be referred to in French has been an ongoing, evolving, complicated and difficult process:

> I consider myself very lucky that I'm in a fairly open department…so I have been fairly open with most of my professors…If they're talkin' about me to somebody else, I ask them to use, like, *Mx. (**Spells it out: *"M-X"*),* instead of, like *Ms.* (*Spells it out: *"M-S""*)* or *Mr.* (*Pronounces as word: *"Mister"*)* or whatever for, like, prefix. I try to- to get them to…avoid using pronouns or adjectives that are gendered, but that's not always doable.
>
> One of the things I've personally put into practice is using, like, a role instead of a title if you want…as a way to avoid having to misgender myself (*laughs*), and most people are I feel, like...Insofar as my profs are concerned (and the other) people I've talked …about being non-binary to are open, but don't really know how to put that into practice I feel...so there is still, despite the openminded-ness, a lot of misgendering happening. But the part that I find the most challenging is the fact that there aren't really,

[19]Most participants used singular *they* in English, but a couple used *he* and/or *she* in addition to gender-neutral pronouns.

[20] An abbreviation for *cisgender and heterosexual*

like, that many ways or it's not intuitive to—to not use gendered language. So…if they ask me like, "Oh! Like, how should I refer to you? Like, what pronouns do you want me to use?"… I haven't really found anything in French that works so most of the time it's just, like, "You know what? Like, don't worry about it." It's a structural issue a lot more than it is a personal or individual one. – *Fred*

I use *they* in English In French (*laughs*) it's complicated. Right now I prefer not to use a pronoun in French. I would prefer different phrases. For a while, I went to *il* and I kept *il* for many years, but it felt...It started…leaving me uncomfortable (*laughs*) 'cause I don't identify as a man…then I switched to *elle*, but then very fast it started feeling uncomfortable too, and so now I'm kind of, in the middle, and I don't really know what to do about it. I tried—I asked people to not gender me, but, just, they can't… in French,I like to…when I write about myself I, I cheat. I use the dot , and, , all the forms of gender…Like *content* dot *e*. I find it's a lot easier to navigate French in the written form but, then again I'm uncomfortable expressing myself verbally

- *Puddle*

Here, Puddle reveals how complicated it is to express themself in French, to the point where it is difficult to be referred to by others.

In their discussion, Prakash revealed that many of the people they interact with in public will

want to use *il*, but I want to hold onto that and I also want to complicate that by using feminine accords. I think that's an interesting way of expressing yourself versus *they* kind of lightens all those nuances that you might want to invoke. (*pause*)

I mean I guess, the next thing would be, just the way that I navigate the French language is kind of, like, addressing groups and using, (*pause*), both, masculine and feminine accords just trying to say, like: "*Bonjour a tous et a toutes."* Like, things...I think they're easier when written. – *Prakash*

In addition to referencing a means to make language more inclusive, which tends to be more easily done in the written form, Prakash highlights a way that the French language can have more nuance than English. Switching between masculine and feminine accords or pronouns can invoke the complex nature of non-binary identity, where *they* as a neutral pronoun may, for some non-binary people, be too generic and not account for a more fluid experience with gender. In French, Prakash is often referred to as *il*, but also uses feminine accords to express

themself more holistically than they would had they chosen to use a single pronoun or accord.

As they later stated in the group interview,

> Even though I'm anglophone, I'm not, like, from Canada really, so, you know, these colonial concepts of gender mean nothing to me and I don't--I really don't care so… For me, mixing adjectives, pronouns is part of my way of challenging or rejecting these rules of linguistics, which, again, are enforced by these higher structures that don't care about me so why should I care about them? - *Prakash*

Hassane described their linguistic creativity in using French in a way that is more inclusive by using verbs and nouns instead of adjectives:

> *J'ai appris un façon de parler français où on n'est pas obligé de genrer, genre, le vocabulaire, tu sais? Par exemple, je sais pas, au lieu de dire, au lieu de dire que "t'es beau" ou "t'es belle," ben je dis plutôt "tu es d'un grand beauté »… « Tu es d'une grande intelligence" au lieu de « t'es intelligent »ou « t'es intelligente.* » - *Hassane*

With this way of communicating in French, a person can discuss someone's qualities without needing to speak with grammatical gender. Hassane also revealed that they would sometimes use gender-neutral English words while speaking in French:

> *Donc, parfois, en parlant français ben, comme c'est genré, je préférais utiliser un adjectif en anglais, tu sais? Par exemple, le mot* cute*, c'est quelque chose que j'utilise très fréquemment*.

Furthermore, rather than the Quebecois French terms *mon chum* or *ma blonde*, [21] Hassane prefers the neutrality of the English term

> *"*Significant other*" ça c'est le mot en* English*, justement c'est le genre du contexte où j'ai la tendance d'utiliser l'anglais, plutôt que le français, tu sais? Et uh...c'est un peu pressant ou "*joyfriend*" ou quelque chose comme ça, tu sais?*

When asked about what pronoun they used in French, Angel revealed just how difficult navigating gender in the French language can be:

[21] Quebecois French terms for *boyfriend* and *girlfriend,* respectively.

> I'm still trying to find an ideal way. I don't really know…I've heard *iel* used a lot which I suppose is something I would be more comfortable with than either *il* or *elle* So that, you know, might be (*pause*) the ideal one for the time being. I guess it's just frustrating, 'cause I wish there was (*pause*) a more firm answer that I could give (uptalk), but I don't even, like...(*pause*) I don't refer to myself in French anymore. My friends don't either. They use my name instead of, like...So that's been, um, (*pause*) frustrating. (*laughs*) - *Angel*

Coming to terms with non-binary identity and safer spaces

Several participants learned about non-binary identities through the Internet and are involved in safer spaces online, such as Facebook groups and chatrooms. Most seemed to learn about their identity in an anglophone context or through online resources in English. One participant recalled coming to terms with their identity when they moved from a predominately francophone town in Quebec to the predominately anglophone metropolis of Toronto:

> I left for Toronto in 2012-2013 maybe and, in my small town, these kinds of conversations aren't happening, so I didn't even know it was possible to just not be either a woman or a man. So, yeah, learning a (new) language, moving to a culture where that was an option, has definitely kind of, like, just opened my eyes, I guess and, allowing (*sic*) me to find myself. -*Fred*

Like Fred, Eliane was away from their hometown in Quebec in a very different cultural and linguistic contexts when they learned about non-binary identities and realized that their feelings of misalignment with the gender they were assigned at birth were valid. Eliane expressed how the Internet led them to discover their identity:

> When I lived in Germany, I got really depressed (*laughs nervously*) and, spent most of that year reading the whole *Everything Feminism* blog in my bed and that's when I heard about it for the first time and, at first, I thought it was really silly; I just thought that everybody was obviously non-binary, 'cause everybody, most likely, wanted to be a boy when they were a kid (*laughs*) just like I did, or something, and, then, eventually, I was, like: "Oh no, right! Like, other people have other experiences and maybe it's valid, so..." I guess I, heard about it from, like, feminist blogs and then, maybe, worked through internalized transphobia until I, gave myself permission to feel the way I did about myself. I would say that, definitely through English sources, as well. I transitioned in English way before I transitioned in French. -*Eliane*

Eliane stating that they "transitioned in English" long before they "transitioned in French" is indicative of, at least at the time, a lack of French-language resources on non-binarity.

Puddle was also introduced to the concept of non-binary gender in an English source. Before they learned about the concept and gained a community of those with similar experiences, Puddle struggled as they had a tendency to "self-destruct" and mental health professionals believed their gender questioning was due to a mental illness. At the time, Puddle did not have the language to describe how they were feeling. They eventually happened upon the term *non-binary* in an English-language zine:

> I think the existence of non-binary people, I didn't know about it before I started speaking English more regularly…Even though I was in an anarchist environment with a bunch of queers, (I) only read about it at first in a zine (*laughs*)-- in English.

Later, an experience in Halifax, Nova Scotia led to Puddle having much more confidence in their self and in their identity:

> In the year between the moment that I found out about non-binary people and the moment that I decided to change my name and come out to the world, I visited Halifax with a friend and at that point I was doing...I was very interested in, like, radical libraries and so we were visiting, a social centre there…all the people I met they were *queers*, they were queer and I just, and it was the first…I told people that I went by *they* and the whole time I was there, I wasn't gendered the whole time. And that, that had never happened to me and it felt so right. Um, yeah. That's not an experience that I get ever in French. – *Puddle*

Similarly to Eliane and Fred, Puddle's identity was strongly affirmed in an anglophone context, even though they had been aware of their identity for quite some time. Angel, on the other hand, reported a "smooth transition" while still living with their family in a town outside of Montreal:

> I'm very lucky to have grown up in a very, like, super open and queer household. My mom also has always been open about being queer which is super cool and I was really lucky to have that and, so, growing up I kind of had this very easy, like, it wasn't even a transition space for me it was just, kind of a realisation and then an acceptance and then it was just part of me. I was very young when I realized I didn't connect with the idea of womanhood that I was, that was kind of expected of me, I suppose so that I-I felt I was supposed to connect with. So, for me, I was very lucky and it was a smooth transition in that sense.- *Angel*

Angel's acknowledgement that they were "very lucky" indicates how often non-binary people face discrimination from others and just how beneficial support and understanding can be.

Sam did not discuss their self-discovery in much detail, but did share their recent experience interacting in various spaces in Montreal as non-binary, after having already come out as *"transmasc[22]-ish":*

> I feel that there is a lot more openness within the queer anglophone community than there *was* (different tenses) in the queer francophone community which is kinda why I moved away from that side of the community. I feel like there's a lot more people that embrace the clear non-binary labels and there isn't, as much (pause), um...I don't know, it's just like, it's just kind of like (pause) everywhere sort of. And people just kind of just live their lives and it's not something that's necessarily complicated or debated as much. I felt like it was a lot easier to come out as transmasc than it was…for me to come out as non-binary, in like, both spheres, with the cishets. When I came out, as, like transmasc it was like the narrative was already there of, like, (speaks following phrase while making air quotes) "*I hate my body, therefore, I am switching genders and going to the opposite gender*," big air quotes. When I came out as non-binary, that was, like, too complicated, (pause) and was met (with people) not wanting to learn different pronouns or finding it just too complicated, and telling me to choose between masculine or feminine. Whereas, in the English sphere of my life, the cishet, it was less, there was a little bit less, (*noticeable hesitation*) like, um, um....what's the word?...like... conflict? I guess (uptalk). Because, like, *they* is like, is kind of already used and so, it was already sort of heard of. - *Sam*

Sam suggests that while binary male and female transgender identities are often well understood especially in regards to a single, popular narrative, cisgender and transgender people alike are not as aware or open towards gender non-binarity. Hassane also discussed the problems of limited views on gender as they were in the process of figuring out their gender identity:

> I think that it (my gender identity) was something that I expressed when I was a teenager, so I was like, you know *androgynous* person (sic). It was during like, when I finished university and I was working I was (sic) more a gender-neutral style, if you want. So I was kinda myself butch, 'cause… I feel comfortable with masculine identity more but not that much masculine more and after that I was learning more about the gender *non-binary* and the trans community and that was like: "Oh! This is me!" You know? I was already asking about the trans community before, but back in the day when I was *youngest* (sic), it was something, I don't know hyper-femininity **(**pronounces as if term was French) in the trans community etc. but something like…I don't like to use this word but the "*she-*

[22] Short for *transmasculine*

male" thing like, this really *pornographical* (sic) images and feminine image. I don't judge these people, but I wasn't feeling comfortable to be like that. And…by knowing some *non-binary person* (sic) and by doing some meeting with trans community, *et cetera* (*pronounces it like the word "extra"*.)...I find on YouTube and internet and Instagram actually I find a way to be myself and I'm always asking, you know? - *Hassane*

Furthermore, in the group interview, Hassane explained that they often feel more comfortable in *queer spaces* than exclusively *trans spaces* as there can sometimes be a lack of understanding of non-binary identities even amongst transgender people:

> Ok, uh, personally (*switches to French*)…*Beh, personnellement, je me sens plus confortable dans le milieu* queer *que dans le milieu* trans, *parce que parfois, avec certaines personnes trans qui sont plus binaires, tu sais*? *Y a (certaines) personnes ont parfois la difficulté à comprendre la réalité' non-binaire, tu sais?... ça me dérange pas quand ça leur arrive d'utiliser le masculin ou féminin tu sais, mais, uh, quand…Quand c'est vraiment des pronoms excessivement genrés, beh, je me sens moins à l'aise avec, tu sais, c'est comme--je sais pas, genre, ça c'est comme des...C'est, je sais pas… Le dernier mois, j'ai vu quelqu'un qui disait "Oh, beh, tu sais que tu peux m'appeler "*girl' *uniquement si c'est une fille trans," tu sais?*
>
> *...Avec ci quand tu es comme: "Ay! Comment ça va, ma belle? Comment ça va,* girl? *Ay t'es une fille!"...Je me sens pas forcément très confortable là-dedans, tu sais, comme... Je préfère quand les gens font un effort de pas utiliser de pronoms genre's et, uh, dans le milieu* queer, *j'ai l'impression que pas mal plus, uh, répondu. Il y a d'inventaires de la sensibilisation par rapport aux pronoms. – Hassane*

Although they themself are predominately francophone, Hassane did reference that they at times found anglophone queer spaces to be more open. Hassane also touched on the importance of the Internet as a resource for many non-binary people:

> *J'ai l'impression que les anglophones entendaient que c'est une minorité '-ils entrentendent ça…être davantage ouvert à certaines minorités, tu sais? Et, um, ça a l'air, tu sais, parfois pour, (*faster*) certaines personnes et cetera comme quelque chose qui est, comme, extravagante qui est quasiment comme extraterrestre , tu sais? fuck/faut que*? faire - comment dire- faire ce travail de vulgarisation tu sais; d'explication, tu sais? C'est créer une communauté aussi. Je pense que c'est des choses qui sont excessivement importantes et je pense que c'est pour ça qu'on est quand même une communauté tissée serrée tu sais? Même si on a beaucoup de, tu sais, on a des conflits, des choses sur lesquelles on n'est pas d'accord et cetera, mais on se connait que-beh on connait beaucoup de monde de la communauté en gros grâce à internet, les réseaux*

> *sociaux et cetera* (*sic*intonation) *et, um, c'est quasiment comme une seconde famille, tu sais.*

When discussing how they came to terms with their gender identity, Prakash described how much his cultural background is critical to his understanding and expression of gender and identity as a whole. At several points during both the individual and group interviews, Prakash further brought up different cultural understandings of gender and culture-specific gender identities:

> I grew up in Canada, but am from a very different cultural context, so I feel like the ideas of what constituted masculinity or femininity were not so rigid until when I was (still) quite young. I think people from the West would read me as really feminine, but within my own, like, family, cultural groups that wasn't really, um…. Either, if I wasn't read that way, it wasn't brought up to me or forgot or, it... It never really seemed to be a problem for me to really affect my behaviour...Yeah, for a long time I think I just associated my queerness to be linked with my sexuality instead of my gender. I think the realisation of you know, the separation of gender, sex, and sexuality came a lot later for me. It just kind of seemed that discourse online and seeing people kind of go through those same kind of things and make the separations I guess helped me to also I guess find the nuances between how I've been *othered* or felt *othered* or really begin to need to notice. – *Prakash*

As for safer spaces, including LGBTQ-centered events in Montreal, several participants discussed linguistic issues that made events harder to access for francophone members of the community. When discussing how events led by anglophone LGBTQ Montrealers could be more inclusive, Puddle reveals common setbacks even when advertising for the event is presented in both English and French:

> The description of a Facebook event would be, would have, first of all, would have a French version, and the version would be, feminized correctly; that, for me, is not as, is not, a sign at all that the event was gonna be inclusive (*laughs*)…especially if you add the French layer, 'cause, I don't know if you notice, but, in Montreal, the anglophones organize an event and then they're like: *"Shit! Francophones!"*
> They translate the descriptions, but then, at the event it's in English.
> So, it's just really weird, 'cause, personally I don't. It doesn't have an impact on my, it doesn't have an impact on my participation (uptalk), but, like...It's just a really weird practice that they pull and somehow think that it's inclusive. – *Puddle*

During the group interview, Eliane referred to a specific transgender-centered event in the city organized by an anglophone queer person:

> **Eliane :** *C'est mon ami.e qui l'organise puis elle m'a demandé de venir coanimer* (*name of event*)
>
> **Max:** Ah, oui?
>
> **Eliane:**--*puis, um, spécialement j'ai traduit les questions de français a l'anglais,* (*Eliane switched names of languages*) *parce que normalement il les fait juste en anglais. Um, puis il y a des gens à la pause qui sont allés à me voir et me dire "Merci de traduire parce qu'on parle pas anglais, puis on trouve ça difficile et tout." Uh, puis elle est...Mais c'est vraiment, stressante. Je pense qu'elle avait des personnes ça de faire de qu'elle faisait quelque chose de problématique qui exclut les gens parce qu'elle fait juste un évènement anglais normalement, u, j'étais comme "Pour vrai, dans les espaces trans que je connais, c'est vraiment la norme, parce que comme cinquante pour cent des gens qui viennent des petites villes puis de Gaspésie--*
>
> **Fred**: *Parlent pas anglais.*
>
> **Eliane:--** *ils parlent pas anglais, parce que oui c'est comme vraiment difficile d'être trans là-bas puis l'autre moitié qui vient de partout en Canada parce que la seule clinique où tu peux avoir, uh, um--*
>
> **Hassane:** *Des chirurgies.*
>
> **Eliane: --** like, *les chirurgies est à Montréal.*

Eliane's presence as a translator for the event allowed francophone transgender people, including those originally from small towns throughout the province of Quebec, to fully participate and enjoy themselves. The francophone attendees' gratitude for Eliane's translation reveals that, as Puddle discussed, inclusivity towards francophones is often an afterthought in anglophone-led LGBTQ events, if there are any steps towards linguistic inclusivity at all.

Participants were open in their discussions of non-linguistic discrimination as well. Prakash, in particular, brought up the topic of anti-BIPOC racism several times, both drawing on

their own experience as a person of South Asian heritage in Canada and other observations he[23] had made. During the individual interview, they introduced me to the concept of a *brave space:*

> I think it's kind of like…I guess like a more *critical race approach* to safe spaces. And, so often, you know, for a space we've saved often comes at the expense of black and brown people giving up their comfort for the sake of white people to, you know, do learning in public... I think the thing at Concordia where they've been kind of making this move into, *brave* instead of *safe;* so that's where I first heard it. I've seen…moving here and then finding these QTBIPOC social organizing groups has been really instrumental and finding this language and finding space and community which I feel safe to, express on these complex identities and questions and do the work of unlearning. -*Prakash*

During the group interview, he shared an experience that quickly drew a visceral reaction from the other participants:

> Someone asked me if I was Korean, and I was, like, "Why would you think that?" (*laughs*) But it was because of my French accent and I was like: "No, I'm from Ontario, I'm just very anglophone." And they're like (*in dramatic voice*): "Oh no, *mais,* like, *tu parles francais comme les coréens."* I'm like: "Ok, cool, cool. Good-bye!" (*others groan* - *Prakash*

In this part of the conversation, Prakash discussed the frustration that can often come with being a racial and a gender minority in different community settings in Montreal, although they preferred their overall experience in Montreal over other places:

> **Prakash**: I do feel (*faster*) the same kind of tokenization of being the Brown person who's also the queer person, 'cause, yeah, often I'm not the only Brown or the only queer, but I'm often--
>
> **Eliane:** You're the only Brown queer.
>
> **Prakash:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, also the only Brown queer, so on that front (*faster*), I feel that there's a lot of education being done even on the level of Montreal but, like, yeah, it makes the idea of, like, going anywhere else really difficult, 'cause 'kay...Toronto's most people's Mecca, (for) racialized people and I'm, like,: "Couldn't live there. Unaffordable." Here I can afford to live… it's nice to have places you can go…(*faster*) you can switch to English or… I can just go back into my BIPOC non-QT community and be, like: "You know I'm tired about talking about trans issues; I just wanna be, you know, Brown, you know, like, watch, like, I don't know, *BET* (Black

[23] Prakash accepts various pronouns

> Entertainment Television) or something stupid, like, you know?" Um, but yeah, I think Montreal allows for…these spaces that are…the spaces we can go to retreat when you don't want to deal with…whatever.
>
> Hassane also mentioned non-linguistic discrimination that they had experienced:
>
> One *times* I went to, a, a feminine bathroom at, uh, a *co-* (immediately self-corrects) a school and it was a guy who wasn't working there, he was, just kind of a volunteer there…He was like: "*Oh! Next time we go to the man bathroom,*" and I told them "*I'm a non-binary person. I can go to the to the girls' bathroom."* But: "*Oh yeah. But we have kids here."* And like: "*We have kids here. Don't you be with kids. You are the problem.*" And I ask after that some girl if *is* ok for them that I go to the woman bathroom (uptalk). They was, "Oh no problem for us," but it just this old white, this old man, who was really angry about that, so I do a *complain* on the college about that, I told them my experience et cetera, do it. Later when I come back, they told me that they create (sic) non-gendered toilets. *-Hassane*

Hassane's response to their experience reveals that there is an ample amount of support in Montreal for non-binary people, but that discrimination is still common.

All in all, participants were both content with and critical of the various spaces they encountered in Montreal and all were able to interact with those with shared experiences. The next section will focus on trends I observed while participants interacted with me as well as with fellow participants.

Paralinguistic themes

Expressing or implying level of self-esteem

Even with support from these communities and assuredness in their identities, participants still expressed hesitation and self-doubt at times. In both the individual and group interviews, there were several instances of participants showing concern that they were unclear in their answers, or that they had spoken too much. When discussing their experience as a non-binary person in Montreal, Sam showed noticeable hesitation and looked for affirmation:

> **Sam:** In the English sphere of my life, the cishet, it was less, there was a little bit less....what's the word?..... conflict? I guess. Because *they* is kind of already used and so, it was already sort of heard. Did that answer your question?

Max: It's, it's good…

Sam: You can tell me if it's, like, it's not on point...

Max: (interrupting) Oh no…there was just a fly that got in and I was (pause) disappointed.

Sam: Yeah. Figured.

Max: Exactly.

Sam: But, yeah, you can tell me, like, if I'm way off base, like if...

Max: I don't know, I mean, it's like you're sharing your own experience, so, it's all good.

When Sam asked me if they had answered the question on their thoughts on and experiences in Montreal, they, perhaps unintentionally, appeared more concerned about giving an answer that would please me rather than being uninhibited in sharing their personal story.

There were also several instances of nervous laughter amongst participants, as when Eliane shared that they were "really depressed" when they were living abroad in Germany and first coming to terms with their non-binary identity. Puddle also laughed when they referred to a difficult time in their life that was ameliorated by self-discovery:

> When I was younger—I have a big background in mental health stuff and I've been told by psychiatrists when I was, like, a teenager that my feelings about gender were linked to my illnesses. And so, as an adult I found out that it wasn't, um, true (*laughs*).
> - *Puddle*

When referring to a particularly traumatic situation, Puddle appears to laugh as a way of relieving anxiety for themself and the investigator. Puddle also seems to laugh to express how ludicrous and uninformed the medical professionals who had treated them in response to them sharing their feelings about their gender had been. Even with experiencing trauma, Puddle was able to come to terms with their identity and affirm themself.

Laughter may not always be directly related to self-esteem. Humor also appears to be a tool for some non-binary English-and-French speakers to cope with daily living, including when navigating grammatical gender in French:

> I'll hear masculine adjectives a lot more often than I'll ever hear *iel* so it still feels like I'm living in the masculine, um, which kind of feels like a lie and kind of feels like just a decent compromise to, like, just make it through my day. And I think that led to me and a lot of my non-binary friends to be kind of desensitized to gender and in French, specifically, and to …kind of, like, not taking the whole thing seriously in the end and kinda like making fun of the whole, like, feminine-masculine, like, switching from one to another at all times and kind of…Yeah, building a trust that people know what you are beyond language, that's important. *-Eliane*

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, data was coded for instances of *uptalk*, a common speech feature marked by inflection (Warren, 2015). While I maintain that uptalk is not inherently indicative of self-doubt or hesitation, there were a few instances during the interviews where this seemed to be the case, especially if there were other speech features that marked hesitation or self-doubt, such as noticeable pauses and nervous laughter. This was evident when Fred was asked about how they navigate French as a non-binary person:

> That is hard! (*laughs*) It's, um, so...Actually I don't...I haven't come out to my family in regards to gender, because I feel like I don't have answers to give them (uptalk). Insofar as, like, pronouns (uptalk) go or, like, how to address me, so as far as my family is concerned…they use female everything and I try to keep the contacts to a minimum (uptalk), because I hate it (uptalk)… One of the things I've personally put into practice is using, like, a role instead of a, like, title if you want (uptalk)…as a way to avoid having to misgender myself (*laughs*), and most people are I feel, like...Insofar as, like, my profs are concerned, like, the people I've talked (to), about being non-binary to are open (uptalk), but don't really know how to put that into practice I feel (uptalk), like, so there is still, despite the openminded-ness , a lot of misgendering happening (uptalk). *-Fred*

Here, uptalk, as well as other noticeable speech patterns, seems to indicate just how confusing and difficult it can be to navigate the French language can be as a non-binary person. Fred appears to struggle to articulate how they navigate the language. Fred's instances of laughter highlight that something that ought to be fairly simple, such as having an answer on how to refer

to oneself, is actually quite complicated. Fred also seems to use uptalk when expressing discomfort, such as when they refer to their family and other people in their life misgendering them.

Uptalk was also noticeable when a participant could not completely recall the name of something, as when Sam was discussing organizations that used epicene language, as in what Sam refers to as *Le petit lexique de francais non-binaire,* when referring to LGBTQ francophone clients:

> (T)here's a base already there that could be, like, shared and used and, like, especially with, like, LGBTQ organizations that would be, like, awesome, you know (uptalk), (Pause), to just, like, be already using, like, gender-neutral French, and I (pause) it's like there's , um... I know *P10* does that (uptalk) and, um, I think it's like *Head and Hands* also does that (uptalk) (pause). But, you know, like (pause) I mean, it's not super great but like, *Fierete Montreal*[24] doesn't do that. -*Sam*

As mentioned earlier, Eliane revealed that humor could be a coping mechanism for non-binary people for dealing with the frustration arising from grammatical gender in French. They also used uptalk and other noticeable speech features that appeared to indicate uncertainty.

Something else that stood out to me was the repetition of the French words for *nervous* when discussing how some of their non-binary friends switched between masculine and feminine pronouns and accords*:*

> (H)ow we cope with *les accords* depends on, like, what triggers you most, I think. Um, for me, like, a lot of my non-binary friends will alternate between feminine and, and masculine (uptalk), so, I'm gonna say, oh, um: "*Mon ami Alex. Uh, iel est beau; uh, iel est nerveuse."…*So I will go from masculine to feminine all with, like, one after the other, all the time (uptalk). Sometimes, people also have their pronoun be like that. So, they're gonna say: *"Il est belle; elle est nerveux."* Uh, and then they're just gonna, like, constantly talk like that (uptalk) and-which works for certain people. It doesn't work for me, because, uh, whenever people gender me in the feminine it makes me anxious and I stop listening to the conversation (uptalk) until I hear them gender me in the masculine again (uptalk), and now I know they respect my pronouns (uptalk).

[24] Montreal's annual Pride celebration.

The terms *nerveux* and *nerveuse* came up later in the interview, as well:

> *Si je dis, euh: "Je suis nerveux" ou "Je suis nerveuse"* (intonation) I have to pick between one of two. There's no, like, gender-neutral middle term. *Nerveux* or *nerveuse.*
>
> I'll hear my co-workers say: "*Oh, uh, t'es vraiment bon",* and then I'll be talking to them and I'll be, like: "*Oh ouais, je suis vraiment nerveux."*

With noticeable repetition of such a term, it seemed that, perhaps subconsciously, Eliane was expressing their own nervousness, whether due to the fact that they were being interviewed by someone they had never met in person before, due to the anxiety brought on by the French language, or both. Although the data was meticulously coded for instances of *uptalk*, it seems that it was not so much a marker of self-doubt or nervousness as a gateway to be aware of and code more valid markers such as nervous laughter, noticeable pauses and repetition of certain words or phrases.

Encouraging and supporting others

As discussed in the previous section, in both the individual interviews and group interviews, there were noticeable instances of the participants showing concern that they were speaking too much. On a couple of occasions in the group interview, each participant insisted that someone else in the group speak, in turn leading to one or more participants insisting that they, themself, would want someone else to speak, in turn leading to a pause. Although these gestures seemed to be based on a desire for inclusion and equality among group members, potential underlying factors, such as insecurity, may have impacted the frequency of these gestures.

> **Max**: *Let's put it all together.*:*What have your experiences been like as gender non-binary English-and-French-speaking individuals in Montreal? Where do you see yourselves moving forward?* And, so, I propose that especially for the second part of that question, you can interpret that however you see fit…All right, who wants to start?
>
> **Fred:** I want to really go last.

Hassane: Yeah!

Eliane: I feel like we just talked a lot. (*Eliane and Max laugh*) I'm, like, willing to (inaudible)

Prakash: I feel the same.

Eliane: Yeah.
(*Pause*)

In addition to relating to one another's experiences as English-and-French-speaking non-binary people in Montreal, some of the participants in the group interview were previously acquainted, which led to a strong sense of camaraderie. The closest connection was between Hassane and Eliane, who had worked together and interacted with one another many times both online and offline. At times, participants referenced the same events, groups, and experiences, and would even assist with or add to others' responses:

Hassane: *Y a (certaines) personnes ont parfois la difficulté à comprendre la réalité non-binaire, tu sais? Fait que ça m'arrivait souvent de devoir, = expliquer ce qu'est la non-binarité. Comme, pourquoi je ne suis pas* elle *ni* il *ni...*

Eliane: *C'est ça.*

Hassane: *T'sais, ça me dérange non plus étant donné que, t'sais, je m'identifiais comme* genderless *si on veut* slash genderfluid, *tu sais?*

Eliane: Just say it's a genderfull (*laughs*)!

Hassane: *Aussi-*

Eliane: *C'est ça oui!*

Although I did not know any of the participants before the recruitment process, the participants were open not only to supporting their fellow participants, but to offering me support and insight as well, whether it would be something complementary to the research or any other useful insight. It was Prakash who informed me that oTranscribe would be a useful tool for

helping me with transcription. Sam checked to see if I had heard of a particular resource that could be helpful in the research process, "*Le petit lexique de francais non-binaire."* While I was never able to find this resource, as Sam may have misremembered the title or it may have been a hard-to-access resource, Sam's willingness to share was still greatly appreciated and indicative of participants' dedication to this work. When I struggled to figure out a particular French term during the group interview, the participants were more than willing to help—even translating, then typing, out the term on the document where I was taking notes:

> **Hassane***: on est quand même un communauté tissée-serrée tu sais?...*
>
> **Max:** *Um, il y avait un mot que t'as dit :*(*mispronounced*) *"communauté accessoire"'? Est-ce-que j'ai ma--?*
>
> **Hassane:** *Communauté tissé- serrée, c'est-à-dire qu'on est une communauté', on est proche les uns des autres.*
>
> **Max:** *Ok. Alors pas comme* accessoire. *C'est-c'est pas --c'est comme uh...*
>
> **Fred:** "Uh, tight-knit" Like a tight-knit community.
>
> **Hassane:** Yeah
>
> **Max:** Ok.
>
> (*Eliane asks about word. inaudible*)
>
> **Hassane:** *Tissée-serrée*
>
> **Eliane***: Tissée-serrée, uh, c'est ça.*
>
> **Max:** *Alors, uh, comment écrire ça?*
> *(** Eliane reaches over and types the words into Max's notes*)
> (*in sing-songy voice**)** *Ok, merci! (*Eliane finishes typing*) Ta-da!*
>
> **Eliane:** There's an accent-- (*inaudible*)
>
> **Max:** *Oh "tissée-serrée" Ah oui- "*tight-knit."*Ah, c'est cute.*

Such interactions indicate just how supportive and *tissée-serrée* the non-binary community in Montreal can truly be, even if there is still much work to be done.

After collecting data and making note of themes and trends that arose during the interviews through the process of coding, I reexamined the three guiding research questions that are the foundation of this thesis. In the following section I present additional data analysis and raise points from the literature as they relate to each research question.

Research Question 1: In what contexts do French-and-English-speaking gender non-binary young people in Montreal use English more often? In what contexts do they use French more often? In what contexts do they switch between the two languages?

One of the main concepts grounding this thesis is that of *communicative repertoire* (Rymes 2014) or the myriad of ways that an individual uses language to communicate or express themself, whether spoken, through the written word or through use of symbols or images. Contexts of language use were relatively diverse amongst the seven participants. Only one participant, Prakash, came from an exclusively non-francophone background, learning French later in life. Out of all the participants, Hassane seemed to be the one who used French most often, "ninety percent of" the time, but even they spoke in English during a decent portion of the interviews and revealed that they use several English terms and phrases quite often.

All seven participants revealed they were more likely to speak in English with other queer people, who may also come from Quebec, from other parts of Canada, or from other countries. There seemed to be a consensus amongst participants that it is easier to discuss queer issues and use gender-neutral language in English than in French. When Puddle, a biology student, states that "all the material is English… some of the books will be translated in French, but when you have to, when you publish, it has to be in English— 'cause English is the

international language," they reference a sociolinguistic phenomenon often cited as *English as lingua franca* (ELF) (Mauranen, 2017). Through ELF, English is used by people of various nationalities and cultures to communicate socially or professionally. Today, more people speak English as a second or additional language than as a first language (Mauranen, 2017, p. 7). This is likely why English terms related to gender and sexuality are so commonly used even in non-anglophone contexts, as seen with participants using the term *queer* even when speaking in French.

The four participants who were born and raised in francophone households in Quebec, Sam, Puddle, Eliane and Fred, revealed that they spoke French with their families, but all implied that they did not communicate with their families nearly as often as with their friends or partners. Fred openly expressed that speaking with their family caused them anxiety, as they were not only misgendered, but unable to provide a solid alternative that would be more reflective of their identity. Of these four, Sam seemed to speak French the least often, only with their family and the few friends that spoke exclusively in French, but, having grown up in a French-speaking household, Sam could still easily switch between the two languages should they choose to do so.

For the participants who spoke in French to their friends, to their partners, or at work or school, the means of speaking French seemed to differ among contexts. With people in their social circles who were well-versed in non-binary issues or non-binary themselves, communication in French was likely to be much more reflective of their identity. Interactions in "straightscape" (Miller, cited in Doyle, 1996, p. 12), or simply spaces occupied by those of a binary gender identity, may not necessarily be in "outscape," because of possible misunderstanding or even discrimination from those outside the non-binary community. It may

be awhile still before the linguistic outscape becomes a reality throughout Quebec. For the time being, non-binary people may continue to draw on their communicative repertoires to adapt to whatever space they are in. Puddle even said that they have "two *me*s: the me that speaks French, that is a scientist and the other me." Here, Puddle appears to provide an unintentional insight into the possibilities of communicative repertoire and to expand on the term's definition. Communicative repertoire is the means to live and communicate as many *me*s as necessary to be the most holistic version of oneself, which may change based on social context, but does not change the core of who one truly is.

Contexts in which participants switched between English and French seemed to be fairly incidental or in the context of translation or interpretation, whether at a trans-centered event, as Eliane had done, or during the interviews when they were asked to clarify something or give an example. In the context of the group interview, switching between French and English sometimes occurred as participants built upon one another's responses, as I will discuss in the final section of this chapter.

Research Question 2: How do Franco-Anglophone gender non-binary young people negotiate grammatical gender in French?

All participants alluded to English being easier to navigate in terms of grammatical gender. Even Hassane, who revealed that they mostly speak in French, still regularly incorporates English words, such as *joyfriend* and *cute* into their everyday conversation.

Puddle emphasized an important difference between verbal written French: the possibility of a grammatical practice that Shroy (2016) refers to as "inclusive punctuated affixes" (p. 2), which Puddle refers to when they reveal that they "cheat" when they write about themself by using "the dot," as in their example *content.e*. These affixes have their roots in the movement towards *féminisation* of the French language, which francophone feminists have advocated over

the past several decades (Burr, 2003). In their discussion, Prakash also referenced *féminisation* and the relative ease of using gender-inclusive language in written French and using phrases such as "*Bonjour à tous et à toutes."*

After data was collected and analyzed, I completed some further reading on grammatical gender in French and how it has been adapted to be expressive of genders other than male or female. Non-binary scholar and Quebec native Florence Ashley (2019) makes a distinction between gender-inclusive French and gender-neutral French, arguing that gender-inclusive French is language used to equalize men and women, whereas gender-neutral French, the focus of the article, is language that is outside of the feminine and masculine and can be used to refer to non-binary people or indicate a person of any gender (p. 2). This usage differs from how I have been using the two terms in this thesis, as I have been using them interchangeably, but is certainly something to consider for future research. In their article, Ashley discusses gender-neutral terms they use for themself, such as *autaire* (Ashley, 2019, p. 2), and makes other recommendations for gender-neutral terms,[25] drawing on the work of French non-binary linguist, Alpheratz (2018).

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that participants and other non-binary people they knew did not necessarily subscribe to any one particular grammatical system. Participants revealed various methods of linguistic creativity and adapted French grammatical gender to whatever felt most right to them, whether it was using a pronoun other than *il* or *elle*, or switching between feminine and masculine pronouns and accords, or using epicene language when referring to others.

[25] Ashley (2019) and Alpheratz (2018) suggest *al(s)* as a potential pronoun and *an* for a gender-neutral indefinite article

Ashley (2019) acknowledges that the grammatical system they are proposing is just one way that the French language can be made more affirming of non-binary identities. As they put it, « *L'élaboration du français neutre n'est pas la création d'une obligation, mais bien la création d'une option* » (Ashley, 2019, p. 3). The non-binary-affirming grammatical gender systems proposed by Ashley (2019), Alpheratz (2018), Divergenres (https://divergenres.org/regles-de-grammaire-neutre-et-inclusive/) and others are just some of the tools that francophone non-binary people can draw on when figuring out what terms are the best fit and what are some ways to refer to a group of people that does not rely on the "masculine-as-default" (Ayoun, 2007, p. 141). The language that a non-binary person chooses for themself is ultimately based on what feels best for the individual. Some non-binary francophone people may constantly switch between different pronouns and accords, as Eliane mentioned that some of their friends do. Prakash suggests this approach to French can actually be beneficial in presenting all the nuances of a person's gender identity and *performance* (Butler, 1990). Other non-binary people may use pronouns, accords or neologisms that are not listed in any of the above-mentioned guides. Still others may draw on such guides to determine gender-neutral ways to refer to groups of people, while using different terms for themselves. As I attempted to answer the question of how franco-anglophone non-binary people in Montreal navigate grammatical gender in French, it became clear that there is no one way that it is navigated, but there ought to be more support and credibility given to these emerging language systems.

Research Question 3: What are the different spaces (physical and/or virtual) that have allowed Franco-Anglophone non-binary young people in Montreal to come to terms with their gender identities and to flourish in their identities?

Although this thesis is centered on sociolinguistics, I deliberately left interview questions about coming to term with non-binary spaces and safer spaces as open-ended as possible, to get a

sense of participants' diverse experiences. Butler (1990) suggests that gender is an act of doing, which is complex, shaped by experience and context "whose totality is permanently deferred" (Butler, 1990, p. 22). Language is but one of a myriad of experiences that shaped participants' understanding of their personal gender identity and their peers' experiences with gender. Participants discussed topics ranging from racial discrimination to lack of accessible washrooms.

Language was, however, still crucial to several participants as they figured out their gender identities. Eliane, Fred and Puddle, who were all raised francophone in Quebec "regions" outside of Montreal, referred to learning about non-binary identities in a non-francophone context. Whether attending university in Toronto, scrolling through an English-language feminist website while living in Germany, or reading an English-language zine, Eliane, Fred and Puddle were introduced to terminology that matched with feelings about their gender that they had not previously been able to articulate. Speaking about their personal experience—and reflecting what seems to be the case for some if not all other participants—Eliane "transitioned in English way before" they "transitioned in French."

Similarly to the transgender women featured in Namaste's (2005) book, all the participants seemed to have strong, supportive communities in Montreal of people with shared identities and experiences. Non-profit organizations, university groups, queer-friendly cafes and bars, and queer-centered events were all mentioned as important spaces for social connection. Virtual spaces also seemed to be quite important in the process of participants coming to terms with their identities as well as to further build community and even to share insights and skills, as Eliane and Hassane referenced during the group interview. The internet can allow non-binary people to connect socially, to answer others' questions, and to connect others to resources.

The use of the internet to both learn about different identities and, eventually, share skills and insights with others in the community is in line with Wuest's (2014) discussion about *acculturation* (Goodwin, 1989, p. 3, cited in Wuest, 2014), a process that follows a person's trajectory from figuring out their identity through others, to eventually becoming a mentor to others figuring out their identity. Eliane and Hassane both learned about non-binary identities through the internet and are now active on the internet in supporting others on their journeys.

It is my assumption that *acculturation* amongst non-binary people is not an inherently linear process; rather, non-binary members of online communities are constantly meeting new people and supporting one another, regardless of where they may be in life. Applying Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the *rhizome*, not only entails less rigid conceptualizations of language, grammar, and gender, but there is a more fluid conceptualization of community building. While Eliane, Hassane and others may moderate Facebook groups, there does not appear to be any sort of hierarchy in terms of age or experience, meaning that community support, teaching, and learning are ongoing processes for all group members. Through this rhizomatic approach to community, all voices, insights, and experiences are validated.

When discussing a trans-centered event that Eliane was an interpreter for, Eliane and Hassane revealed a reason why Montreal is a popular destination for transgender people throughout the province; the only clinic, not only in Quebec, but in Canada, that offers gender-affirming surgery is GrS Montreal at *Centre Metropolitain de Chirurgie* (GrS Montreal, inc.). Getting an appointment at this clinic is quite competitive, with over one thousand surgeries completed per year and a wait list of at least six months with patients coming from different parts of the world (CTVNews.ca Staff, 2016). With such a long wait time for surgery, it seems

beneficial for francophone transgender people to have positive social interactions and community building amongst fellow LGBTQ folks.

When recruiting and interviewing participants for this thesis, I was cognizant of whether participants used any stylistic devices or expressed ideas that disempowered people of any other groups, similarly to how white, gay men can at times appropriate AAVE (Ilbury 2020). While I found that none of the participants appropriated or did anything to disempower others, I am also aware that some experiences with non-binary identity were not represented in this thesis. For example, there were no participants of Caribbean heritage who may have had a very different perspective on language and gender than any of the featured interviewees. Neither were there any who had and/or claimed Indigenous heritage. As I will discuss in the conclusion, I believe that there are ethical, even empowering, means to fill this ongoing gap in the literature.

Conclusion

This chapter presented results from interviews and served as a discussion of the data, which incorporated insights from outside literature as well as codes determined before and during the process of data analysis. This chapter addressed linguistic and paralinguistic themes that were found to be significant to gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' thoughts and experiences. Results were presented as they related to the following linguistic themes: contexts of language use, negotiation of French grammatical gender and linguistic creativity, and coming to terms with non-binary identity and safer spaces. This chapter also presented results as they related to the following paralinguistic themes: expressing or implying level of self-esteem and encouraging others. This was followed by a discussion of the data as it related to the three main guiding research questions. Through discussions with participants, it became clear that there is no one ideal way of communicating or expressing one's identity; nor is there a single queer space that is affirming and open to all linguistic, gender, and racial identities.

Chapter Five – Conclusion

There is still much research to be done on queer identities and language. Ideally this would be done with as much of it being conducted by members of the community of focus, as possible. Hord (2016), Knisely (2020), Zimman (2014; 2017) and others research and write about populations representative of their own, providing insight that an outsider may not have access to. The need for further research to be done in French, is evinced by several newly proposed systems of gender-neutral language have arose between the beginning of this thesis work and its completion. Furthermore, more work ought to be done on gender-neutral languages and non-binary identities in other Romance languages, carrying on the legacy of works such as *They Call Me Mix.Me llamen maestre* (Rivas, 2018). Such representation should further expand to members of non-Western communities where understandings of gender and sexuality fall outside of the Western LGBTQ spectrum. As participant Prakash attested during the group interview,

> In BIPOC spaces or QTBIPOC spaces, we already have, if not the language, the imagery of that… India we have the *hijra*[26] …there's the *fa'fafine*[27] , there's *Two-Spirits*[28]. We (QTBIPOC) have- we have this imagery even if we have different language.
> - *Prakash*

Research on various populations whose identities fall outside of the Western concepts of heterosexual cisgender male or female cannot occur and reach the masses without the same level of support and access to publication and dissemination as the scholars whose works were cited throughout this thesis. It is thus paramount for academic, social, and political institutions to prioritize and validify this research, even as this work may challenge these very institutions.

Furthermore, though this thesis centered on young people, falling within a relatively broad age range, it may be important for future research to be focused on older non-binary adults. Throughout my time in various physical and virtual queer spaces, it became apparent just how youth-centered many LGBTQ services are. While these spaces are important, it begs the question of how older non-binary people can connect to services and bond with one another. Having easily accessible spaces for older adults can be affirming for youth between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, as well. One of my closest friends in Montreal, a twenty-four-year-old non-binary person whose insights on being non-binary while navigating the French language were in many ways a catalyst to this work, took their own life mere weeks before the completion of the first draft of this thesis. This happened not long after their significant other, a twenty-seven-year-old transgender woman, took her own life as well. It is paramount that transgender and non-binary people are affirmed in their identities and supported in times of need, so that there can be a future for transgender and non-binary older adults.

[26] See Hall (2013)
[27] See Taulapapa McMullin (2011)
[28] See Morgensen (2011)

It is important to acknowledge, however, even with all the work that needs to be done, that some very critical steps are being taken in the right direction to ensure more rights for non-binary and transgender people in Quebec. On January 28, 2021, it was announced that a constitutional challenge brought forth by the Concordia University-based Centre for Gender Advocacy and four co-plaintiffs in 2014 was at last accepted. As stated in the Centre for Gender Advocacy's (2021) press release,

> This decision is an important victory for the rights of non-binary individuals, trans parents, trans non-citizens and trans youth. The Court deemed unconstitutional the requirement that people can only be designated as either male or female. It also declared that trans parents have a right to change their designation on their children's birth certificate and to be recognized as "parent" and not just "mother" or "father." It struck down the requirement to be a Canadian citizen in order to change one's name or gender. The Court also struck down the requirement for a medical evaluation for trans youth (The Centre for Gender Advocacy, 2021,para 2)

This recent development shows how important advocacy is in the fight for transgender and non-binary rights as well as how much systemic change can impact and affirm the lives of transgender and non-binary people. There is still much work to be done, as seen in the fact that, even though it still made a history-making decision, the Court did not approve all of the plaintiffs' demands, including one that could have been beneficial to trans and non-binary youth under the age of eighteen. Also rejected was a demand to "strike down the requirement to designate a sex at birth without exception, including for intersex individuals" (The Centre for Gender Advocacy, 2021, para.2), but the Center later decided not to pursue this as the proposed change may or may not have been

beneficial to intersex people (The Centre for Gender Advocacy, 2021, para. 2). The Center vowed to work with the intersex community rather than act on their behalf, which goes to show that all organizations are capable of error and what is done to correct this error moving forward is itself a form of activism and accountability.

Time will tell what positive, sustainable changes will come from emerging gender-inclusive and gender-neutral French grammar systems in the public sphere. As the topic of French language use and preservation continues to be central to the province of Quebec (Levine, 1991), it may be important to consider how gender-neutral and inclusive French can encourage French language use. This awareness could lead to public spaces as well as previously linguistically and/or socially exclusive queer spaces being more appealing to non-binary Quebecois in Montreal and beyond.

Furthermore, the development and application of gender-inclusive French and other historically grammatically gendered languages may lead to more English-as-L1 students deciding to learn foreign languages. As standard French currently stands, with the lack of gender-neutral pronouns and terminology, anglophone non-binary transgender students who use gender-neutral pronouns are often forced to choose a binary pronoun and/or identity when learning French. Being forced to use a pronoun that does not match one's identity can lead to strong feelings of gender dysphoria. Students who are anxious, depressed, and invalidated are much less likely to succeed than their peers (Dornyei, 2005) and, as a result, may be pulled away from learning French or other historically binarist languages.

For positive change to occur for non-binary students, teachers need to be a part of their system as well. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of moving from *striated space* (traditional ideas) to *smooth space* and the *Body without Organs* (BwO), former elementary

school teacher Adrian D. Martin (2016) advises teachers not to immediately assume the identity of their students and to instead provide students a safe, open (*smooth)* space to self-identify and explore their identities. Perhaps such a smooth space could help increase the number of American children who choose to take foreign languages, as language and curriculum move from something perceived as traditional and frustrating to something dynamic and inclusive. It should also be noted that, according to Complexity Theory, all students can learn an L2, as they already have experience learning a language: their L1 (Ortega, 2015). Therefore, all students should have access to learning an L2 in an affirming and accepting environment. Conceptualizations of gender have expanded past even what they were when I started learning French in the mid-2000s. While I may never know what it would have been like if I had had an understanding of non-binary gender or awareness of a social movement towards gender-neutral-and-inclusive French at an earlier age, it is possible that for future generations, this will be second nature, as the groundwork will already be laid out for them.

It is also reasonable to speculate if and what French and other languages with both grammatical and social gender could be without grammatical gender at all (Ibrahim, 1973, 30). Over time, will the connection of gendered pronouns to nouns or even to verbs will fade away, unraveling grammatical gender as a linguistic extension of natural or social gender? If gender is no longer a defining feature of language, perhaps the greater understanding of gender can transition from fixed and objective to fluid and unique, unbound by any linguistic constrictions or unnecessary conflations.

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Appendix A

Recruitment flier

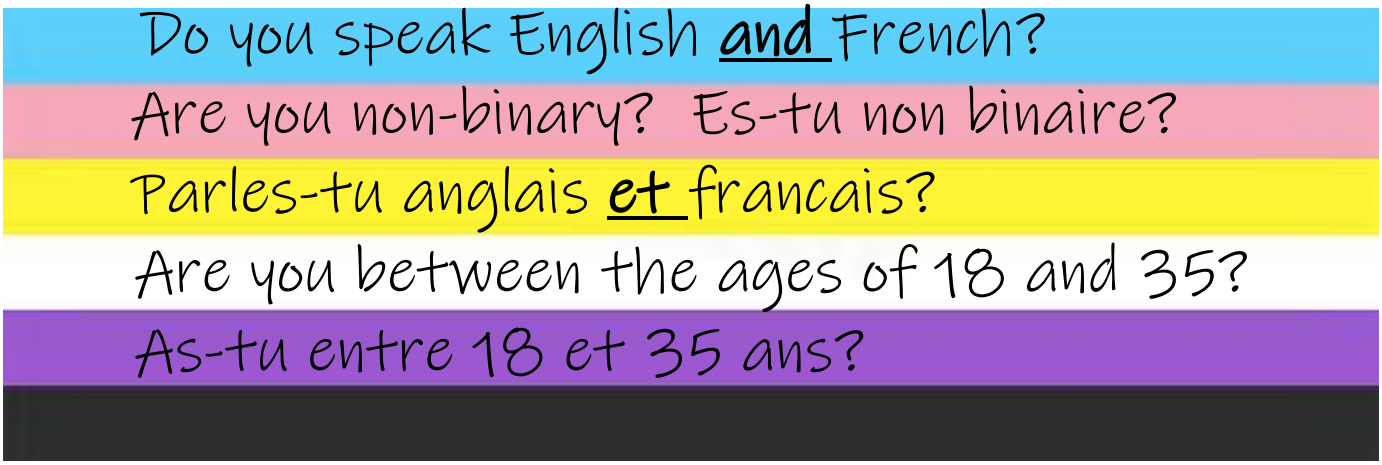

Image Retrieved from : https://mygenderpride.com/products/transgender-non-binary-pride-flag

May 27, 2019

I am a queer, transgender Montrealer conducting research on how gender non-binary people navigate the French and English languages. If you are interested in being interviewed and sharing your experiences and opinions, contact me at:

E-mail: maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca

Phone: 514-549-8610

Facebook and Instagram: Max Jack-Monroe

All participants will receive an honorarium for their time.

Appendix B

Original Consent Form for Participants pre-amendment

Informed Consent Form for Participants

Title of Research: Queer Sociolinguistics and Identity Amongst Franco-Anglophone Gender Non-Binary Young People in Montreal

Researcher: Max Jack-Monroe, Master's student

Department: Integrated Studies in Education (DISE)

Contact Information: 514-549-8610 or maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Professor Mela Sarkar, DISE at mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca

Dear Participant,

I am a current Master of Arts candidate in Second Language Education with a Gender and Women's Studies option at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Working within the Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE) I am carrying out a study exploring how young (18-35-year-old) gender non-binary English-and-French speaking individuals living in Montreal navigate the English and the French language. The findings from this study will be disseminated and made accessible to the general public as an academic thesis, as part of the website queerlanguage.com, and at LGBTQ and/or linguistics-centered conferences. Your participation in this study will provide valuable insight into how gender non-binary individuals in a specific linguistic and spatial context navigate different languages and implications this may have going forward.

Your participation will include 2 interviews- 1 individual interview and 1 group interview. Each interview will last 45-60 minutes. It is my hope that you participate in both

interviews, but you will have the option to only be interviewed once, as an individual. Should you choose to participate in this study, the precise time and location of these interviews will be based on communication and consensus between you and I for the individual interview and between the entire group for the group interview.

The interviews will be audio-recorded to help with data analysis. Your name and precise location will **not** be included in the audio-recording. Only I will listen to these recordings, except in the case of asking clarifying questions to my supervisor, Professor Mela Sarkar or to you, the participant. These recordings will be encrypted and saved on a Drive. In keeping with the standards of the Research Ethics Board (REB) of McGill, all data will be confidential, and all identifiable data (i.e. your full legal and/or chosen name, precise location of the interview) will be destroyed after seven years. Furthermore, your name and location will remain confidential and I will be using pseudonyms for all participants throughout the research process.

All participants are entitled to a **$50 honorarium** through the generosity of local LGBTQ organization Jeunes Queer Youth. This amount will be rewarded regardless if you participate in one or both interviews. This is to ensure equality amongst all participants, regardless of the time and energy they have to discuss the topics of non-binary identity, gender, and language.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not wish to respond to a particular research question, it is your right to refuse, and it will not be held against you. The aim of this study is to gain a better idea of how to access and incorporate more inclusive languages and spaces and this philosophy will be adhered to at all points of the study.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me by telephone at 514-549-8610, on Facebook messenger or Instagram (Max Jack-Monroe) or through e-mail at maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca. Also feel free to contact my supervisor, Professor Mela Sarkar at mela.sarkar@mcgill.ca. We will be happy to share our findings and provide access to publications as soon as they are made available.

Any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant can be addressed to McGill REB (Research Ethics Board) Ethics Officer Lydia McNeil at Lydia.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Max Jack-Monroe

Mela Sarkar, PhD., Associate Professor in Faculty of Education

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

3700 Rue McTavish, McGill University

Montreal, QC Canada H3A1Y2

Tel: 514-549-8610

E-mail: maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca

Please select the following sections if you agree to give consent to participate in this study.

____I will participate in the one-on-one interview.

____I will participate in the group interview.

For focus group participants: In order to respect the privacy and confidentiality of others in the group, you are requested not to share any information during the session with anyone outside of this group.

Name (in print):_____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant can be addressed to McGill REB Ethics Officer Lynda McNeil at Lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Appendix C

Amendment to Consent Form to reflect honorarium increase

McGill University

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ETHICS REVIEW
AMENDMENT REQUEST FORM

This form can be used to submit any changes/updates to be made to a currently approved research project. Changes must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.

Significant or numerous changes to study methods, participant populations, location of research or the research question or where the amendment will change the overall purpose or objective of the originally approved study will require the submission of a complete new application.

REB File #: 44-0719
Project Title: Queer Sociolinguistics and Identity Amongst Franco-Anglophone Gender Non-Binary Young People in Montreal
Principal Investigator: Max Jack-Monroe, Master's student
Email: maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca
Faculty Supervisor (for student PI): Professor Mela Sarkar

1) Explain what these changes are, why they are needed, and if the risks or benefits to participants will change.

As I have more funding from Jeunes Queer Youth than what was reflected in the initial ethics application, I plan to provide each of the seven participants with a **$70** honorarium, rather than a $50 one. This increase will be very beneficial to participants, who will have more funds than initially anticipated to go towards food or transportation costs, gender transition-related costs, etc.

2) Attach relevant additional or revised documents such as questionnaires, consent forms, recruitment ads.

2d).*Describe any compensation subjects may receive for participating*.

I have applied for and received funding for this project in order to provide an honorarium for each participant, thus supporting members of my own community. This funding will be provided by Jeunes Queer Youth, a local LGBTQ organization. I have chosen to provide an honorarium in consideration of the sensitive nature of the topic and to assist in covering participants' finances whether that be transportation costs, assistance covering medical expenses such as hormone replacement therapy or anything else the participant may need. Each participant will receive $70 for their participation whether they participate in one or both studies.

Appendix A: Recruitment Flier to be Distributed Electronically on Social Media and as Print in Public Spaces

Image retrieved from : https://mygenderpride.com/products/transgender-non-binary-pride-flag May 27, 2019

I am a queer, transgender Montrealer conducting research on how gender non binary people navigate the French and English languages. Findings from this research will be presented as part of a Master's thesis and be featured on the website queerlanguage.com. All responses will remain confidential.

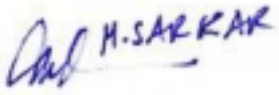
If you are interested in being interviewed and sharing your experiences and opinions, contact me at:
E-mail: maxen.jack-monroe@mail.mcgill.ca
Phone: 514-549-8610
Facebook and Instagram (private message only): Max Jack-Monroe

All interviews will take place in person. All participants will receive an honorarium of $70 for their time.

This research study is being conducted under the Supervision of Professor Mela Sarkar at McGill University.

Submit by email to lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca. REB Office: James Administration Building, 845 Sherbrooke Street West suite 429, fax: 398-4644 tel: 398-6831/6193; www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human
(August 2014)
Principal Investigator Signature:

Date: ___September 12, 2019_____



Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ _____Date: _____ (for student PI)

For Administrative Use:REB#44-0719

This amendment request has been approved.
Signature of REB Chair/ delegate: ____lynda.mcnei l@mcgill.ca Digitally signed by lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca DN: cn=lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca Date: 2019.09.23 11:04:37 -04'00'

_____ Date: _____ Project Approval Expires: Sept.2, 2020

Submit by email to lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca. REB Office: James Administration Building, 845 Sherbrooke Street West suite 429, fax: 398-4644 tel: 398-6831/6193; www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human
(August 2014)

Appendix D

Individual Interview Research Questions

Theme: English vs. French

1. In what contexts do you use English more often? In what contexts do you use French more often? Are there contexts where you find yourself switching between the two? Are there any other languages that you speak? If so, what are your experiences like with that language or languages?
2. How have you and/or people that you know, navigated French as a historically-gendered language?

Theme: Identity and Safe Spaces

3. How did you come to terms with your non-binary identity and/or other aspects of your identity?
4. Are there particular spaces where you feel particularly affirmed in your identity? How did you find out about these spaces?

Theme: The Montreal Context

5. How long have you lived in Montreal? What are your thoughts on the city and the experiences you have had as a non-binary person in the city?
6. In what ways have you been allowed to express yourself linguistically (i.e. pronouns, noun-endings, adjective-endings, honorifics) in Montreal? Are there things that you believe work well in this city? Are there ways that Montreal can be more inclusive?

Appendix E

Group Interview Questions

Theme: English vs. French

1. All of you speak both English and French. Can you talk about how you and/or other gender non-binary people you know use each language and in which contexts? What are your thoughts on grammatical gender in English versus grammatical gender in French?

Theme: Identity and Safe Spaces

2. All of you identify as gender non-binary. Are there spaces where you feel particularly comfortable in expressing your identity? Are there spaces that you feel could be made more inclusive?

Theme: The Montreal Context

3. Let's put it all together-- What have your experiences been like as gender non-binary English-and-French-speaking individuals living in Montreal? Where do you see yourselves moving forward?

Appendix F

Individual Interview Codes

Language of utterance	**Linguistic codes**	**Paralinguistic codes**
Speaking in English	Expresses attitude towards English	Uptalk
Speaking in French Speaking in French and English	Expresses attitude towards French Reference to context in which English is used more often	Showing doubt/looking for affirmation Self-correction
	Reference to context in which French is used more often	Asking for clarification
	Reference to switching between French and English—or using an English word while speaking French	Noticeable hesitation
	Reference to other language spoken	Noticeable change in speed
	Expresses ways of making language more inclusive	laughter
	Coming to terms with identity	

	Reference to community/safer spaces	
	Expresses thoughts on Montreal	

Appendix G

Group Interview Codes

Speaker of utterance	Language of utterance	Linguistic codes	Paralinguistic codes
Hassane	English	Reference to context in which participant or someone they know uses English more often	Insisting that they have spoken enough and that another participant should share
Prakash	French	Reference to context in which participant or someone they know uses French more often	Uptalk
Eliane	Mix of English and French	Reference to context in which participant or someone they know switches between English and French	Showing doubt/looking for affirmation
Fred		Expresses thoughts on grammatical gender in English	Self-correction

		Expresses thoughts on grammatical gender in French	Asking for clarification
		Reference to space(s) that can be made more inclusive	Noticeable hesitation
		Reference to experiences in Montreal	Noticeable change in speed
		Reference to where participant sees themself moving forward	laughter
		Reference to pronouns, honorifics, etc. in English Reference to pronouns, honorifics, etc. in French	
		Responding to follow-up question/comment from investigator	
		Responding to/referencing fellow participant	