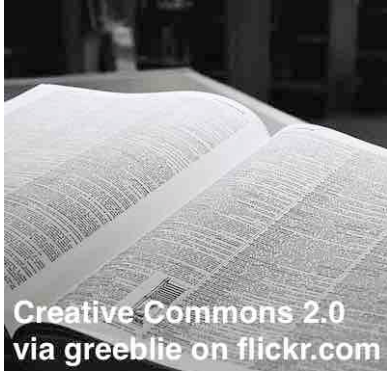


The word 'they' is now also a singular pronoun

20th September, 2019



The reference book company Merriam-Webster has added a new definition of the pronoun "they" to its famous Webster's Dictionary. It now lists the word "they" as referring to a "single person whose gender identity is non-binary". This will be welcome news for those who identify neither as male nor female - people with non-binary identities. Many institutions have already incorporated a gender-neutral option into their official forms. A growing number of local governments, schools and airlines have introduced the gender choice of "X" to accommodate people who do not consider themselves as male or female, and for gender fluid people who switch between different genders.

Merriam-Webster stated that the use of "they" in place of "he" or "she" recognizes people who did not "conform to an expected gender expression, or who seemed to be neither male nor female". It added: "We've struggled to find the right language to describe these people, and in particular, the right pronouns." It points out that the word "they" has been used as a singular pronoun since the late 1300s. William Shakespeare used it in this way in the early 17th century. In 1898, the playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote in his play Antony and Cleopatra that: "No man goes to battle to be killed....But they do get killed." Merriam-Webster says that today, "nearly everyone uses the singular "they" in casual conversation".

Sources:
washingtonpost.com / cnn.com / merriam-webster.com

Writing

There should be just one subject personal pronoun. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

reference / definition / list / gender / welcome news / institutions / gender / female / they / conform / male / language / pronouns / singular / playwright / battle / casual

True / False

- a) The article says Merriam-Webster is the biggest dictionary company. T / F
- b) 'They' refers to a single person whose gender identity is non-binary. T / F
- c) Some airlines have a gender choice of 'X' for gender-neutral people. T / F
- d) Gender fluid people are those who switch between different genders. T / F
- e) Merriam-Webster found it easy to describe gender-neutral people. T / F
- f) The article said the first use of 'they' as a singular pronoun was in 1598. T / F
- g) Shakespeare never used 'they' as a singular pronoun. T / F
- h) Merriam-Webster says most people use the singular 'they' today. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. definition | a. relate |
| 2. famous | b. nowadays |
| 3. identify | c. increasing |
| 4. growing | d. informal |
| 5. switch | e. battled |
| 6. conform | f. meaning |
| 7. struggled | g. manner |
| 8. way | h. follow |
| 9. today | i. renowned |
| 10. casual | j. transition |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What is your favorite dictionary?
- c) How difficult is the pronoun system in English?
- d) What are gender pronouns like in your language?
- e) What is the function of pronouns?
- f) What different types of pronoun are there in English?
- g) How important is using grammar correctly in conversation?
- h) What questions would you like to ask the dictionary?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. a single person whose gender identity | a. 17th century |
| 2. welcome | b. fluid people |
| 3. incorporated a gender- | c. the late 1300s |
| 4. introduced the gender choice | d. is non-binary |
| 5. gender | e. to be killed |
| 6. who seemed to be neither | f. neutral option |
| 7. used as a singular pronoun since | g. conversation |
| 8. in the early | h. of "X" |
| 9. No man goes to battle | i. male nor female |
| 10. in casual | j. news |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think of dictionaries?
- What are the good and bad things about dictionaries?
- What do you think of pronouns?
- What do you think of using 'they' in the singular?
- How good is it that dictionaries are recognizing non-binary people?
- What do you think of the choice 'X' instead of 'male' or 'female'?
- Should languages not have gender-based pronouns?
- What do you know about gender fluidity?

Spelling

- The rferenece book company
- a new nfiieitdon of the pronoun
- whose gender identity is non-ianbry
- Many sinttutioins have already
- a gender-nrteual option
- the gender choice of "X" to mamaeotoccd people
- an expected gender ensproxies
- We've gseutdglr to find the right language
- used as a ugnlsari pronoun
- in the early 17th cetrnyu
- the yltpiawhgr George Bernard
- in slauac conversation

Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. i	3. a	4. c	5. j
6. h	7. e	8. g	9. b	10. d

Role Play

Role A – Subject Pronouns

You think subject pronouns are the most difficult to master. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their pronouns are easier. Also, tell the others which are the easiest of these (and why): possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns or relative pronouns.

Role B – Possessive Pronouns

You think possessive pronouns are the most difficult to master. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their pronouns are easier. Also, tell the others which are the easiest of these (and why): subject pronouns, reflexive pronouns or relative pronouns.

Role C – Reflexive Pronouns

You think reflexive pronouns are the most difficult to master. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their pronouns are easier. Also, tell the others which are the easiest of these (and why): possessive pronouns, subject pronouns or relative pronouns.

Role D – Relative Pronouns

You think relative pronouns are the most difficult to master. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them why their pronouns are easier. Also, tell the others which are the easiest of these (and why): possessive pronouns, reflexive pronouns or subject pronouns.

Speaking – Pronouns

Rank these with your partner. Put the most difficult pronouns to use at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| • Reflexive pronouns | • Subject pronouns |
| • Interrogatives | • Object Pronouns |
| • Relative pronouns | • Possessive pronouns |
| • All pronouns | • Demonstrative pronouns |

Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	T	e	F	f	F	g	F	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.