

Abstract

The present thesis studies gender-neutral pronominal reference to dual gender nouns such as *judge* or *lawyer* in legal English. Although recent decades have shown a trend toward gender-neutral language, the legal sector remains significantly influenced by long-standing traditions and is reluctant to embrace linguistic change. Until recently, it was common practice to use masculine forms to refer to both genders (unmarked *he*) to avoid ambiguity in laws and other legal documents.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore the current state of this issue and determine whether legal English is moving away from the use of the generic *he*. The thesis also focuses on identifying and analyzing linguistic strategies used in the field as gender-neutral alternatives.

The theoretical part presents findings from previous surveys and studies focused on this phenomenon, along with the historical context and development of the use of generic *he*. Additionally, it discusses recommended strategies for gender-neutral reference and reasons why it is important to study gender equality from a linguistic perspective.

The research part of the thesis analyses 200 examples of reference to dual gender nouns such as *employee* in the English spoken corpus ParlaMint. The study revealed a substantial shift toward the use of gender-neutral language. Speakers of British English readily use the singular *they* and almost never use generic *he*. Apart from the singular *they*, speakers most frequently opt for noun repetition and the coordinative phrase *he or she*.

Keywords: androcentrism, gender, gender linguistics, language change, legal English, feminism, singular *they*, unmarked *he*, dual gender nouns