

OF PRONOUN HAVERS AND HAVERS-NOT: THE SEMANTIC SHIFT OF 'PRONOUN' IN ONLINE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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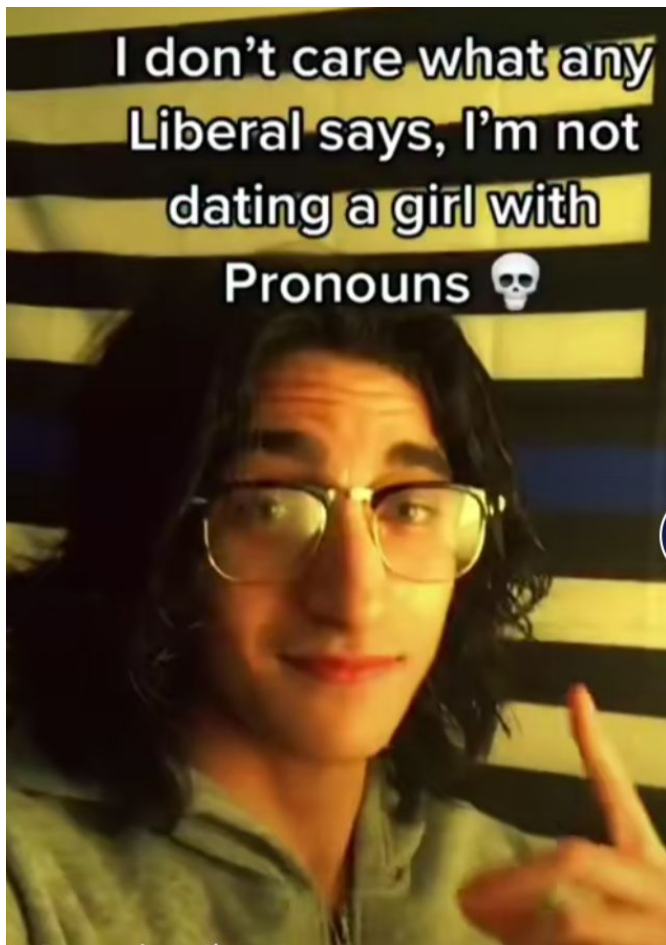
OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical frameworks
3. Quantitative methods and results: Twitter
4. Qualitative methods and results: Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, Tumblr, Twitter
5. Discussion and future directions

CW: Posts mocking gender inclusivity will be displayed/discussed

THEY USE THEIR ADJECTIVES TO DENY US OUR PRONOUNS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT WE ARE NOUNS. TO THEM WE ARE VERBS. THEY CALL US [DANGEROUS], BECAUSE WE ARE [DISTRACTING], [DECEIVING], [DESTROYING]. THESE ARE NOT MERELY THINGS WE DO, THESE ARE THINGS WE ARE. ALWAYS DOING, NEVER BEING.

INTRODUCTION



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar 2007)

- What do current usages of the word “pronoun” reveal about both gender and linguistic ideologies?
- What are the discourses in which shift is occurring? What does this reveal about the goals and effects of shift?
- What do these usages reveal about gendered power dynamics?

(Counter-)resistance (Talbot 2007)

- Attacks against efforts to resist oppression
 - e.g. attacks on ‘political correctness,’ or more recently ‘wokeness’

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Semantic shift: Changes in meaning over time

- Amelioration vs. Pejoration
 - e.g. 'noble' (of the nobility → virtuous) vs. 'villain' (serf → lowly person → evil person)
- Broadening vs. Narrowing
 - e.g. 'holiday' (holy day → break from work) vs. 'girl' (young person → young woman)

QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Full Twitter archive search (04/2006 - 11/2022) with Academic API access

- Query: “pronoun(s)” in English → 9.3 million tweets
- Fields of interest: Tweet text & date, user description
- Total counts of English tweets for 1 random day per month
- Gathered lists of words co-occurring with “pronoun(s)” for future research

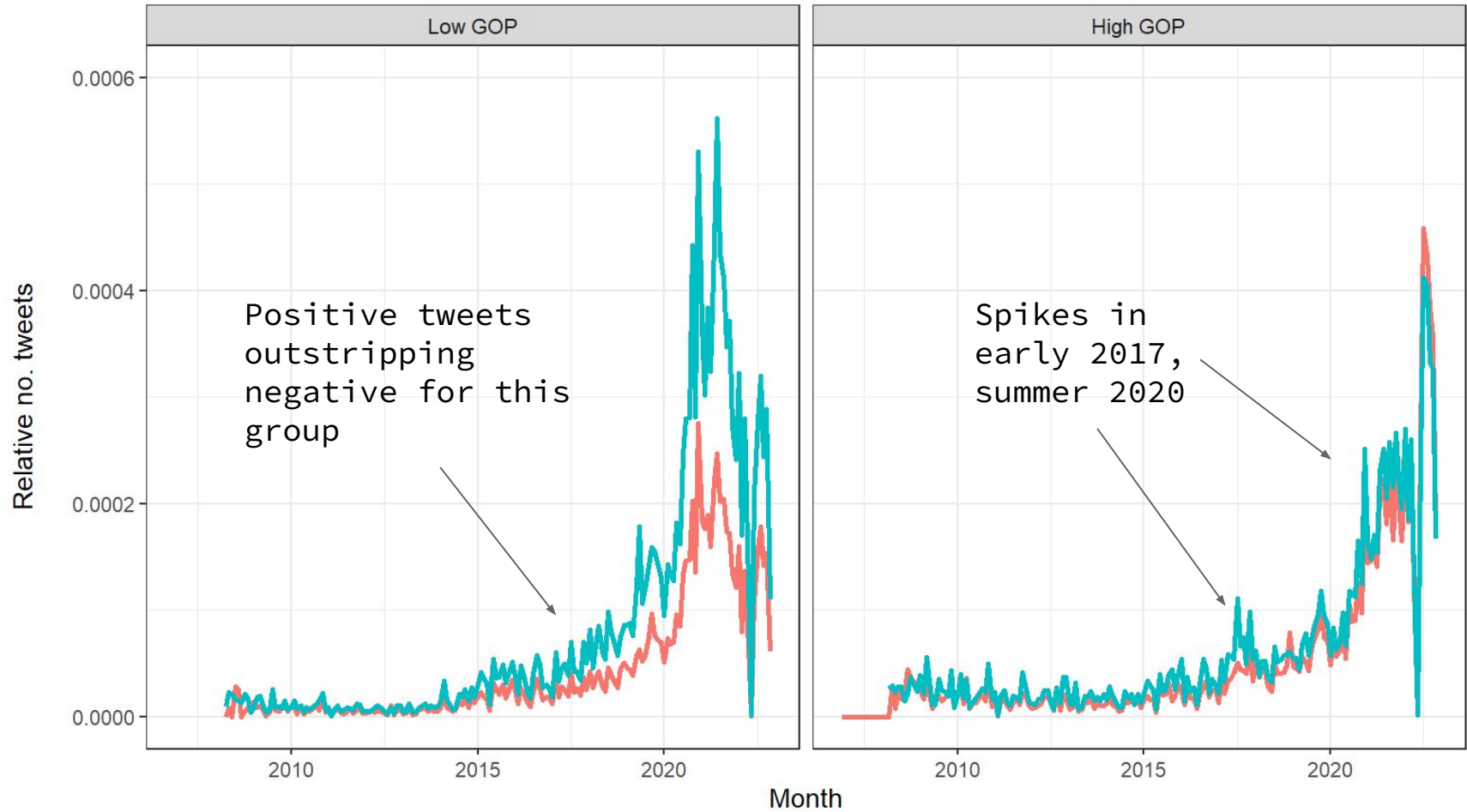
QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Sentiment analysis with VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sentiment Reasoner) (Hutto & Gilbert 2014)

Users given “GOP probability” based on tweets & self-provided information, using machine learning (cf. Paialunga 2021) and split into “low” and “high” categories

Relative usage for each month:
“pronoun(s)” tweets/estimated total English tweets





(Random 25% sample)

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

- Posts coded along 2 dimensions of semantic shift (amelioration/pejoration, broadening/narrowing)
- Lexical co-occurrences
- Other thematic motifs

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Semantic shift

- Interrater agreement on amelioration/pejoration
- Disagreement on broadening/narrowing
 - Narrow sense seems to always co-occur with the broad sense (few online users are unaware of broader sense)
 - Some speakers *only* have the broader sense



HarriBlueBerry · 2 mo. ago

Cis is not a pronoun it's an adjective... I hate that the definition of "pronouns" is being blurred by transphobia.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Emergent themes

1. Possession of pronouns
2. Pronouns as an ideology
3. Pronouns as a threat to hegemonic masculinity
4. Moral panic
5. Absurdism

**My pronouns
are not
preferred.
They are
required.**



It's wild to me how everyone has roughly the same "world is ending" feeling right now but some people feel that way because of fascism and climate change while others feel that way, with equal intensity, because of drag queens at libraries and singular they/them pronouns.

1. POSSESSION OF PRONOUNS

- a. pronoun havers (and those who ostensibly do not have them)
- b. my/your/their/... pronouns
- c. pronoun jewelry



I think it's hilarious that TRAs actually think calling me a TERF hurts me because they don't get the joke. I'm not as fragile as you pronoun havers.

2. PRONOUNS AS AN IDEOLOGY

#skeleclover #gender nonsense
#from the pronoun fandom #radfem safe
#terf safe

- a. people 'believe' or 'don't believe' things about them
 - i. for pro-pronoun folks, an ideology of respect
 - ii. for anti-pronoun folks, an ideology of control

impact

USING THE CORRECT PRONOUNS FOR SOMEONE IS A SIGN OF BASIC HUMAN DECENCY AND CAN HELP TO CREATE A KINDER, MORE COMPASSIONATE WORLD.

正しい代名詞を使うことで
あなたの人間力を示すことができ、
やさしい世界をつくることに繋がります。



It's less about getting someone's pronouns "right" and more about truly seeing them in their identity.

theorybush



radrenblog

S'abonner

its just really funny when the tras force pronouns onto people 😭

#gerard way they/them 🦴 kys

3. PRONOUNS AS A THREAT TO HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

- a. threat to cis- and hetero-normativity
- b. threat to cis male dominance



None So Arch-Vile

@deportablediz

I love the central contradiction in conservative gender politics where being a man is both an unchangeable biological fact and something that is revoked if you don't perform masculinity well enough.

Isabella Maria DeLuca @Isabella... · 05 Sep 22

If your boyfriend has he/him in his bio- you don't have a boyfriend, you have a girlfriend.

[Show this thread](#)

6:53 AM · 07 Sep 22

Rex2x4 🍀 +3 · 2 mo. ago

Last corporate job I had a bunch of fat white women in mangment and HR positions insisted on the use of Latinx. They wanted the whole building to add their perfer pronouns and gender on their emails.

Its not everyone. Its literally 95% women who've never had social power before. They want us all to act like women pretend to act in public to fit in with other women.

↑ 89 ↓ 🗨 Reply Share Report Save Follow



4. MORAL PANIC

- a. "Pronouns" = gender confusion for children
- b. Indoctrination of "the youth"



REPUBLICAN	-V-	DEMOCRAT
AMERICA FIRST		AMERICA LAST
FREE MARKET/CAPITALISM		WELFARE FOR ALL
2A		TURN IN YOUR GUNS
FREEDOM OF RELIGION		RELIGION IS HOMOPHOBIC
LAW & ORDER		DEFUND POLICE
CLOSED BORDERS/ LEGAL IMMIGRATION		OPEN BORDERS/ ENDLESS MIGRATION
ELECTION INTEGRITY		UNLIMITED MAIL-IN BALLOTS
VOTER ID		VOTER ID IS RACIST
SCHOOL BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY		PARENTS ARE DOMESTIC TERRORISTS
UPHOLD ORIGINAL CONSTITUTION		CONSTITUTION IS OUTDATED/NEEDS REVISED
STRONG MILITARY		GLOBAL WEAKNESS
PROTECT THE UNBORN		ABORTION AFTER BIRTH
MALE & FEMALE		78+ GENDER PRONOUNS
ENERGY INDEPENDENCE		GREEN NEW DEAL
FREEDOM OF SPEECH		CANCEL/WOKE CULTURE
STATES' RIGHTS		FEDERAL CONTROL
		SHUTDOWNS/MASKS/



5. ABSURDISM

Satirizing pronouns (and therefore progressivism) as excessive

- deliberate, mean-spirited poking fun
- commentary on the state of language and culture
 - satirizing things that aren't understood
 - "my pronouns are try/me"
- reclaiming resistance through satire

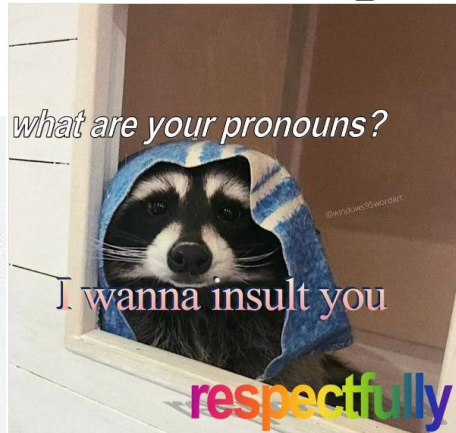


You don't need to be a boring he/him anymore! Now you can wow your friends and jazz up your life with new winter catalog pronouns!

Here are the most exciting pronouns you can try out today:

1. **I/Me:** Drop the pretense. Your pronouns aren't about social justice or an imaginary identity. They're about *you*.
2. **Trump/Won:** OOOOHHhhhhh! Libs owned!
3. **Doe/Deer/Female Deer:** Great if you're 16, going on 17.
4. **Free/Assange:** Did you know he's still sitting in a jail cell awaiting extradition to America where he's facing charges of journalism?
5. **Thing 1/Thing 2:** For when you identify as human-like twins who fly kites indoors.
6. **Ross/Rachel:** Pick "Ross" if you thought Ross and Rachel were on a break, pick "Rachel" if you thought they weren't. Can be fluid.
7. **Legion/Legion-self:** You are many, and also sometimes identify as swine.
8. **Holly/Jolly:** The war on Christmas is an attack on you. Also, you are fat.

JUST A
THEY/THEM
OUT CAUSING
MAY/HEM



people are still hung up about the singular "they" but that's not my priority. when ya say "we" do you mean you and i or you and someone else???

we need another "we" god damnit. #pronouns

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Kirby Conrod
@kirbyconrod

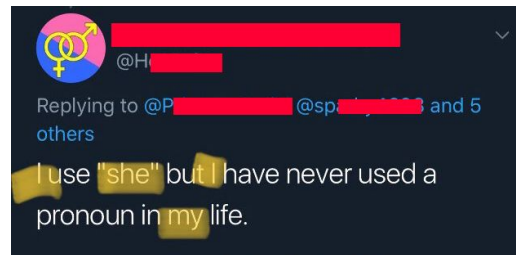
this week has been another influx of fascist transphobes wilfully saying wrong things about pronouns because, as we have discussed!! the word "pronoun" to them is a dogwhistle for forbidden gender transgression of any kind. they don't care about linguistics or grammar!

What do we *do* with this information?

- We can stop getting baited into amplifying transphobic and politically opportunistic messaging (cf. Conrod 2022)
- We keep resisting and sharing our joy & positive experiences

Future research

- Quantitative directions: Network analysis, more nuanced classification, co-occurrences
- Qualitative directions: Analyses beyond social media (e.g. legislation or policies against sharing pronouns)



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