



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Simpson, L. and Dewaele, Jean-Marc (2019) Self-misgendering among multilingual transgender speakers. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (256), pp. 103-128. ISSN 0165-2516.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/18541/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

Self-Misgendering Among Multilingual Transgender Speakers¹

Lauren Simpson

Jean-Marc Dewaele

Birkbeck College, University of London

Abstract: “Misgendering” is a term used broadly to mean referring to someone using the wrong gender. In the transgender context, it usually refers to cases where a transgender person is referred to using the gender assigned at birth, rather than according to gender presentation. Misgendering is sometimes a form of anti-trans aggression, but can also be accidental or otherwise unintended. “Self-misgendering”, where transgender speakers unintentionally misgender themselves, is apparently previously unstudied, seems mainly to occur in a foreign-language context, and may bear some similarity to language-interference effects observed in the study of multilinguals, a “first-gender effect” analogous to first-language effects. One may also hypothesize social gender bias, variable gender-identity, or similar factors. This paper quantitatively surveys self-reported self-misgendering among multilingual transgender speakers to identify factors of correlation or causation. Using data and respondents’ comments from an online survey, it shows strong correlation between self-misgendering by full-time transgender speakers and (lack of) fluency in the language spoken, with no significant correlation to other linguistic or social gender-related factors. This suggests the self-misgendering phenomenon is primarily a fluency effect, independent of social or identity factors such as attitude to gender in language, attitude to being misgendered, or “default” masculine gender.

1. Introduction

This paper examines multilingual transgender speakers, focusing on a specific form of gender-error (“self-misgendering”) that is particularly pertinent to individuals who have undergone gender transition.

¹ To appear in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*

Researchers have investigated “first language transfer” – effects of a speaker’s first language on use of subsequently learned languages – or effects of other changes in such as migration or changes in social context (Odlin 1989). In such studies, the speakers’ social and linguistic gender is an unchanging factor, while other factors change. In traditional sociolinguistic studies, where cisgender is the assumed norm with no allowance for transgender, an interlocutor’s gender-references are therefore assumed to be immutable over their lifetime. Transgender interlocutors provide an opportunity to study variation in this “immutable” factor. Increasing access to transgender subjects now provides an opportunity to study “first gender effects” on language usage.

Also, with this increased access, it becomes progressively more valid also to study transgender in an everyday social context, outside the context of marginalization that past studies have often focused on. This study therefore examines the linguistic challenges that second language users experience when acquiring grammatical gender, which is particularly laden for transgender people. Our investigation is informed by the research on the acquisition of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence in a second language (Howard, Mougeon & Dewaele 2013).

While the concept of gender in different languages corresponds to various categorisations (masculine/feminine in some languages, animate/inanimate in others, etc), for purposes of this study, only grammatical-gender systems that correspond to “sex” (masculine/feminine or masculine/feminine/neuter) are considered, as only these relate to speakers’ social gender identity. Throughout this paper, references to whether a language is “gendered” therefore refer only to “sex-based” gender (so-called “natural gender”).

2. Theoretical Context

2.1 Misgendering and Self-Misgendering

Among the transgender community, “being misgendered” is a topic of frequent discussion and complaint. For example, transwomen, perceived by some around them as “born male”, often find

themselves referred to as “he” rather than “she” (which they prefer and expect), or addressed with unwanted gender-specific forms such as “sir” or “mate”, and the opposite occurs to transmen. In languages with pervasive gender, this phenomenon also occurs in use of gendered adjectives and other gendered language constructs – e.g. referring in French to a transfemale as “grand” (masculine form of “tall”) rather than “grande” (feminine form). Misgendering is, understandably, generally unwelcome by the individuals being misgendered, and it is often perceived as an act of verbal aggression (Nordmarken 2014; Ansara & Hegarty 2013, 2014).

From a linguistic point of view, misgendering can be simply defined as referring to a person not using the form of gender reference that the person *expects* or prefers – generally this is the person’s socially presented gender; for cisgender people, this aligns with their natal gender, for transgender it may be fixed or may vary.

Like any other speech act, the meaning of misgendering is dependent on context and intent, and may range from a cisgenderist act of verbal aggression to an unintended slip, or even a simple error.

One can therefore taxonomize the pragmatics of misgendering:

Aggressive or “political” misgendering: The speaker is aware of the referred-to-person’s gender-presentation and expected gender reference, and intends to embarrass or “out” the referred-to individual, to deny the validity of the person’s expected gender reference, and/or to deny the validity of gender transition as a personal or social phenomenon.

Historical or habitual misgendering: The speaker is aware of the referred-to person’s expected gender reference, has no intention to misgender them, but has a long-standing memory of them in their pre-transition gender, or a well-established habit of referring to them in that gender and, without conscious intent, refers to them using that gender. The speaker, if they become aware of the misgendering, may therefore be embarrassed by their unintended error.

Mixed-perception misgendering: The speaker is aware of the referred-to person's expected gender reference, has no intention to misgender them, but, in response to perceived gender indicators (voice, appearance, height, etc) unconsciously uses the wrong gender reference with no intent to do so. The speaker, if they become aware of the misgendering, may therefore be embarrassed by their unintended error.

Uninformed misgendering: The speaker has no negative intent toward the referred-to person, may have perceived the person as transgender, but is unaware that they wish to be referred to in the gender they are presenting as, and the speaker believes, with no aggressive or impolite intention, that the person would prefer being referred to in their so-called "birth gender".

Mistaken misgendering: The speaker misperceives the referred-to person's gender, and therefore misgenders them due to this mistaken perception. This also happens sometimes to cisgender people – it is not a transgender-specific phenomenon.

Ironic misgendering: The speaker knows and accepts the referred-to person's expected gender, and is misgendering them for ironic reasons (e.g. to highlight a perceived failure to conform to gender-based expectations). This is not a transgender-oriented phenomenon.

Accidental/random misgendering: The speaker, through lack of fluency or simple random error, uses an incorrect gender reference. This occasionally and apparently randomly happens to anyone, transgender or not – it is not a transgender-oriented phenomenon.

This study seeks to empirically investigate the phenomenon – previously unstudied and only anecdotally reported – where transgender speakers unintentionally misgender *themselves* in a multilingual context, to determine where it falls in the above taxonomy, and to examine possible causes or contributory factors. Since self-misgendering also appears to manifest primarily in foreign-language usage, it may have causes or triggers related to the linguistics of second language acquisition and usage.

2.2 Research Questions

As an initial exploratory study of the phenomenon of self-misgendering, the research questions of this study are:

Research Question 1: Is there a pattern of self-misgendering (SMG) in transgender speakers after gender transition? The aim is to examine change – to determine whether, beyond some possible “background” level of accidental self-misgendering errors, there is a pattern showing these errors increasing in transgender speakers after gender-transition.

Of course, anyone might self-misgender occasionally, simply by accident or lack of fluency. This study investigates *increased* self-misgendering after gender-transition.

Research Question 2: What factors correlate to any increased SMG? Is it, as anecdotal observations suggest, a phenomenon that occurs primarily when speaking foreign languages? Are there factors that tend to predict SMG?

Research Question 3: What mechanisms can be suggested as plausible causes of, or triggers of, this post-transition SMG? Are these explanations supported by qualitative observations as well as quantitative data?

2.3 Hypotheses

Self-misgendering appears to be a previously unstudied phenomenon. There are apparently no previous studies of accidental self-misgendering among transgender speakers.

There are published papers on misgendering in the context of medical treatment or research (Ansara & Hegarty 2014) and some qualitative anthropological studies of (usually intentional) misgendering in closed transgender social groups, where it is usually observed as a form of social positioning or rebuke, or as aggressive, playful or otherwise-marked speech (e.g. Kulick 1998; Besnier 2002). There is also a study by Friedman (2014) of gender perception and predictors of misgendering. However,

these studies, while describing particular examples of misgendering in transgender contexts, do not pertain to the self-misgendering behaviour that is the subject of this study.

With no existing literature on the phenomenon of unintentional transgender self-misgendering, there is no relevant theoretical basis or previous research on which to base hypotheses. The question is therefore open to conjecture.

This study therefore suggests a number of hypotheses, H1 to H5 below, and seeks to gather data to identify which of these have a degree of observable validity:

H1. Fluency effect: Where transgender SMG occurs, it may simply be related to (lack of) fluency in the language spoken. In this scenario, the probable cause is a speakers' poorly internalized model of gender in the foreign language – a notoriously difficult aspect to master in a foreign language (Dewaele & Véronique 2001; Dewaele 2015). In this scenario, we should expect SMG to occur more in non-fluently spoken languages learned prior to the speaker's gender transition, and expect SMG to be particularly unlikely to occur in languages learned *after* public gender-transition, as the post-transition gender-references would be acquired as the language is learned.

H2. Bias to misgender in "one direction": Social or linguistic gender-biases may create tendencies to self-misgender. For example, the fact that male gender is the "default" gender in most languages (Dewaele & Véronique 2001) could bias the direction of SMG where it occurs, possibly causing trans-females to self-misgender more often than trans-males (or vice-versa?).

H3. Gender-identity differences by language: Where SMG occurs, it may relate to differences between speakers' subjective identity when speaking their native language (L1) and when speaking a foreign language (LX), triggering a form of mixed-perception misgendering in the transgender speakers themselves.

H4. Gender attitudes: Where SMG occurs, it may relate to an individual's broader attitudes to gender in language or to gender overall. For example, someone with a strong dislike of being

misgendered by others might be less inclined to self-misgender, or someone who likes or dislikes gender in language might be more (or less) likely to self-misgender.

H5. L1 “genderedness”: Where SMG occurs, it may relate to gender-structure or degree of “genderedness” in the speaker’s L1. For example, one might suppose that native speakers of a pervasively gendered language (like French, German, or Hebrew, where a person’s gender is present not only in pronouns, but also in adjectives or even verbs) would be *less* inclined to experience post-transition SMG when speaking other gendered languages, while native speakers of a non-gendered language (like Turkish or Finnish, which don’t even have separate words for “he” and “she”), or of a semi-gendered language (like English or Swedish, where gender exists but is not pervasive through the language), having a different perception of gender in language, might be *more* inclined to SMG when speaking a pervasively gendered language. This hypothesis suggests that native familiarity with any pervasive linguistic “sex-gender” model might render speakers less likely to SMG in LXs – therefore it is a theory of first-language effects, and differs from H3 and H1.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

This is primarily a quantitative study, conducted using an online questionnaire-based survey of bilingual/multilingual transgender subjects, with additional qualitative input from open-text questions in the survey. There is no experimental treatment or control group – it is a correlative study of self-reported self-misgendering behaviours correlated to gender attitudes, linguistic background, gender-transition history, and other demographics.

3.2 Research Design Factors

Several aspects of the research design are enumerated here, with a description of measures taken to address potential weaknesses:

Access to respondents: Transgender population can be sparsely distributed, and/or hidden, and it would previously have been difficult to contact, or get a good sample of different transgender respondents. However, this problem is greatly reduced with the ability to make contact through the internet.

Lack of theoretical basis or previous studies: Since this research is in an apparently previously unstudied area, there no pre-existing theoretical basis. The results of this study are analysed to identify which of several hypotheses seem to be supported by the data.

Privacy/anonymity and possible associated sampling errors: Since many transgender subjects wish to remain anonymous, it is effectively impossible to ensure there are no false respondents or duplicate respondents. This is a potential problem shared with most online studies and with studies of stigmatized groups with anonymous respondents: the possibility of duplicate respondents or even of impersonation (fabricated responses from cisgender individuals). To reduce this risk, the questionnaire was promoted only in specialist online transgender groups and forums. In addition, to avoid creating a participant-self-selection bias through attracting respondents with a particular “agenda” regarding misgendering, there was no statement that the study focussed on misgendering – it was merely described as a survey about “how transgender people use gender in language”, and the SMG questions were located near the end of the questionnaire.

Lack of population demographics: Since transgender demographics are not accurately known (Meier & Labuski 2013) it is impossible to check whether attribute-profiles of the respondent group match transgender population(s) overall.

Self-reported data: All data in this study are self-reported. This is not problematical for questions about attitudes or demographic attributes. But there could be bias in self-reported language proficiency or emotive events such as being misgendered. Measures are taken to reduce risk of

misreporting for these questions, such as the use of descriptive phrases rather than generic rating-scales in the response choices.

English language: The questionnaire was in English only. Consequently, all respondents had English as one of their languages. Similarly, most of the promotion of the questionnaire was in English, though in international contexts, and responses are from a wide range of countries, with a wide range of native languages.

3.3 Questionnaire Design and Data-Analysis Model

Here is a summary of the questions found on the questionnaire:

Demographic questions: transgender category (transmale, transfemale, genderfluid, genderless, other); living in role (full-time, part-time, occasional, never); time since transition (years); preferred gender reference (aka preferred pronoun); age; country of birth; country of current residence. Other data (e.g. natal gender for binary-identified respondents) was derivable from this data.

Languages spoken: number of languages spoken, and specific questions about up to three of these languages; age of first exposure to the language; peak proficiency (self assessed on a rating scale), frequency of use; language loss (if any). Other data (e.g. L1 “genderedness”) was derived from this data.

Misgendering, and attitude to gender: attitude to being misgendered by others; frequency of being misgendered by others; increased (post-transition) tendency to self-misgender in native (L1) and foreign languages (LX); attitude to gender in language (like it, dislike it, neutral); variation (or not) in sense of gender when speaking different languages.

The “increased tendency to self-misgender” questions define the principal dependent variables in this study, SMG-overall and SMG-mode (described below).

Free-text questions: All the “other” options allow free text. There are also “additional comments” free-text questions in every section.

Generally, the multiple-choice questions in this questionnaire provide a choice between a number of descriptive phrases, with the respondent choosing the phrase or sentence that matches closest.

For many questions, the choices are entirely nominal (gender categories etc). In some other cases, it is tempting to interpret the responses as indicating degrees, but with a fairly small sample and no opportunity to cross-compare or normalize different respondents’ interpretation of the choices, this study chooses to use a caution-based approach, preferring to test correlations between data categories, using Chi-squared data-dependence tests, rather than to use methods that depend on interpretation of degree or interval by assigning numerical values to the responses (t-tests, linear or other regressions etc.). This approach is valid for correlating category-based data, on the assumption that any errors in the sample are randomly (normally) distributed.

To ensure independence in the correlations, we avoid treating the responses for each language spoken by each respondent as a separate data row – being multiple responses from each respondent, these are not statistically independent observations. Instead, we use a pair of derived variables for each respondent, enabling us to use one data-row for each respondent only – this preserves the integrity of the data for statistical analysis. These two derived variables are *SMG-overall* (whether the respondent reports a tendency to self-misgender in any language) and *SMG-mode* (whether the respondent reports a tendency to self-misgender in their L1, in foreign languages (LXs) only, or not at all). The analysis determines correlation between these derived SMG observations and other factors in the data.

Significance threshold: in this study, a p-value of less than 0.05 is treated as indicating a statistically significant correlation.

As the survey would be given to English LX subjects, it was tested for comprehensibility with a number of English LX speakers. From these tests, revisions made to help ensure comprehensibility for such respondents. Feedback was also sought from transgender contacts regarding the word-choice for gender-options and other transgender-specific questions, and additional changes made, based on their feedback.

3.4 Data Collection

The questionnaire was promoted online, mainly through social-networking sites and forums used by the transgender community (over 30 groups and forums, based in various countries). To help reassure possible respondents, it was made clear that responses were anonymous and the researcher was herself transgender. The survey promotion focussed mainly on groups in English-speaking countries, and in Europe, where “sex-gendered” languages are more common.

4. Results – Descriptive Data

4.1 Data Summary

One hundred thirty-two “raw” responses were received. Data cleaning eliminated 17 as unusable, due to inconsistent/disqualifying responses, leaving 115 respondents’ data to be used in the analysis.

Data-cleaning also modified some responses, mostly trivial changes (standardising country names, language names etc.), but 20 involved interpretation of responses, mainly where respondents chose “other” in order to use the text-response to indicate their personal terminology preferences or other details of wording. Where it was clear from the respondent’s text that their answer matched one of the questionnaire’s intended categories, these responses were correspondingly reclassified. Care was taken to avoid discarding useful information about individuals, but also to avoid excluding people’s responses simply because they had asserted their individual terminological preferences.

The following table shows a data summary, providing an overall view of the respondent group.

Table 1 Summary of data collected

Attribute	Range of responses (n = 115)						
Transgender category	Transmale 41 (35.7%)	Transfemale 46 (40.0%)	Non-binary 28 (24.3%)				
Living in role	Full-time 64 (55.7%)	Part-time 24 (20.9%)	Occasional 26 (22.6%)	Never 1 (0.9%)			
Time since public gender transition	0-2yrs 36 (31.3%)	3-5yrs 18 (15.7%)	6-10yrs 17 (14.8%)	10+yrs 20 (17.4%)	NA (no transition) 24 (20.9%)		
Age	16- 19 16 (13.9%)	20-29 36 (31.3%)	30-39 21 (18.3%)	40-49 19 (16.5%)	50-59 17 (14.8%)	60-69 4 (3.5%)	70+ 2 (1.7%)
Number of languages spoken	Two 28 (24.3%)	Three 33 (28.7%)	Four 29 (25.2%)	Five 15 (13.0%)	Six 5 (4.3%)	Seven 3 (2.6%)	Eight 2 (1.7%)
L1 (18 languages)	English 44 (38.3%)	Swedish 15 (13.0%)	Dutch 14 (12.2%)	Danish 13 (11.3%)	German 8 (7.0%)	Hungarian 6 (5.3%)	Spanish 4 (3.5%) Other 11 (9.6%)
SMG-overall (tendency to SMG in any language)	Yes 35 (30.4%)	No 80 (69.6%)					
SMG-Mode (derived category)	Ntv 18 (15.7%)	FL 17 (14.8%)	None 80 (69.6%)				
Attitude to being misgendered	Not bothered 23 (20.0%)	Slightly annoyed 28 (24.3%)	Somewhat upset ("usually bothers me") 40 (34.8%)	Very upset ("usually ruins my day") 17 (14.8%)	NA 7 (6.1%)		
Gender sense in different languages	Same in all languages 91 (79.1%)	Different in pre-transition language(s) 12 (10.4%)	Subjective gender sense that varies by language 7 (6.1%)	Other 5 (4.3%)			
Attitude to gender in language	Like it a lot ("good that gender can be present all through our speech") 15 (13.0%)	Like it a bit 15 (13.0%)	Neutral 25 (21.7%)	Dislike it a bit 19 (16.5%)	Dislike it a lot ("wish we could even get rid of 'he' and 'she') 41 (35.7%)		

4.2 Qualitative Illustrations – Subjects' Comments

While quantitative analysis can reveal patterns that may not show clearly in a strictly qualitative study, it's important to remember that each row of data represents an individual's views and life experience, and not to lose sight of the people behind the numbers. A selection of these often-evocative comments follows.

Key:

xF=Transfemale

xM=Transmale

N=Non-binary

FT=Full-time (living in role)

PT=Part-time

Occ=Occasional

Subjects' comments on their own gender sense & gender presentation:

There are more comments in this section from non-binary respondents, as there is a wider range of possible expression than for binary identity, and a wide range of terminology preferences, with associated individuals' different personal identity models:

"I am genderqueer. I recognize that there are male and female, and I feel that my gender is a mix of the two. Some days I am more masculine, some days for feminine. (#19 N PT)

Although I'm FtM I also consider myself gender fluid." (#71 xM-FT)

" [I am a] Transsexual WOMAN (I've not been ever male, so "MtF" is not an acceptable way to name transsexual women -nor FtM for transsexual men-); and "transwoman" too, is not right, because it seems like it was a different term from woman, and regarding sex and gender, I'm a woman not anything else ..." (#32 xF-FT, excerpt from a much longer comment)

"changed juridical gender to M but identify as TRANSman, which for me, is not the same as identifying as male. It's an important part for me to make it clear because i don't believe in the binary gender model" (#75 xM-FT)

"Genderqueer transman, identify as mostly male. Love to cross dress for (street)theatre" (#67 xM-FT)

"I live as a (trans) man. Most people don't know I'm agender." (#57 N-Occ)

"To the people I already knew ~2 years ago, I identify as female, as they knew me back when I still lived as my birth-assigned gender, male. ... The people I met after my transition, mostly

assume I am female, and I told most of them I am actually neither male nor female.” (#68 N,PT)

The range of social/gender identities overlaps on the range of preferred pronouns and other gendered language constructs. Several respondents express desire for language change, usually toward gender-neutrality, including wishing to adopt new gender-neutral pronouns. The data in Table for “attitude to gender in language” shows some embrace gender in language, but most (non-binaries and binaries alike) dislike it:

“... I prefer they/them/theirs. Dutch doesn't have this option, so the equivalent of he/him/his for most people” (#57 N-Occ)

“I am somewhat in the transmasculine spectrum but i have 'out of gender' moments when i'm not just agender - i am neutral. ... socially, i have to fit in binary where English is spoken, i prefer male pronouns 'he/him/his' in addition to 'ze/zie/zir'. ... sometimes i like the word 'femme' but only as an adjective. for instance, 'femme guy' is a cool one.” (#48 xM-PT)

“I'm still not sure about my pronouns. In English I want people to use 'they' when referring to me. But in my mother tongue, German, there are only male and female pronouns so it's more difficult.” (#22 N-Occ)

“Usually he and him, because it's easier (I live in Spain and we don't have neutral pronouns). I also like ze, hir...” (#112 xM-FT)

“Preferred gender neutral pronouns in English: singular they, possibly zie...Preferred gender neutral pronouns in Swedish: hen or den” (#30 xM-FT)

“The matter is not what [pronoun] I "prefer"; speaking about me (or any other woman - cissexual or transsexual) the only right way to do it is using 'she', 'her'...), any other way is not only wrong, but it's verbal and psychological violence and abuse.” (#32 xF-FT)

"I prefer they/them as a pronoun, but in my native language (Dutch) these words only refer to things and not to persons. so I have to use he/him instead." (#66 N-FT)

For several respondents with non-binary gender identity, there is an acceptance that others will fail (or refuse) to adopt non-binary language ... but they especially **don't** want to be seen as their natal gender:

"I don't correct people who use male pronouns, though I prefer gender-neutral ones. If anyone would use female pronouns I correct them." (#109 N-Occ)

"I dislike being viewed as female. In spite being two spirit I feel, perhaps because female was the circumstance of my birth, more obstinate towards things that place me in a female category." (#97 N-PT)

Unsurprisingly, many respondents report contexts in which their transgender existence is not accepted. This often creates a situation where they live in role part time, or occasionally "revert" in particular circumstances:

"[I identify as] Two-spirit. I live in an area and have non tribal family that does not accept anything outside heterosexual gender binary and could face physical danger if I lived who I am 24/7. For this reason I only actively express my two spirit identity when safe. I do, however, wear both male and female clothes." (#97 N-PT)

"Out socially, not at work." (#89 xM-PT)

"When I return to my home country, which does not recognize my change in gender, I revert to using my gender and sex assigned at birth. ... My immediate family refer to me as female at all times. I allow people to refer to me in whichever pronoun in my home country - female during legal matters, male in a social context." (#98 xM-FT)

"My wife does not accept my trans gender" (#121 xF- not living in role)

On the other end of the spectrum, sometimes family is the **most** accepting milieu:

"My family accept me so when I am with them, which is most of the time, I am myself and online I am who I am, but at school I am not "out" yet so there I am not my real self" (#64 xM-PT)

"I am married and do not believe my husband would like to think of me as anything other than female" (#123 xF-FT)

On being misgendered by others:

"It depends on presentation. . If I get "misgendered" (spoken to as my birth gender) doesn't bother me to much but if they gender me as my preferred gender, even when dressed in my birth gender, it really makes me happy" (#14 xF-Occ)

"Some people in my life don't recognize my transition, they misgender me. Other people mostly misgender me based on my voice." (#57 N-Occ)

"I don't really care what I'm called. Sometimes it's nice to hear "She" when I'm dolled up, but otherwise; it has zero relevancy." (#21 N-Occ)

"[Misgendering is] normally purely accidental and mostly by people I knew before my Transition. I do not look anything like a male now." (#39 xF-FT)

"it doesn't bother me NOW, but it used to get me VERY UPSET before my transition." (#42 xM-FT)

"I am usually misgendered by my mother through use of gendered language (in Polish)" (#46 xM-FT)

"I have family members who have refused to change [the gender they use to refer to me]. Other than that, there is no problem." (#29 xF-FT)

“The only people who occasionally misgender me are my family living in another country. We don't speak very often, so it doesn't happen very often.” (#47 xM-FT)

“Although I almost always present androgynously, I rarely bother to correct people who incorrectly assume my gender.” (#58 N-Occ)

“I most often ‘pass’ as a cis male but some people (family for example) who knew me before my gender transition still use the wrong pronoun (she).” (#76 xM-FT)

“It annoys me more when people who know me do it. My maternal grandfather, who's senile, gets away with it though.” (#91 xM-FT)

On self-misgendering:

“Although other people can't misgender me, as I do not really care what pronouns others use for me, I can still misgender myself. My preference in pronouns changes way too often to tell others what my preferred pronoun is, but I can use the right one for myself.” (#68 N-PT L1=Dutch)

“It has been hard for me to unlearn feminine endings to adjectives in Spanish.” (#89 xM-PT L1=English)

“I learnt my L2 when I was male and learnt masculine grammar declension, which therefore became automatically part of my vocabulary. I have to now be careful, especially if I am talking quickly.” (#23 xF-FT L1=English)

“I think self-misgendering is due to force of habit – I became accustomed to speaking of myself with pronouns that are now incorrect.” (#58 N-Occ L1=English)

“It actually improved when I transitioned, maybe because before transition my mind rejected gendering of language.” (#29 xF-FT L1=English)

"I am half-German and thus my use of German is deeply tied to my identity, but not all of my German family knows that I'm trans (yes, even a couple of years into transition and 1.5 years on HRT, oops)" (#53 xM-FT L1=English)

On gender in language and subjective gender sense in different languages:

"French is a very Masculine/feminine divided language. But I find it easier to stay in Feminine mode in French as English is very simplistic in its gender expression." (#39 xF-FT L1=English)

"I feel more feminine speaking Korean [L3]." (#8 xF-FT L1=English)

"I am closer to my true (Female) gender when I speak in Spanish [L2]." (#29 xF-FT L1=English)

"Sometimes i feel the sound of my voice more masculine when speaking in English [L2]" (#31 xF-FT L1=Italian)

"I don't feel more masculine or feminine while speaking my first language, but gender seems to be more visible and have more weight in English and Swedish. That affects how much I think about my gender identity and the way people see my gender expression." (#34 N-FT L1=Finnish)

"I think gender is an oppressive patriarchal construct (note that this is not incompatible with the existence of trans people, as people still have an internal sense of what their bodies should look like) and would prefer it not to exist in any languages." (#53 xM-FT L1=English)

"The great thing about ASL is that pronouns are just pointing at someone or a reference point, which is really nice and I wish was appropriate in the hearing world" (#70 N-Occ L1=English)

5. Discussion and Findings

The majority of respondents report no increased tendency to self-misgender. However roughly 30% indicate they have observed an increased tendency to self-misgender, so the phenomenon, while reportedly a minority behaviour, is sufficiently widespread to warrant analysis.

We initially only expected relevant results in responses from binary-gender respondents who were living in role full-time. However, it became apparent that many part-time or non-binary respondents, even those who feel they cannot expect *others* to clearly identify their gender, have nonetheless a clear sense of when they *themselves* have self-misgendered. Therefore the following analysis is conducted with all respondents' data.

5.1 Correlations

The following table shows a summary of Chi-squared dependence tests between SMG-overall (with comments regarding SMG-mode) and other factors on the survey, covering hypotheses H1 to H5.

Table 2 Correlation of SMG (SMG-overall and SMG-mode) to other subject-attributes

	Correlation of	With	Hypothesis	Chi-squared value	p (equiv)	n =	Degrees Of Freedom	f(exp) Expected frequencies ²	Comment
A	SMG (overall)	TG category (xF, xM, N)	H2	3.1	.21	115	2	32-14-29-12-19-9	No significant correlation of gender to SMG. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.
B	SMG (overall)	Age		2.6	.62	115	4	11-5-25-11-15-6-13-6-16-7	SMG is almost entirely independent of age. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.
C	SMG (overall)	Time since transition		4.8	.31	108	4	28-8-14-4-13-4-15-4-13-4	No significant correlation of SMG to time since transition. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.
D	SMG (overall)	Attitude to being misgendered	H4	0.63	.89	108	3	12-5-28-12-19-9-16-7	People who hate being misgendered by others still SMG just as often as people who don't mind it at all. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.

² Note: As Chi-squared tests are calculated from differences between observed frequencies and "expected frequencies" f(exp), correlations based on small f(exp) values are questionable, as small random fluctuation could noticeably affect the result. Some of these tests use merged related categories, to avoid the problem of small f(exp) values.

	Correlation of	With	Hypothesis	Chi-squared value	p (equiv)	n =	Degrees of Freedom	f(exp) Expected frequencies ²	Comment
E	SMG (overall)	Attitude to gender in language	H4	2.9	.57	115	4	10-5-10-5-17-8-13-6-29-12	People who love gender in language SMG just as often as people who hate it. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.
F	SMG (overall)	Gender sense by language	H3	2.6	.28	115	3	64-27-8-4-5-2	No apparent correlation of SMG to subjective gender-sense. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode. But some low f(exp) values, therefore may be questionable.
G1	SMG (overall)	L1 “genderedness” (pervasive gender, slightly gendered, or non-gendered)	H5 H2 H1	3.4	.18	115	2	42-19-7-3-31-13	Possible correlation of SMG to L1 genderedness. But unsound as a key f(exp) value is questionably low.
G2	SMG (overall)	L1 “genderedness” (language has gender agreement or not)	H5 H2 H1	3.3	.07	115	1	57-25-23-10	Combined categories circumvent problem of low f(exp) in row G1. Statistically significant correlation between SMG and speakers whose L1 lacks gender agreement.
H	SMG (overall)	Number of languages spoken		3.3	.34	115	3	19-9-23-10-20-9-17-7	No significant correlation of SMG to number of languages spoken. Similarly no correlation for SMG-mode.
I	SMG (overall)	Living-in-role (FT, PT, Occ)		12.6	.002	114	2	44-20-17-7-18-8	Full-timers do less SMG – statistically significant but not particularly relevant in terms of understanding SMG.
J1	SMG-mode (Ntv, FL, none)	Living-in-role (FT, PT, Occ)	H1	32.1	.000002	114	4	10-10-44-4-4-17-4-4-18	Extremely high correlation but questionable as several f(exp) values are less than 5.
J2	SMG-mode (Ntv, FL, none)	Full-time in role (Living-in-role = FT vs PT+Occ)	H1	15.2	.0005	115	2	10-9-45-8-8-35	Combined categories circumvent problem of low f(exp) in row J1. Strong correlation and clear dichotomy: For living-in-role=FT, less SMG overall, and almost never SMG-mode=Ntv. For Living-in-role=PT/Occ, strong linkage with SMG-mode=Ntv.

5.2 Discussion of Results for Each Hypothesis

H1. Fluency effect: Rows J1 and J2 of Table show strong correlation ($p=0.0005$) for full-time transgender speakers between increased post-transition self-misgendering and (lack of) LX fluency – such speakers self-misgender sometimes in LXs but very seldom in languages in which they are

fluent. This supports hypothesis H1, and the probable cause appears to be related to speaking the LX without having fully internalized the language's gender concept. This is supported by comments from some of respondents – for example, one respondent, an American transmale, sums up this phenomenon succinctly, saying “It has been hard for me to unlearn feminine endings to adjectives in Spanish.”, with another, a British transfemale, saying “I learnt [French] when I was male and learnt masculine grammar ... which therefore became automatically part of my vocabulary.”.

These comments suggest that self-misgendering should be largely absent in languages learned after gender transition, or at least no more prevalent than the accidental self-misgendering in a non-transgender population. The questionnaire for this study was designed to identify such cases, but there were none in the sample – therefore the present study is unable to examine this suggestion and it remains a question for further research.

H2. Bias in one “direction”: Row A of Table does not show a significant relationship between the respondent's gender identity and increased self-misgendering ($p = .21$). Therefore this study has found no evidence to support hypothesis H2.

H3. LX gender identity: Row F of Table shows no significant correlation ($p = .28$) between respondents' differing sense of gender in different languages and increased self-misgendering. However the sample found very few respondents who do actually feel a different subjective sense of gender when speaking different languages, so the $f(\text{exp})$ values in Row F are very low, making the correlation test questionable, and the result should therefore be considered inconclusive. Hypothesis H3 is therefore neither eliminated nor supported by this study – this is a possible area for additional research. However, since it appears only a very small minority of people actually do feel different subjective gender-sense in different languages, there is no reason to believe this is major factor in the SMG phenomenon overall.

H4. Gender attitudes: Row E of Table shows no correlation ($p = .57$) between SMG and respondents' attitude to gender in language. Similarly Row D actually shows strong *independence* ($p = .89$) between SMG and attitude to being misgendered by others – people who hate being misgendered by others are apparently just as likely to self-misgender as people who don't even notice it. Hypothesis H4 is not supported.

H5. L1 “genderedness”: Row G1 of Table shows no significant correlation ($p = .18$ with low $f(\text{exp})$) between the respondents' tendency to self-misgender and the degree of “genderedness” of the respondents' L1 (a derived category-value determined by the authors based on the respondent's L1). Row G2, using broader categories to avoid the problem of low $f(\text{exp})$ values approaches but does not meet the significance threshold ($p = .07$). This suggests a possibility that speakers whose L1 has gender agreement are less inclined to increased post-transition self-misgendering. From these results, we cannot say hypothesis H5 is supported, but suggest further investigation to eliminate doubt.

The confirmation of H1 is perhaps unsurprising – many speech errors derive from lack of proficiency. However, this may also suggest something deeper about semi-fluent speech and its associated interlanguage, suggesting semi-fluent speakers, while they may make gender-agreement competently in second- and third-person contexts, find themselves using something like rote patterns for first-person references, while fully fluent speakers do not make such errors. It can easily be argued that, in the majority of cases where 1st-person gender does not vary over time, it is more important to develop the ability to apply gender in second- and third-person references, and rote usage of first-person-grammar is normally sufficient and doesn't develop until the speaker's interlanguage becomes more advanced. This may even provide some support for usage-based or “constructive” models of grammar as proposed by Tomasello (2005).

5.3 Additional observation

For part-time and occasional transgender subjects, the data show an additional statistically significant result.

There is a correlation indicating a tendency for non-full-time transgender subjects to self-misgender in their L1. There are no additional data or subjective responses to suggest a particular cause for this phenomenon, but one plausible explanation relates to subjects sometimes effectively “misremembering” their own current gender presentation – for example, if a person who usually presents as male is currently presenting as female, there’s a possibility of “habit of speech” causing gender errors in L1 that would not occur in the case of full-time transgender person where the “habit of speech” matches the speaker’s (constant) gender presentation.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

As this is a preliminary study in a previously unstudied area, a wide range of further research is suggested. It would be interesting to extend the study for particular language-pairs, rather than a broad survey. This would also enable use of a bilingual questionnaire to eliminate concerns of the survey being English-centric. Another question worth investigating is whether SMG occurs in languages learned after gender transition.

Some anecdotal reports suggest these behaviours increase when speakers are agitated or fatigued. The study of the effect of emotions on misgendering and self-misgendering warrants separate examination.

Moreover, further investigations could throw light into the nature and causes of other forms of misgendering, especially the less-conscious or even unconscious phenomena of habitual and mixed-perception misgendering.

Finally, there are many studies of gender-based differences in the speech of cisgender individuals – this suggests investigation of whether, to what extent, and in what areas “first gender effects” influence the speech of transgender individuals.

6. Conclusion

Overall, findings from this study suggest strongly that multilingual self-misgendering is not a social-attitude or identity phenomenon, but is instead an interlanguage phenomenon linked to LX fluency. This suggests a causative mechanism wherein the speaker has not fully internalized the grammatical concept of gender in the LX (Pavlenko 2009).

The evidence shows no plausible linkage to other factors, including gender-identity factors or gender-attitude factors, linguistic-gender biases such as default gender, or to demographic factors. These non-correlations seem to indicate that self-misgendering is unrelated to social attitudes. Multilingual post-transition self-misgendering therefore appears to fall entirely in the category of habitual misgendering, rather than other categories such as mixed-perception misgendering.

References

- Ansara, Y Gavriel, and Peter Hegarty. "Misgendering in English Language Contexts: Applying Non-Cisgenderist Methods to Feminist Research." *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches* 7.2 (2013): 160–177.
- Ansara, Y Gavriel, and Peter Hegarty. "Methodologies of Misgendering: Recommendations for Reducing Cisgenderism in Psychological Research." *Feminism & Psychology* 24.2 (2014): 259–270.
- Besnier, Niko. "Transgenderism, Locality, and the Miss Galaxy Beauty Pageant in Tonga." *American Ethnologist* 29.3 (2002): 534–566.
- Dewaele, Jean-Marc, and Daniel Véronique. "Gender Assignment and Gender Agreement in Advanced French Interlanguage: A Cross-Sectional Study." *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 4.3 (2001): 275–297.
- Dewaele, Jean-Marc, "Gender errors in French interlanguage: The effect of initial consonant versus initial vowel in the head noun." *Arborescences: Revue d'études françaises* 5 (2015): 84-104.
- Friedman, Erica Jayne. "Cisgenderism in Gender Attributions: The Ways in Which Social, Cognitive, and Individual Factors Predict Misgendering." Doctoral Thesis. City University of New York, 2014. http://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/212/
- Howard, Martin, Mougeon, Raymond and Jean-Marc Dewaele "Sociolinguistics and Second Language Acquisition". In R. Bayley, R. Cameron & C. Lucas (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press (2013) pp. 340-359.
- Kulick, Don. *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Meier, Stacey Colton, and Christine M. Labuski. "The Demographics of the Transgender Population."

International Handbook on the Demography of Sexuality. Ed. Amanda K. Baumle. Vol. 5.

Springer Netherlands, 2013. 289–327. International Handbooks of Population.

Nordmarken, Sonny. "Microaggressions." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1.1-2 (2014): 129–134.

Odlin, Terence. *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Pavlenko, Aneta. *The Bilingual Mental Lexicon: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Clevedon: Multilingual

Matters, 2009.

Tomasello, Michael. *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*.

Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2005.