

IDEOLOGY, GENDER ROLES, AND PRONOMINAL CHOICE: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC  
ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF ENGLISH THIRD PERSON GENERIC PRONOUNS BY  
NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ARABIC

BY

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## Abstract

This study is a sociolinguistic investigation of the use of four English generic pronouns (*he, she, he or she, singular they*) by Arabic-speaking second language learners of English. This study takes a different approach to the investigation of second language (L2) acquisition and use by examining the use of L2 as a function of two social constructs: gender roles and linguistic gender ideology.

In this study, 150 participants (50 English NSs and 100 Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English) completed two tasks: a gender role assignment questionnaire and a written sentence completion task. The goal of the first task was to examine what gender roles (i.e., typically female, typically male, or gender neutral) the participants assign to a list of personal nouns (e.g., *nurse, mechanic, and person*). The goal of the second task was to examine what generic pronouns the participants use to index these personal nouns, whether rated as typically female (e.g., *nurse*), typically male (e.g., *mechanic*), or gender neutral (e.g., *person*). In doing so, this study aimed at examining the effect of Arab/Arabic androcentricity (i.e., male bias) on both gender role assignment and generic pronoun usage.

The results of this study showed that singular *they* was, overall, the most commonly used pronoun by English NSs. In terms of gender roles, English NSs provided singular *they* for the majority of gender neutral antecedents and for almost one third of both typically male antecedents and typically female antecedents. The masculine pronoun and the feminine pronoun were used for almost half of their corresponding gender roles (i.e., typically male – *he*, typically female – *she*). The pronominal *he or she* was rarely, but consistently, used across all gender categories by English NSs.

In comparison to English NSs, Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English rated fewer items as ‘typically female’, but were not significantly different from NSs in terms of the number of ‘typically male’ and ‘gender neutral’ ratings. Unlike English NSs, Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English provided the masculine pronoun (*he*) for the vast majority of both typically male antecedents and gender neutral antecedents. The feminine pronoun (*she*) was used with the majority of typically female antecedents by these English L2 learners. The pattern of use of generic pronouns by Arabic-speaking L2 learners of English may be an indication of a typical sexist linguistic practice, where men occupy both the male and neutral positions, and women are assigned to “the marked, the gendered, the different, the forever-female position.” MacKinnon (1987:55). The results of this study showed significant differences between English NSs and English L2 learners not only in terms of ‘gender inclusive’ vs. ‘gender exclusive’ language patterns, but also in terms of the strategies employed. Finally, these results point to the limitations of foreign language classroom input for L2 socialization, thus, for the development of L2 sociolinguistic competence.

## **DEDICATION**

*TO THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT WOMEN IN MY LIFE:*

*MY MOTHER, FATIMAH, AND MY WIFE, MARAM*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Gender is a social construct and a linguistic category. The communication of gender-related messages reflects the role of ideology as a mediator between sociocultural systems and linguistic systems (Kroskrity, 2004). Embedded in the sociocultural systems are beliefs (i.e., assumptions and expectations) about what the appropriate gender roles for men and women are and thoughts about what the appropriate use of language is. The linguistic systems include the various mechanisms of linguistic gender representation such as grammatical, lexical, and referential gender.

The use of generic pronouns is one of the means through which speakers communicate gender-related messages. By generic pronouns, we refer to personal pronouns that index gender-indefinite or hypothetical human referents. Like other means of communication of gender-related messages, the use of generic pronouns may reflect the role of ideology in terms of not only beliefs about what the typical gender roles for men and women are (e.g., *nurse*-female, *engineer*-male) but also beliefs about what the appropriate, correct, or ideal use of language is (e.g., gender-inclusive vs. gender-exclusive use of language). However, the role of ideology in the use of generic pronouns should be considered in terms of the type and number of gendering mechanisms available in a given language.

Previous research (e.g., Newman, 1992; Matossian, 1997; Baranowski, 2002) has shown that the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of American English is driven by a gender-inclusive linguistic ideology despite showing some effect of gender roles (typically-male personal nouns elicited generic *he* more than any other type of personal nouns and typically-female personal nouns elicited generic *she* more than any other type of personal nouns). In other

words, native speakers of American English often use inclusive pronouns such as singular *they* and the disjunctive pronominal *he or she*, though less frequently used, and avoid exclusive pronouns such as male-specific *he* or female-specific *she*. Again, these patterns may not be solely attributed to ideology and are not devoid of the effect of purely linguistic factors; English is a genderless language where the vast majority of human nouns are not marked for gender. Therefore, English may offer a greater potential for gender-inclusive use of generic pronouns.

**i. Statement of the problem**

Social beliefs vary from one culture to another and languages vary in their linguistic peculiarities. Therefore, the communication of gender-related messages is subject to both cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation. On the one hand, gender roles result from the process of socialization, which creates “norms unique to each culture about what [are] normal characteristics of men and women” (Mollegaard, 2003:1) as an outcome of the complex interaction of linguistic, cultural, and social structures (Mollegaard, 2003). These socio-cultural norms may result in cross-cultural differences in the assumptions and expectations about gender roles. Similarly, beliefs (i.e., ideologies) about the appropriate use of language vary from one culture to another. On the other hand, languages may exploit different linguistic gendering mechanisms and may possess different gender categories. For example, while Arabic has grammatical gender, English does not. While Arabic has two grammatical gender categories (masculine and feminine), German has three (including the neuter).

Being one of the means of communication of gender-related messages, the use of English generic pronouns by speakers from other speech communities may be subject to both social and linguistic interference. However, the study of the use of English generic pronouns by speakers of other languages (i.e., second language learners of English) has been neglected in the literature.

While second language users of English are supposedly using the same linguistic system as native speakers of English, they have different first language background and may have different social and cultural beliefs about gender role assignment and use. In other words, speakers from different cultures may have different linguistic gender ideologies and may show different patterns of use of English generic pronouns. For example, while Finnish shows signs of a female-biased language (Motschenbacher, 2008), Arab societies and cultures are male biased (Saadawi, 1980; Mernissi, 1994) resulting in an androcentric (i.e., male biased) use of Arabic (Elkhatib, 1997; Sadiqi, 2003 and 2006). Since linguistic ideologies mediate between sociocultural systems and linguistic practices, different patterns are expected for the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of Arabic.

Furthermore, the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of American English, despite being inclusive overall, shows some amount of variation among speakers (Matossian, 1997) and also between males and females (Martyna, 1978). Thus, by using English generic pronouns, second language learners use a construct that is variable in L1. Moreover, most of the pronouns which English L2 learners may use are grammatical (possibly except for singular *they*)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, and contrary to other studies of second language acquisition, grammaticality is not the concern here.

## **ii. Goal of the study**

The goal of this study is twofold. First, it examines the gender roles native speakers of Arabic associate with some English personal nouns, that is how they perceive the gender roles associated with such nouns. Second, this study investigates how native speakers of Arabic use English generic pronouns in reference to these assigned gender roles and to nouns that may not

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<sup>1</sup> Newman (1992) makes the argument that the use of singular *they* is grammatical and does not violate number agreement. He even goes further to criticize the term 'singular *they*'.

be associated with any gender roles (e.g., *person* or *someone*). The Arab linguistic and social androcentricity (Sadiqi, 2003 and 2006) is important because it is claimed to deeply influence the language users' performance, perception and attitudes to gender assignment (Sadiqi, 2006) and may carry over (i.e., transfer) to the use of English as a second language.

**iii. Significance of the study:**

The significance of this study stems not only from the lack of studies on the use of English generic pronouns by second language learners of English but also from the sociolinguistic approach it follows. Studies of second language use have traditionally focused on the learners' use of L1 features that are categorical rather than variable (Mougeon et al., 2002). Unlike previous studies, this study investigates the use of English generic pronouns, which is a variable use in L1, by native speakers of Arabic. In doing so, this study examines the potential influence of L1 linguistic background, social background, and ideology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Background

Gender is a linguistic category and a social construct. The communication of gender-related messages, such as the use of generic pronouns, is the outcome of the interaction between the linguistic and the social nature of gender. The interaction between these two facets of gender is often mediated by a linguistic gender ideology. Therefore, in this chapter I discuss these components of the communication of gender-related messages: linguistic gender, social gender, and linguistic gender ideology. First, I discuss three categories of linguistic gender representation: grammatical gender, lexical gender, and referential gender. Second, I discuss the concept of social gender and gender roles. Third, I discuss the role of linguistic gender ideology as a mediator between these two facets of gender, the linguistic and the social. Fourth, I review the studies on the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of English. In doing so, I discuss the effect of both gender roles and linguistic gender ideology on how native speakers of English use generic pronouns. Finally, I discuss linguistic and sociolinguistic Arabic androcentricity and how it may affect the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of Arabic.

#### **I. Gender as a Linguistic Category**

The linguistic representation of women and men is a central issue in linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and sociology among several other fields. Languages vary in their gender representations due to their structural peculiarities and the socio-cultural environment in which these languages are embedded. Hellinger and Bubmann (2001) unpacked the linguistic representation of men and women in language and identified three universal mechanisms of linguistic gender representation through which gender-related messages can be performed (i.e.,

constructed and communicated). These gendering mechanisms are: grammatical gender, lexical gender, and referential gender. Not only are these categories good tools for studying how gender is constructed in one language, but they can also be the basis for cross-linguistic analysis of gender representation. For example, the category of grammatical gender is the basis of the typological classification of languages into gender and genderless languages as I will discuss in this section.

### **1. Grammatical Gender**

Grammatical gender is a ‘purely’ abstract linguistic system of nominal classification (Motschenbacher, 2008), and is considered an inherent property of the noun (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001). Grammatical gender is the basis of the typological classification of languages into gender languages and genderless languages. While languages with grammatical gender are called “gender languages” (e.g., Arabic), languages that lack grammatical gender are called “genderless languages” (e.g., English).

Gender languages possess two or three gender classes, and the noun is typically assigned one of the following three values: masculine, feminine, or neuter. This value specification “is determined by an interaction of formal and semantic assignment rules” (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001: 7). However, nouns in gender languages are not necessarily marked for gender in a morphological way. In many gender languages (e.g., Arabic), masculine nouns are unmarked for gender. However, grammatical gender, whether marked explicitly or implicitly, is responsible for the agreement between the noun (the controller) and other ‘gender-variable’ satellite elements (the target) within and outside the noun phrase. These target elements include articles, adjectives, pronominals, verbs, numerals, and prepositions. Example (1) illustrates how the grammatical gender of the noun (feminine here) imposes gender agreement on the demonstrative, adjective,

and subject and object anaphoric pronouns in Jordanian Arabic (Dem=demonstrative, Def=definite article, N=noun, Adj=adjective, V=verb, Pro=pronoun, Comp=complementizer, 3=3<sup>rd</sup> person, S=singular, P=plural, M=male, F=female):

1) haathi	iT-Taawli <b>h</b>	li-kbiir- <b>ih</b>	<b>hiyya</b>	illi	ishtareyt- <b>ha</b>
Dem	Def-N	Def-Adj	Pro.	Comp.	V-Pro.
this.FS	the-table.FS	the-big-FS	she	which	I bought-her
‘This is the big table which I bought.’					

However, grammatical gender may sometimes be overridden by other categories of gender such as lexical or referential gender (Motschenbacher, 2008). In the following section, I discuss lexical gender and how it may interact with grammatical gender.

## 2. Lexical Gender

Unlike grammatical gender, lexical gender is concerned with the extra-linguistic (i.e., biological or natural) meaning of gender (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001), resulting in the binary distinction: male vs. female (rather than the masculine, feminine, and neuter classification). Therefore, inanimate nouns are not associated with any lexical gender.

Both gender and genderless languages may have lexical gender. For example, the English personal nouns *father*, *son*, and *uncle* are lexically specified as ‘male’ whereas the nouns *mother*, *daughter*, and *aunt* are lexically specified as ‘female’. None of these kinship terms has any grammatical gender and the gender specification is completely lexical/semantic (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001). However, the vast majority of personal nouns in English do not have a lexical gender specification (e.g., *person*, *citizen*, and *doctor*).

In gender languages, there is often a strong correspondence between a noun’s lexical gender and its grammatical gender; one that rarely exists in genderless languages. In Arabic, it is hard to separate grammatical gender from lexical gender because lexically male or female nouns

acquire the correspondent grammatical gender<sup>2</sup>. For example, the Arabic kinship terms *waalid* (father), *ibn* (son), *zawj* (husband) are both grammatically masculine and lexically male whereas the kinship terms *waalidah* (mother), *ibnah* (daughter), and *zawjah* (wife) are grammatically feminine (by virtue of the feminine marker *-a*) and lexically female.

In both gender and genderless languages, gender-variable satellite elements often agree with the lexical gender of the noun. Therefore, lexical gender is more visible in gender languages, where lexical gender often corresponds to grammatical gender, because satellite elements have more gender-variable forms (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001). Consider the following two examples from English (2) and Jordanian Arabic (3):

2) The **girl** thinks that **she** has become old.

3) il-**bint**            bi-**t**-fakker            inn-**ha**            Saar-**at**            kbiir-**ih**  
the-girl            asp-3FS-think            that-she            became-3FS            old-F  
‘The girl thinks that she has become old.’

The lexically female nouns in both sentences (English *girl*, Arabic *bint*) impose gender agreement on other gender-variable elements in each sentence. However, lexical gender is more evident in the Arabic sentence because Arabic has many more gender-variable elements than English.

### 3. Referential Gender

Similar to lexical gender, referential gender is related to the extra-linguistic meaning of gender. However, referential gender is concerned with the sex of the actual referent. Instead, referential gender “relates linguistic expressions to the non-linguistic reality; more specifically, referential gender identifies a referent as “female”, “male” or “gender-indefinite” (Hellinger &

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<sup>2</sup> Except for very few cases such as *abb* ‘father’ and *umm* ‘mother’ as well as *HiSaan* ‘horse’ and *faras* ‘mare’ in which lexical gender is not marked grammatically.

Bubmann, 2001: 8). In other words, referential gender is concerned with “whom a particular personal noun or pronoun actually refers to in a given context” (Motschenbacher, 2008: 25).

Referential gender is an important category because grammatically, lexically, or socially gendered personal nouns may not necessarily be used correspondingly (Motschenbacher, 2008). In other words, referential gender may override the grammatical, lexical, or social gender of the noun. An example of this mismatch comes from English where the lexically-male noun *guys* (Motschenbacher, 2008) may be used to refer to or address a mixed-gender group or an inclusively group of females (all-female group). This usage represents a mismatch between lexical gender (male here) and referential gender (common or female). Another example of this mismatch is the use of an English gendered pronoun to refer to a gender-indefinite personal noun such as *That person... he*. Therefore, the choice of an anaphoric pronoun in genderless languages to refer to a lexically gender-indefinite personal noun talking about a specific male or female person will often depend on referential gender and not on any property of the noun itself (Motschenbacher, 2008).

In gender languages, referential gender often corresponds to grammatical and/or lexical gender. In these languages, the choice of an anaphoric pronoun will often depend on the grammatical/lexical gender of the noun as in the following two examples from Jordanian Arabic:

- |    |  |                    |              |                      |          |
|----|--|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------|
| 4) | al-kaatib  | bi-guul            | <b>huwwa</b> | bi-saafir            | bukra    |
|    | the-writer.MS                                    | asp-say.3MS        | he           | asp-travel.3MS       | tomorrow |
|    | ‘The writer says that he will travel tomorrow.’  |                    |              |                      |          |
|    |  |                    |              |                      |          |
| 5) | al-kaatib- <b>ih</b>                             | bi- <b>t</b> -guul | <b>hiyya</b> | bi- <b>t</b> -saafir | bukra    |
|    | the-writer-FS                                    | asp-3FS-say        | she          | asp-3FS-travel       | tomorrow |
|    | ‘The writer says that she will travel tomorrow.’ |                    |              |                      |          |

In examples (4) and (5), the grammatical gender of the noun (masculine, feminine) determines the choice of an anaphoric pronoun (*huwwa*, *hiyya*). In sentence (4), the grammatical gender of

the noun (*al-kaatib*) is masculine, hence, the use of the masculine third person singular pronoun (*huwwa*). In sentence (5), the grammatical gender of the noun (*al-kaatib-a*) is feminine, hence, the use of the feminine third person singular pronoun (*hiyya*). Neither sentence (4) nor (5) can carry a generic meaning because of the use of the definite article (*al-*), which results in specific reference in both cases.

## **II. Gender as a Social Construct: Social Gender**

As the term implies, social gender relates to the social meaning of gender. Therefore, social gender is not concerned with grammar or biology. It refers “to the socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits” (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985:173). However, and contrary to other categories of gender, social gender does not directly label nouns as ‘female’ or ‘male’ (Ochs, 1992), but it makes a gendered interpretation of these nouns more likely (Motschenbacher, 2008). Therefore, social gender may be better viewed as a continuum that goes through a gradual transition from the most-likely male towards the most-likely female rather than as a categorical binary concept divided between maleness and femaleness.

Social gender is concerned with the gender assumptions and stereotypical associations that people assign to different personal nouns. In other words, social gender is “a matter of entrenched social stereotypes that tie certain role scripts to women and men” (Motschenbacher, 2008:23-24). Motschenbacher (2008) claims that there are very ‘well-established’ stereotypical associations such as *nurse* and *farmer* and ‘weaker’ stereotypical associations such as *teacher* and *doctor*. According to Motschenbacher (2008), personal nouns with weaker stereotypical associations are less clearly socially gendered than personal nouns with strong stereotypical associations. However, Motschenbacher’s (2008) dichotomy posits the existence of a static,

uniformly shared culture regarding the gender assumptions that may be associated with some personal nouns. Being a social construct, such gender associations may undergo change over time and are also subject to cross-cultural variation.

Personal nouns are said to be socially gendered if the behavior of the associated terms is not motivated by other categories of gender such as grammatical, lexical, or referential gender (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001). Therefore, social gender is overt, but less salient, in gender languages (Motschenbacher, 2008). On the one hand, social gender in gender languages is overt because gender-related assumptions (i.e., social gender) are expressed through grammatical and/or lexical gendering of personal nouns. On the other hand, social gender is less salient in these languages because the behavior of the associated terms is motivated by other categories of gender such as grammatical, lexical, or referential gender (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001). In other words, social gender is not the sole mechanism responsible for the gender meaning obtained.

In Arabic, social gender is marked explicitly through grammatical gender assignment. For example, the Arabic counterparts of *nurse* and *homemaker* seem to be associated with a more likely female interpretation. These observations are supported by a corpus search that I performed based on the Arabic corpus search tool (arabiCorpus) from Brigham Young University. The feminine noun *mumarriD-a* (female nurse) appears more frequently than its male counterpart *mumarriD* (male nurse) as indicated by the results of corpus search (1.37 and 0.56 per 100,000 words, respectively). Similarly, the feminine term *rabb-at manzil* (female homemaker; housewife) appears more frequently than its male counterpart *rabb manzil* (male homemaker) as indicated by the same corpus research (0.42 and 0.00, respectively). On the other hand, the Arabic counterparts of *doctor* and *manager* seem to be associated with a more likely male interpretation. The results of the same corpus search shows that the masculine noun *doctour*

(male doctor) appears much more often than *doctour-a* (female doctor) with frequencies of 85.73 and 5.34, respectively. Similarly, the masculine noun *mudiir* (male manager) appears much more frequently than *mudiir-a* (female manager) with frequencies of 57.76 and 1.97, respectively.

Social gender is less linguistically visible in genderless languages, where personal nouns are neither grammatically nor lexically gendered. Therefore, social gender in genderless languages is often called ‘covert gender’ (Hellinger, 2004) and is usually regarded as a salient category (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2001) because gender-related assumptions in these languages cannot be inferred from the forms themselves (Motschenbacher, 2008). However, social gender in genderless languages may surface from time to time. In English, social gender may surface through generic anaphoric reference (in non-specific contexts) to personal noun antecedents (e.g., *a mechanic – he*, *a nurse – she*) or through overt opposite-gender marking/labeling (e.g., *male babysitter*, *woman surgeon*), the latter being one of the means to reverse social gender (i.e., gender roles).

Generic pronouns in English reveal much about the social gender of terms that seem mistakenly to be completely ungendered. The fact that English speakers use varying gendered pronouns in generic reference to various gender-indefinite (in the grammatical/lexical sense) personal nouns indicates that these terms are anything but entirely genderless. For example, Hellinger and Bubmann (2001) observed that English speakers often pronominalize higher-status occupational titles (e.g., *lawyer*, *scientist* and *surgeon*) by the pronoun *he* in non-specific contexts. In contrast, they observed that English speakers frequently use *she* to pronominalize low-status occupational terms such as *secretary*, *schoolteacher*, and *nurse*. Hellinger & Bubmann (2001) attribute these patterns to the “stereotypical assumptions about what are appropriate social roles for women and men, including expectations about who will be a typical

member of the class of, say, *surgeon* or *nurse*” (11). In other words, social gender is a language ideology that relates to speakers’ thoughts about what gender roles and traits are associated with particular personal nouns, especially occupational ones.

Social gender does not always account for the choice of a generic pronoun. Personal nouns such as *person* and *citizen* have no social gender (i.e., they are not associated with a greater likelihood of being male or female). However, English speakers still index such personal nouns with gendered pronouns. For example, Hellinger and Bubmann (2001) observed that English general personal nouns (e.g., *consumer*, *patient*, and *pedestrian*) are often pronominalized by the male-specific pronoun *he* in neutral contexts according to traditional prescriptive rules. While the choice of a generic pronoun to index socially-gendered personal nouns may be attributed to social gender, the choice of a generic pronoun to pronominalize English personal nouns that have no social gender probably reflects a different type of ideology (e.g., a gender-inclusive or gender-exclusive ideology) on the part of the speaker. Thus, the variation in the use of generic pronouns in the latter case may be due to varying ideologies and/or the effect of social factors, such as the gender of the speaker.

### **III. Linguistic Gender Ideology**

Linguistic ideology has recently become a central topic in social sciences including linguistics (sociolinguistics) and linguistic anthropology among several other fields. As a result of this multifarious interest and interdisciplinary scholarship, various definitions of ideology have been suggested. The various definitions of language ideology, broadly defined as “thoughts about language” (Kroskrity, 2004:496), can be classified in terms of the primary emphasis they place on speakers’ agency and awareness, interest group, or the relationship between linguistic and sociocultural systems (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994; Kroskrity, 2004). However, there is

some amount of overlap among the definitions of linguistic ideology in terms of the above three aspects.

Speakers' linguistic awareness and agency has a vital role in ideology construction and projection. Examples of definitions that emphasize the role of speakers' linguistic awareness and agency are Silverstein's (1979) and Kroskrity's (2000). Silverstein (1979) defines linguistic ideology as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (193). For Kroskrity (2000), linguistic ideology is the investigation of the role of speakers' consciousness of their language and the positions of these speakers in the political and economic systems in shaping their beliefs, representations, and evaluations of linguistic structure and use. However, in Kroskrity (2004) there is a room for varying degrees of awareness. He explains that language ideologies are an "ubiquitous set of diverse beliefs, however implicit or explicit they may be, used by speakers of all types as models for constructing linguistic evaluations and engaging in communicative activity." (497) Despite the possibility of implicit beliefs in Kroskrity (2004), his definition of linguistic ideology does not eliminate speakers' agency in language through their engagement in communicative activities and linguistic evaluations.

In some definitions there is an emphasis on the role of "interest groups" or lobbies (also called *advocacy groups* or *pressure groups*) in projecting and maintaining linguistic ideologies. Such ideological interest groups can be political, economic, religious, or social. Similar to its political meaning, a social or cultural interest group refers to a group of individuals who share some common socio-economic or moral position or concerns, not necessarily purely linguistic. These groups draw upon some strategies and tactics (Gormley, 2007) to bring their concerns and views to the attention of decision makers in an attempt to influence linguistic rules, policies, and

practices to secure benefits or protect their interests. Examples of these social interest groups include feminists, men, and women. Rumsey (1990) brings the interest notion to the surface by arguing that “research on topics such as pronouns, politeness, and purism has begun the difficult program of considering whose interests are served by linguistic ideology taking the form that it does, relating notions of linguistic ideology as rooted in linguistic structure and cognitive limitations to understandings of ideology as rooted in social practices and interests.” (356) Kroskrity (2004) argues that linguistic ideologies “represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group” (501) As Kroskrity’s (2004) definition suggests, members of an interest group do not necessarily have an agenda to implement or a change to demand for; they may simply be individuals who benefit from a current or demanded linguistic practice.

Some definitions emphasize the social and sociocultural aspect of linguistic ideology. For example, Heath (1977) defines linguistic ideology as “self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in the social experiences of members as they contribute to the expression of the group.” (53) Irvine (1989) argues that linguistic ideology is “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” (255) Commenting on Irvine’s (1989) definition, Kroskrity (2006) explains “here language ideologies are viewed as multiple and constructed from specific political economic perspectives which, in turn, influence “the cultural ideas about language.” (497) For Errington (2001), language ideology is “the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language.” (110) Kroskrity (2004) defines language ideologies as “beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds.” (498) In this view, language ideology is considered a much needed bridge “between linguistic and social theory, because it

relates the microculture of communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality, confronting macrosocial constraints on language behavior.” (Kroskrity, personal communication in Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994:72) Woolard & Schieffelin (1994) explain that “it is the attempt to link these two aspects of ideology, and to tie social and linguistic forms together through ideology, that is both most provocative and most challenging.” (72)

Despite varying emphasis on different factors and notions, language ideology is not a simple concept. Instead, language ideology can be better seen as a “cluster concept.” Kroskrity (2004) suggests that the concept of language ideology encapsulates five dimensions or layers. These layers are: group or individual interests, multiplicity of ideologies, awareness of speakers, mediating functions of ideologies, and role of language ideology in identity construction. A relatively more comprehensive definition that probably combines these layers of linguistic ideology is provided by Schieffelin et al. (1998:3). They argue that:

“Language ideologies” are cultural representations, whether explicit or implicit, of the intersection of language and human beings in a social world. Mediating between social structures and forms of talk, such ideologies are not only about language. Rather, they link language to identity, power, aesthetics, morality and epistemology. Through such linkages, language ideologies underpin not only linguistic form and use, but also significant social institutions and fundamental notions of person and community.

Schieffelin et al.’s (1998) definition, similar to that in Kroskrity (2004), views linguistic ideologies as multiple allowing for variation among them. Kroskrity (2004) argues that linguistic ideologies “are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker” (496). Such focus contrasts with views such as Rumsey’s (1990) on language ideology as “shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world” (346). Kroskrity (2004) argues that Rumsey’s (1990) definition posits the existence of a static, uniformly shared culture or common way of thinking. Kroskrity (2004) criticizes Rumsey’s (1990) definition of linguistic ideology for not problematizing the

variation in language ideologies as a function of social categories (e.g., gender, age, class, etc.) in a way that suggests “an overly homogeneous view of language ideologies within a cultural group” (496). Kroskrity (2004) explains that linguistic ideology provides an alternative tool to culture “for exploring variation in ideas, ideals, and communicative practices.” (496)

The scope of ideology is very broad including both linguistic and social dimensions. Linguistically speaking, ideology is relevant to the structure and use of different levels of representation (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, style, etc.). Socially speaking, ideology can reflect several social affiliations and memberships in social categories such as gender, class, and age. Woolard & Schieffelin (1994) explain that language ideology is concerned with the fundamental links among “diverse cultural categories as language, spelling, grammar, nation, gender, simplicity, intentionality, authenticity, knowledge, development, power, and tradition.” (72) According to Woolard & Schieffelin (1994), scholarly work has just started to focus on when and how such links are formulated, and more importantly, on what the linguistic and social consequences of these linkages are. For example, researchers (e.g., Haslanger, 2011) have started to investigate the social meaning and consequences of the use of generic statements as a potential ideological issue.

A once standard rule in English language prescribed the use of masculine generics (including generic *he*) to refer to gender-indefinite personal nouns in English (Matossian, 1997; Kroskrity, 2004). However, recent qualitative and empirical studies have shown that the use of generic pronouns is subject to variation reflecting the interests of different groups (e.g., feminists, males vs. females). Although reference has been rarely made to the role of different ideologies in this variation, one may assume that the use (and the variation in use) of generic pronouns reflects different ideologies.

As far as the use of generic pronouns is concerned, two distinct, though not sharply defined, linguistic ideologies can be observed. The proponents of one ideology advocate the use of masculine pronouns for generic and epicene reference. This ideology is most advocated by traditional prescriptive linguists and grammarians (e.g., Muhlhausler and Harre, 1990). However, these proponents' arguments and motives are not the same. Traditional prescriptive linguists do not see a point in the argument about "fair language" suggesting that the prescription of generic *he* is independent from any ideological meanings. Grammarians who are concerned about correctness are worried about other alternatives creating ambiguity or harming cohesion of discourse (Newman, 1992). In general, men are said to be more likely to advocate the use of masculine generics to protect and secure their socio-economic gains and maintain their superiority, both socially and economically, relative to women in their speech communities (Spender, 1980).

The proponents of a second ideology advocate the use of gender-inclusive pronouns for generic reference such as singular *they* and the disjunctive pronominal *he or she*. Under this ideology are moderate feminists, language reformers, and women in general (Muhlhausler and Harre, 1990). Contrary to the proponents of the first ideology, the proponents of this ideology seem to share more or less the same concerns, i.e., equity and fairness. The proponents of the gender-inclusive ideology (or fair language ideology) regard the use of masculine generics as untrue, unfair, or both (Cameron, 1990). Feminists view masculine generic instances as a "discriminatory, gendered-practice" rather than being "a neutrally arbitrary grammatical convention" (Silverstein, 1985). Driven by a Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, some proponents of this ideology have concerns about how the use of language shapes the speakers' view of the world (Muhlhausler and Harre, 1990). Language reformers are more concerned about political

correctness. Political correctness is different from feminism because it does not necessarily view such gendered practices as untrue but view them as unfair. As a result, feminists call for a “fair language”, i.e. a gender-inclusive language.

In the following section, I discuss the use of generic pronouns in American English as a function of both gender roles and linguistic ideology.

#### **IV. Generic Pronouns in American English**

Modern English lacks a gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun. This causes a problem when reference is made to a hypothetical person or to an individual of unknown sex. Balhorn (2004) reports that “[a] commonly encountered and much-discussed reference and agreement problem in modern English is how to pronominalize singular, epicene [gender-indefinite] antecedents.” (79) To solve this problem, various ways were suggested to “make up for the pronoun gap” (Kolln, 1999: 233). Among these solutions is to use the English third-person pronouns generically. Third-person generic pronouns in English include the prescriptive masculine generics *he/him/his* (6), feminine generics *she/her/her* (7), disjunction *he or she* or *s/he* in writing (8), and singular *they/them/their* (9) as in the following examples:

- 6) If *a student* is getting a low grade, *he* might want to go talk to the teacher. (Balhorn, 2004)
- 7) An educated person is a *person* who is aware of who *she* is and what *her* place in the world is. (Meyers, 1990)
- 8) An educated *person* must consider not only formal education but also the concepts of permanent learning throughout *his/her* lifetime. (Meyers, 1990)
- 9) A criminal is a *criminal* no matter what *they* wear. (Balhorn, 2009)

The possibility of male or female referents in sentences (6-9) is linguistically equal (at the level of expression) given that these antecedent nouns are not marked grammatically or lexically for gender in English. However, the generic pronominal choice is not constant. Previous studies

have shown that these generic pronominal choices are not random. A sociolinguistic significance may be associated with one choice or another (Balhorn, 2004). Because the grammatical categories used in linguistic descriptions cannot be “neutral, objective and devoid of ideological significance” (Cameron, 1985:19), I examine the variation in the use of English generic pronouns by speakers of American English as a function of two types of ideology: gender roles and linguistic gender ideology.

Traditionally, the masculine third-person singular pronoun was predominantly used to make sex-indefinite (generic and epicene) reference in American English. This was overwhelmingly reported by the descriptive literature on the use of the singular epicene pronominals in English (*see* Newman, 1992 and Matossian, 1997). Some of the available empirical evidence shows that the usage of male generics was prevalent at least about three decades ago (e.g., Marcoux, 1973; Nilsen, 1977; Martyna, 1978). For example, Martyna (1978), in a sentence-completion experiment that included 435 student participants, reported that *he* was used for 96% of the typically male referents (e.g., engineer), 65% of the epicene ones (e.g., human being), and even for 7% of the typically female antecedents (e.g., secretary). Her taxonomy (male, female, epicene) was based on the judgments of 140 other participants. These results suggest that the male-biased, exclusive ideology was dominant over both gender roles (i.e., social gender) and the inclusive language ideology. Of course, this pattern of usage had its social implications.

The use of the male generics, or what Martyna (1983) called the ‘He/Man Approach’, has its ideological problems. While the concerns with the use of generic *he* were only about accuracy and clarity, the concerns expanded to include equity and appropriateness (e.g., Cameron, 1985 and 1990). For Martyna (1978) the concerns with the generic usage of *he* are: ambiguity,

exclusiveness, and inequity. Along the lines of the last two concerns, male generics have been viewed by many linguists (e.g., Valian, 1977, Kramarae, 1981, and Penelope, 1990) as a symbol of linguistic sexism, male superiority, and as a marginalization of women and their relegation to the periphery of the public domain. In her feminist Muted Group Theory, Kramarae (1981) states that "[b]ecause men are the dominant group in society, the male perception is also dominant. Women's perceptions and systems of perceiving are seen as less competent." (3) Penelope (1990) considers prescriptive *he* as the most striking sign of the male dominance in English. She notes:

[O]ccupations outside the home are conceptually classified by English speakers as male-specific, and so commonly replaced by the pronoun *he*. The kinship terms are the only nouns in English that demonstrate "natural gender" in the pronouns that replace them. Other examples . . . show that *she* is used to refer to a noun only when a speaker thinks of that noun as [+female]. That is, women are explicitly mentioned in discourse only if some activity is thought of as womanly or feminine. (119)

Penelope's observation illustrates the sexist thinking and the derogatory sense that lie beyond the use of masculine generics. Matossian (1997) claims "perhaps nowhere has the linguistic marginalization of women been more apparent to contemporary writers than in conventional generic or hypothetical reference to the individual human being, particularly in the English pronoun system with its prescriptive third-person *he*" (24). Therefore, it is no wonder that the male generic has been called "false generic" (or "pseudo-generics") and has triggered a vast opposition especially among feminist linguists, such as Cameron (1985, 1990), creating the need for a fair (i.e., non-sexist, gender-inclusive) language.

Language users often associate their own use of male generics with strong male interpretation. A number of psycholinguistic experiments looked at whether language users comprehend generic *he* as a truly neutral pronoun to see whether it is an adequate generic pronoun. The main question of these studies was whether generic *he* was truly comprehended as

a neutral pronoun, thus, whether it is an adequate generic pronoun. In other words, if generic *he* is truly generic; it should be used not only with typically male antecedents, but also with typically female and neutral ones. Martyna (1978) asked the participants in her study to describe the gender images that came to their mind when they provided generic pronouns to complete 18 written and spoken sentence fragments about stereotypically male, female, and neutral antecedents. The participants reported male imagery of generic sentences with typically male subjects (e.g., *police officer, judge, and legislator*) and female imagery of generic sentences with typically female antecedents (e.g., *nurse, babysitter, and librarian*), and used the generic pronouns (*he, she*) accordingly. However, the majority of the participants who used generic *he* in generic sentences with neutral antecedents (e.g., *person*) reported male imagery. Therefore, Martyna (1978) argued that the ‘so-called’ generic *he* has a male-specific interpretation. Overall, it seems that the ‘so-called’ generic *he* is very male-specific to serve as an inclusive pronoun. Therefore, the findings of psycholinguistic studies of the interpretation of generic *he* support the discontents feminists and some linguists had about male generics.

Generic *he* has a strong gender-specific reading and leads to an exclusively male comprehension. Other than commenting on one’s own generic pronoun choice, other studies looked at how people comprehended generic sentences. In Khosroshahi (1989), 55 college students were asked to draw the mental images triggered by reading sex-indefinite paragraphs that included generic *he, he or she, or they*. The results indicated that 67% of generic *he* instances evoked male figures, and only 19% of these evoked female figures. On the other hand, the generic disjunction *he or she* was the most likely to elicit female referents/images (34%) followed by generic *they* (26%). Gastil (1990) asked undergraduate students to verbally describe the gender images they perceived after reading aloud sentences with generic pronouns (*he,*

*he/she*, and singular *they*). The results indicated that generic *he* triggered an overwhelming number of male images. Conversely, singular *they* was interpreted inclusively by both males and females. Surprisingly, males perceived *he/she* in a manner similar to *he*. Gastil (1990) considered these results as an indication of sexist language associated with the use of generic *he*. Overall, these results support Newman's (1992) argument that intended epicene usages of *he* bias readers toward masculine interpretations. Therefore, reading comprehension is perhaps another piece of evidence showing that generic *he* fails to serve as a truly generic pronoun.

Since the women's rights movement and the Gender-neutral Language Reform Movement of the 1970s (Matossian, 1997 and Balhorn, 2009), the use of the English male generic pronouns has witnessed a gradual decline in favor of another generic pronoun, singular *they*. Meyers (1990) examined the usage of English generic pronouns by 392 higher-division male and female college writers. The samples were collected from the students' writing about their conception of 'the educated person' as a part of their degree plans. Meyers's (1990) analysis targeted all of the pronouns referring to the 'the educated person'. Her results showed that almost half of the writers (48%) avoided the use of generic pronouns at all by pluralizing the antecedent. In terms of frequency, the generic masculine (34%) and singular *they* (32%) occurred about equally followed by *he or she* (22%). It is not clear whether the pronouns the writers in Meyers' (1990) study provided were intended as generic or epicene. Those writers may have regarded the noun phrase 'the educated person' as an epicene one or they may have translated that into a more socially gendered noun such as 'professor'.

Newman (1992) examined the use of English generic pronouns on formal and informal American television interview programs. Those programs were broadcasted in 1990 and were of a topical interest to a large portion of the American audience. While the speakers used singular

*they* for around 60% of the epicene antecedents, they used *he* for only 28% of these antecedents. Therefore, Newman (1992) argued that singular *they* had become the most commonly used epicene pronoun in spontaneous American English speech. It is worth noting that Newman (1992) was very tolerant in his classification of epicene antecedents. Among those were *guy* and *man*, which he claimed to be logically epicene (though he admits that they may still have a masculine interpretation). Therefore, the percentage of use of *he* might have been lower if such antecedents had not been used.

Matossian (1997) examined the use of generic pronouns in both spoken and written colloquial Euro-American English in four urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Minneapolis. She collected 1,267 tokens of generic pronouns by means of oral-history interviews and written questionnaires on topics of local interest. Her results showed that singular *they* was provided in 81% of the total sample followed by *he*, which was provided in 16% of the times. Surprisingly, Matossian (1997) reported that *he* was used only about half the time even for masculine-generic referents such as *burglar*. She found that singular *they* appeared almost half the time for masculine-generic referents and was dominantly provided for feminine-generic referents. Contrary to Martyna (1977), Matossian (1997) did not explain how she obtained the taxonomy that she used.

The comparison of the frequency of use of generic *he* among the work of Martyna (1978), Meyers (1990), Newman (1992), and Matossian (1997) shows a steady decline from 65% in Martyna (1978) to 16% in Matossian (1997). On the other hand, these studies show a steady increase in the frequency of use of singular *they* from 32% in Meyers (1990) to 81% in Matossian (1997). Balhorn (2004) observes that the usage of singular *they* has become 'so ubiquitous'. These results suggest a gradual shift from a male-biased ideology towards a more

inclusive ideology, of which singular *they* is a characteristic. Therefore, the preference to use singular *they* over generic *he* or generic *she* is possibly due to the fact that singular *they* is not explicitly marked for gender, and thus is more inclusive, making it more appropriate as a sign of fair language.

Despite its inclusive meaning, singular *they* has not been safe from criticism. Aside from being considered a ‘cosmetic reform’ (Cameron, 1985), singular *they* has been attacked by many linguists for violating number agreement in English or even endangering the singular/plural distinction itself (MacKay, 1980, 1983), creating ‘awkward ambiguity’ (Frank and Treichler, 1989), and harming cohesion. In response, Newman (1992) criticizes the term ‘singular *they*’ and claims that this notion is based on the false assumption “that pronouns are substitutive elements that do not influence the meaning of a sentence but are placed or (should be placed) solely by agreement with the antecedent” (470). Regardless of this controversy, ‘singular’ *they* appears to be the most commonly used generic pronoun in the current American English language. This suggests that speakers are willing to adopt a language-inclusive ideology at the expense of what may be called the grammatical use of language.

Despite feminist efforts, generic *she* is far from being adopted for generic reference. The participants in Martyna's (1978) experiment rarely provided *she* even for the antecedents that produced feminine imagery as self-reported. Penelope (1990) observed that the speakers of all ages used *she* only with feminine antecedents and not with neutral ones in experimental settings, casual conversations, and television interviews. Meyers (1990) found that generic *she* was used for only 4% of the time to refer to ‘the educated person’. Matossian (1997) found that *she* was rarely provided even for feminine-generic referents. Perhaps, the tendency to avoid the generic *she* is because it is explicitly marked for gender or as Matossian (1997) put it: "*she* is too female-

identified for use as an all-purpose generic pronoun" (59). Even in the rare cases where *she* is used generically with masculine or neutral antecedents, it is viewed as ‘intentional role-reversals’ (Martyna, 1978). It seems that generic *she* is more successful as an ‘effective consciousness-raiser’ (Cameron, 1985) rather than as generic pronoun. It seems that speakers view generic *she*, just like generic *he*, as an example of exclusive language ideology, one that they tend to avoid. Therefore, the speakers’ tendency to avoid generic *she* emphasizes the shift in ideology regarding the use of generic pronouns.

The disjunction *he or she* is a non-controversial generic alternative because it signals explicitly the possibility of both feminine and masculine reference and also does not violate number agreement in English. Therefore, it seems to satisfy both prescriptive linguists and feminists (Matossian, 1997). However, this disjunctive pronominal is an uncommon generic pronoun in American English. Actually, the results of previous studies show that the use of this pronominal has witnessed a sharp decline, especially in spoken English (Martyna, 1978). Cochran (1988) found that *he or she* was very rarely used by American high school students. According to the estimations of the participants (mainly graduate students and faculty) in the attitudinal study by Harrigan and Lucic (1988), the pronominal *he or she* occurred in speech 22% of the time; that was almost equal to singular *they* and half as often as generic *he*. Meyers (1990) reported that *he or she* occurred in 22% of the time to refer to “the educated person” in writing. Newman (1992) noticed that his speakers used *he or she* for only 2% of the epicene antecedents in televised interviews. More recently, Matossian (1997) found that *he or she* was very rarely found in a sample of 1,267 third-person generic pronouns of both written and spoken usage. The weak tendency to use the disjunctive pronominal, despite its inclusive meaning and grammaticality, is possibly due to its “formal, self-conscious connotations” (Matossian, 1997:

44). Although pronominal *he or she* meets the expectations of an inclusive language, speakers are more willing to exploit and make use of alternative strategies (such as the use of singular *they*) to fulfill their inclusive ideology.

The tendency to avoid male generics is led by women. Women are more inclusive (i.e., less sex biased) in their use of generic pronouns. Meyers (1990) observed that female highly self-conscious adult college writers led in adopting alternatives to male generics compared with their male counterparts. Similarly, Balhorn (2009) reported that the female writers used *he* less frequently than the male writers did. However, women are not yet willing to use generic *she* for epicene and generic referents. Instead, women adopt other strategies to avoid male generics such as the use of singular *they* (Matossian, 1997) or the pluralization of the referent (Meyers, 1990). Overall, the relatively higher tendency of women to avoid *he* may indicate what Kramarae (1981) described as a different perception of the world between men and women. Kramarae noted "[w]omen perceive the world differently from men because of women's and men's different experience and activities rooted in the division of labor" (3). In general, women are found to be pioneering in adopting new linguistic variants in their speech communities (Martyna, 1978; Milroy et al., 1994; Haeri, 1996; and Eddington & Taylor, 2009, for example). In other words, women are more willing to follow a language-inclusive ideology that does not exclude them from linguistic representation.

Not only are females more inclusive in their usage of generic pronouns, but they are also more inclusive in their interpretation of these inclusive pronouns. For example, Khosroshahi (1989) reported that women, overall, drew fewer male pictures than men in their representation of the mental images that generic pronouns evoked. Similarly, Gastil (1990) found that females had an inclusive interpretation of *he/she*. Combined together, the women's tendency to avoid the

use of male generics and their relative preference for an inclusive interpretation of generic pronouns, other than *he*, suggests that women are responding to the sexist connotations of male generics. This suggests that women are inclusive not only in their use of language but also in their thoughts about language, which can be a linguistic ideology in itself.

Spender (1980), in his book *Man Made Language*, argues that prescriptive male generic *he* was introduced by males in order to encode “sexism into the language to consolidate their claims of male supremacy” (144). Spender (1980) hypothesizes that women would resist linguistic sexism, and would be the primary users of alternative pronouns, such as singular *they*. Similarly, in her review of the linguistic practices of Moroccan women, Sadiqi (2003) observed that Moroccan women, resisting the gender roles imposed on them by culture and history, “exploit the symbolic values of specific languages and language uses to score social and personal gains” and use communicative strategies to “allow them to secure a place in the linguistic 'arena' of everyday conversations and to index their agency in language” (37).

### **Conclusion:**

The results of the studies of the usage of generic pronouns in American English show two important trends, a decline in the use of ‘generic’ *he*, especially to refer to gender neutral (i.e., epicene) antecedents and an increase in the use of singular *they*, especially to refer to gender neutral antecedents. Other alternatives (generic *she*, *he or she*) to the male generic clearly fail. The following two figures from Matossian (1997) illustrate these trends. The pronominal *he or she* is removed from the figures due to its very low frequency.

**Figure 1: Traditional prescriptive use of English third-person generic pronouns**

GENDER NUMBER		Feminine	Epicene	Masculine
		Singular	<b>SHE</b>	<b>HE</b>
Plural		<b>THEY</b>		

**Figure 2: Current use of English third-person generic pronouns**

GENDER NUMBER		Feminine	Epicene	Masculine
		Singular	<b>SHE</b>	<b>HE</b>
<b>THEY</b>				
Plural		<b>THEY</b>		

The comparison between the two figures above suggests a shift in language ideology from a male-biased ideology towards an inclusive ideology. This shift undermines the role of gender roles (i.e., social gender) as speakers rarely rely on the social gender of personal nouns in making their generic pronominal choices. In doing so, speakers may be avoiding any derogatory meaning associated with socially-gendered nouns sacrificing entrenched stereotypical assumptions (*nurse* – female, *mechanic* – male) for the sake of political correctness and fair language. Moreover, the gender of the speaker has a significant effect. Women are more inclusive in both their usage and interpretation (of inclusive pronouns) and are, therefore, pioneering in adopting the inclusive language ideology.

Both usage and interpretation of generic *he* indicate that generic *he* fails to be a truly generic pronoun. On the one hand, generic *he* was more frequently used with typically male antecedents than with neutral ones, and was rarely used with typically female antecedents. On the other hand, what is claimed to be generic *he* biases the reader towards a male interpretation as the largest proportion of ‘generic’ *he* triggers masculine imagery.

Overall, the studies of generic pronoun usage show three important shortcomings. First, there is a terminology inconsistency in the use of the terms *generic* and *epicene*. Second, most of these studies took for granted certain taxonomy and were not explicit on how they designated certain antecedents as: typically male, typically female, and epicene. Third, very few of these studies correlated usage with gender roles. A more comprehensive examination requires the exploration of both the use and understanding (interpretation) of generic pronouns.

The use of English generic pronouns by users who belong to other cultures with different beliefs about the relationship between men and women may reveal the role of varying linguistic ideologies in the communication of gender-related messages. In the following section, I discuss Arabic structural and sociolinguistic androcentricity and its relation to the linguistic gender ideology in the Arab World.

## **V. Linguistic Gender Ideology in Arabic**

As discussed earlier, Arabic is a gender language with two gender categories: masculine/male and feminine/female. Nouns in Arabic are specified for gender via grammatical and/or lexical marking. The satellite words in the phrase or sentence (e.g., verbs, adjectives, and pronouns) agree with the gender of the noun. Other categories of linguistic gender representation (i.e., lexical, referential, and social gender) correspond with grammatical gender in Arabic.

Both Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic (the various regional dialects) are claimed to be heavily androcentric (i.e., male biased) in terms of their structure and use. At the structural level, Sadiqi (2003 and 2006) argues that Arabic is deeply androcentric. At the sociolinguistic level, Arabic androcentricity is evident in terms of the disproportional distribution of power, space, and linguistic visibility between men/males and women/females (e.g., Sadiqi, 2003 and 2006; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006; Al-Ali, 2006).

In this section, I discuss both levels of androcentricity of Arabic. While I argue that the structural androcentricity in Arabic is not an inherent one but reflects a social ideology (socio-cultural assumptions and beliefs), I adhere to the concept of sociolinguistic androcentricity in Arabic. This argument is important to this study because it motivates the sociolinguistic approach, rather than the psycholinguistic approach, to the study of the use of English generic pronouns by native speakers of Arabic. I argue that native speakers of Arabic transfer a social construct (i.e., linguistic gender ideology), rather than pure linguistic elements, into their use of English generic pronouns as a second language.

### **1. Formal androcentricity in Arabic**

Formal androcentricity relates to the structural limitations in certain languages that hinder the representation of females in language, resulting in a male-biased use of the language. In formally androcentric languages, females are less linguistically visible than males due to structural limitations in these languages. In other words, structural androcentricity is “the linguistic indexing of male-biased concepts in specific languages” (Sadiqi, 2006: 97). Some researchers such as Sadiqi (2003, 2006) and Sadiqi and Ennaji (2006) claim that Arabic is androcentric in terms of the grammatical encoding of gender. Sadiqi (2003, 2006) claims that Arabic is structurally androcentric and cites examples such as masculine precedence, the

derivation hypothesis in Arabic morphology, generic reference, and the lack of feminine counterparts of some masculine nouns. In the following, I discuss these examples and show that Arabic androcentricity is far from being established as an inherent one and that what seem to be examples of formal androcentricity in Arabic are probably examples of sociolinguistic androcentricity.

The masculine form often precedes the feminine form in the Arabic noun phrase. This masculine precedence cannot be accidental given its high frequency of occurrence. Sadiqi (2003, 2006) cites the regular precedence of masculine nouns over feminine nouns in Arabic expressions, such as *rajulun wa imraʔah* (a man and a woman) and *Tiflun wa Tiflah* (a male child and a female child). The reverse expressions *imraʔatun wa rajulun* (a woman and a man) and *Tiflatun wa Tiflun* (a female child and a male child) are rare. The exceptions are very few examples such as *sayyidaatii wa saadatii* (ladies and gentlemen) which is a calque (i.e., a direct translation) from English. However, Arabic allows the feminine noun to precede, in which case the verb agrees with the feminine noun. The following two examples illustrate the agreement consequences of both orders:

- |     |  |              |     |             |            |
|-----|--|--------------|-----|-------------|------------|
| 10) | kataba                                 | al-waladu    | wa  | al-bintu    | risaalatan |
|     | wrote.3MS                              | the-boy.3S   | and | the-girl.3S | a letter   |
|     | ‘The boy and the girl wrote a letter.’ |              |     |             |            |
| 11) | katab-a t                              | al-bintu     | wa  | al-waladu   | risaalatan |
|     | wrote-3FS                              | the-girl .3S | and | the-boy.3S  | a letter   |
|     | ‘The girl and the boy wrote a letter.’ |              |     |             |            |

In (6) the masculine noun *alwaladu* precedes the feminine noun *albintu* and the verb agrees with the closer noun, which is the masculine noun. Example (7) has the reverse order and the verb carries feminine agreement with the closer noun, which is the feminine noun. These two examples show that Arabic allows for both orders and has the ability to accommodate both possibilities to its inflectional agreement system. Therefore, the typical masculine precedency in

Arabic cannot be related to any structural limitations in Arabic. Yet, Sadiqi (2003, 2006) uses derogatory commentaries and sexist interpretations that some pro-masculine traditional Arab linguists provided for the masculine precedence to argue that this pattern is evidence of structural androcentricity in Arabic. Commenting on those grammarians' interpretation, Sadiqi (2003) argues that "the comments of traditional Arab grammarians can be read only as a particular kind of language ideology which often leads to stereotypical and sexist views in society at large [sic large]" (5). In a subsequent account, Sadiqi (2006) considers the masculine precedence in Arabic as an example of the relegation of women to a secondary position and is "reminiscent of the folk ideology which is still prevalent in the Arab-Islamic world whereby males are given precedence over females" (5).

While masculine forms (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns) are generally unmarked for gender in Arabic, feminine forms often require explicit marking. According to the derivation hypothesis in Arabic morphology, feminine forms are derived from the masculine ones. For example, feminine nouns are derived from the masculine ones by virtue of adding the feminine marker *-a* or *-ih*<sup>3</sup> (e.g., *xaal* 'maternal uncle' → *xaal-ih* 'maternal aunt'). Sadiqi (2003) questions the derivation hypothesis and proposes that feminine forms were historically shortened (i.e., through backformation) to make the masculine forms following a rule of economy or deletion. Sadiqi (2006) considers the derivation hypothesis as an example of grammatical androcentricity of Arabic and argues:

traditional Arab grammarians' derivation hypothesis was advanced and maintained mainly because it served socio-cultural purposes and had social meaning that fit within the overall Arab-Islamic patriarchy where women were subordinate to men and hence the latter needed to "grammatically" precede. (6)

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<sup>3</sup> This is the feminine marker in Jordanian Arabic. The feminine marker has more or less different phonological realizations in different dialects of Arabic.

As clear in the above quotation, Sadiqi (2006) uses claims that famous medieval Arab grammarians (e.g., Sibawayhe, Ibn Al-Anbari, and Ibn Ginni) made about the language to claim that Arabic is structurally androcentric. In fact, Sadiqi's claim may be better interpreted as an example of sociolinguistic androcentricity because it relates to thoughts about the language rather than to the structure of the language itself.

Generic reference in Arabic seems mistakenly to lend support to the concept of formal androcentricity in Arabic. Personal nouns in Arabic are specified grammatically and/or lexically for gender. While masculine nouns are unmarked, feminine nouns are grammatically marked for gender using suffixes such as *-a* in the singular and *-aat* in the plural. However, only masculine nouns are used for making reference about a person of unknown or undetermined gender, hence excluding feminine nouns from constructing generic reference. Given that Arabic is a gender language, the use of masculine nouns for generic reference has agreement consequences in the sentence; co-indexing verbs, adjectives, and pronouns are used in the masculine to agree with the gender of the noun. Consider the following examples from Jordanian Arabic elicited by the researcher:

- |     |            |  |                                     |                             |  |
|-----|------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 12) | iTHa<br>If | muwaaTin<br>citizen.MS   | urduni<br>Jordanian.MS              | bidd- <b>u</b><br>want-3MS  | <b>yi</b> -nzal<br>3MS-get down            |
|     | ʔala<br>on | ilintixaabaat<br>elections   | <b>huwwa</b> Hurr<br>he free.MS     |                             |  |
|     |            | 'If a Jordanian citizen wishes to run for elections, he should be able to.'    |                                     |                             |  |
| 13) | iTHa<br>If | muwaaTin- <b>iin</b><br>citizen.3MP  | urduniy- <b>iin</b><br>Jordanian-MP | bid- <b>hum</b><br>want-MP  | <b>yi</b> -nzal- <b>u</b><br>3M-get down-P |
|     | ʔala<br>on | ilintixaabaat<br>elections   | <b>humma</b><br>they.M              | Hurr- <b>iin</b><br>free-MP |  |
|     |            | 'If any Jordanian citizens wish to run for elections, they should be able to.' |                                     |                             |  |
| 14) | iTHa<br>If | muwaaTin- <b>a</b><br>citizen-FS   | urduniyy- <b>a</b><br>Jordanian-FS  | bid- <b>ha</b><br>wants-3FS | <b>ti</b> -nzal<br>3FS-get down            |

ʔala      ilintixaabaat      **hiyya**      **Hurr-a**  
on      elections      she      free-FS  
‘If a female Jordanian citizen wishes to run for elections, she should be able to.’

15) iTHa      muwaaTin-**aat**      urduniy-**aat**      bid-**hin**      yi-nzal-**in**  
If      citizen-FP      Jordanian-FP      want-3FP      3-get down-FP

ʔala      ilintixaabaat      **hinna**      **Hurr-aat**  
on      elections      they-F      free-FP  
‘If any female Jordanian citizens wish to run for elections, they should be able to.’

The subject is singular masculine (muwaaTin) in (8) and plural masculine (muwaaTin-iin) in (9).

Both of these sentences have a generic reading in Jordanian Arabic. They refer to any male or female Jordanian citizen(s). However, neither sentence (10) nor sentence (11), which have singular feminine (muwaaTin-a) and plural feminine (muwaaTin-aat) subjects respectively, can be interpreted as referring to an individual of either sex. Instead, the reference in (10) and (11) is restricted to female Jordanian citizens.

The use of masculine generics in Arabic does not seem to be linguistically motivated and is not the result of structural limitations. On the contrary, the use of masculine generics in Arabic is surprising because gender languages, such as Arabic, “offer the larger potential for the avoidance of male-biased language – simply because female visibility is more easily achieved on the level of expression” (Hellinger and Bubmann, 2002:19-20). Similarly, Sadiqi (2003) explains that words like al-muwaaTin “citizen-MS”, al-ʕaamil “worker-MS”, or even al-ʔustaaTH “teacher-MS” are used in a generic way “although there are at least as many female as male citizens, workers, and teachers, and in spite of the fact that Arabic contains gender morphemes even in the dual form” (6). Although Sadiqi (2003) claims that Arabic masculine generics are examples of structural androcentricity, Sadiqi (2006) argues that these masculine generics are the result of a male-biased ideology that stems from “a heavily-gendered socio-cultural context” that

makes this structural androcentricity appear “as a ‘natural’ phenomenon and is seldom invoked as ‘genuine’ androcentricity” (96). Her argument seems to be in line with the Sapir -Whorf hypothesis, which states that our culture determines our language; language determines the way that we categorize our thoughts about the world and our experiences in it. These claims can also be seen in Spender’s (1980) hypothesis ‘men made the language’. Spender (1980) argues that prescriptive male generic *he* was introduced by males in order to encode “sexism into the language to consolidate their claims of male supremacy.” (144)

Some masculine nouns lack feminine counterparts in Arabic. For example, nouns such as *shaxS* ‘person’, *fard* ‘individual’, *naas* ‘people’ do not have feminine counterparts. The absence of feminine counterparts of these masculine nouns is unexpected given that Arabic is a gender language with productive grammatical gender. Sadiqi (2006) argues that the absence of feminine counterparts of such masculine nouns results from a structural androcentricity of the language. However, given the small number of similar cases, one can hardly draw any generalizations in this regard. These instances may be due to a natural gap in the language, avoidance of use, or some semantic reasoning such as that these nouns are too vague to carry any gender specification.

In sum, Arabic seems to be far from being a structurally male-biased language. Arabic is at least not more structurally androcentric than other languages such as English. What other scholars have proposed as examples of structural androcentricity are probably examples of the sociolinguistic androcentricity of Arabic because they pertain to how Arabic is utilized to construct and communicate gender messages in Arab speech communities rather than to structural limitations in Arabic. In the following section, I discuss further sociolinguistic manifestations of this male-biased ideology in the Arab World.

## 2. Sociolinguistic androcentricity in Arabic

In sociolinguistics, language is viewed as a social behavior, where language use is strongly conditioned by various social and situational factors. Sociolinguistic androcentricity relates to how gendered messages are linguistically performed in social life. Therefore, Arabic sociolinguistic androcentricity can only be understood within the overall socio-cultural framework within which it is produced, practiced, and perpetuated (Badran et al 2002; Sadiqi 2006). At the level of language use, androcentricity is attested in the “sense-making of gender-related expressions and sentences” (Sadiqi, 2006: 89). In addition to the previous examples of androcentricity in Arabic, which were mistakenly viewed as signs of structural androcentricity, several other sociolinguistic practices suggest that the use of Arabic is heavily male biased.

Like many societies and cultures today, Arab-Islamic societies and cultures are patriarchal. Although most modern societies and cultures may be perceived as patriarchal, male authority can be seen in a different way in the Arab world. Saadawi (1980) and Mernissi (1994) argue that Arab-Islamic patriarchy is based on the notion of space dichotomy: while men are associated with the public space, women are associated with the private space. Similarly, Sadiqi (2003) claims that Arab-Islamic patriarchy is different from mainstream Western patriarchy; whereas the former is based on space, the latter is based on the power of “image” creating “models” for men and women. According to Sadiqi and Ennaji (2006), this space notion (*Huduud*<sup>4</sup> ‘boundaries’) “is not only spatial, but also linguistic and symbolic” (9). Sadiqi (2003) argues:

Only males have the right to recite the Qur’an loudly in public, to lead the Friday prayers, to deliver Friday sermons, to slaughter animals while uttering specific religious formulae, to be

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<sup>4</sup> The term *Huduud* first appeared in Quran to refer to boundaries that Muslims should not cross such as committing adultery or theft. The term has since acquired an additional everyday meaning such as the boundary between public and private space.

present and participate orally during the marriage and burial rites, to deliver “important” political speeches, to debate “serious” literary works. (18)

This space dichotomy (private/public) has linguistic consequences. For example, terms denoting ‘private’ space such as *xaadim-ah* ‘maid’, *rabb-at manzil* ‘housewife’, and *xayyaaT-ah* ‘seamstress’ are often used in the feminine as indicated by corpus search (see the complete results of the corpus search in Appendix 1). Interestingly, the term *xayyaaT* (the masculine counterpart of *xayyaaT-ah*) seems to be associated with public space meaning ‘tailor’.

Space does not seem to be simply divided into public and private but is also domain-based. Sadiqi (2003) claims that Arab women’s space is limited and publicly constrained and restricted in the four domains of public power in the Arab world. According to her, these domains are: religion, politics, law, and literacy. This spatial restriction has linguistic manifestations. In the domain of religion, terms such as *sheikh*, *rajul diin* ‘religious man’, *imaam* ‘imam’, and *xaTiib* ‘preacher’ are always used in the masculine and never appear in the feminine in public discourse. In the political spheres, the terms *siyaasi* ‘politician’, *waziir* ‘minister’, and *naa’ib* ‘MP/Congress representative’ are often used in the masculine and rarely appear in the feminine. In the legal domain, terms such as *qaaDi* ‘judge’, *muHaami* ‘lawyer’, *qaanuuni* ‘jurist’, *musharriʕ* ‘legislator’, and *shurTi* ‘police officer’ are more frequently used as masculine and are seldom used as feminine. The results of my Arabic corpus search confirm these observations. In the domain of literacy and higher education, terms such as *ustaaTH* ‘teacher, professor’, *ʕaalim* ‘scientist’, *adiib* ‘writer’, *shaaʕir* ‘poet’, and *mufakkir* ‘intellectual’ often appear in the masculine; their feminine counterparts are rarely used. These observations are also confirmed through the Arabic corpus research.

When women step into public space, they seem to be associated with less power and authority compared with men. For example, even ‘typically-feminine’ (Matossian, 1997) terms

that relate to the public space such as *mumarriD-ah* ‘nurse’, *sikerteyr-ah* ‘secretary’, *muDiif-ih* ‘stewardess’ are probably used in relation to the more powerful terms *doctour* ‘doctor’, *mudiir* or *ra?iis* ‘manager’, and *Tayyaar* ‘pilot’, respectively.

In terms of visibility in the workplace, women are socially banned or unwelcomed in several occupations such as engineering in some Arab countries. It seems that such restriction is based on social stereotypes that view women as weaker and less talented. Berrais (2010) reported that women are hardly seen in technical and engineering professions and higher technical education in Levantine and Gulf Arab countries. Upon a survey of the numbers of females enrolled in engineering, construction, and industry majors in nine Arab Universities, Berrais (2011) attributes the low visibility of women in these professions and education programs to local Arab socio-cultural forces that discourage women’s participation in the labor market.

The status of women in the public space in the Arab World cannot be understood in isolation of the current socio-economic situation in these countries. International human development reports (e.g., The United Nations World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2004-2010 and the USAID Gender Assessment reports for a number of participating countries 2003-2007) refer to the limited access women have to resources such as education and political involvement in the Arab World. They also document the proportional visibility (presence) of women in public domains such as the workplace. These reports share one major conclusion; gender equity is not met yet, despite recorded development and success rates in some Arab countries. For example, the report on Gender and Generation in Household Labor Supply in Jordan (2003) documents empirically the disproportionate workforce participation of young urban single women in Amman, the capital of Jordan.

Due to the disproportional distribution of power and space, women are less linguistically visible than men in the public discourse in some parts of the Arab World. The relative linguistic invisibility of women is evident in several public social practices. For example, while the names of the groom, his father or guardian, and the bride's father or guardian appear in full on Arabic wedding invitation cards, a bride's name rarely does. Instead, the bride's name is often muted using terms such as *kariimatuhu* 'his honorable daughter' or another corresponding kinship term (e.g., *his honorable sister*) in Jordanian society (Abd-el-Jawad, 1989; Al-Ali, 2006). Similarly, the Arabic wedding invitation card seldom includes the names of the married couple's mothers and rarely makes any reference to them at all, except in rare cases where the phrase *wa zawjatuhu* 'and his wife' follows the names of the couple's male guardians (Al-Ali, 2006). Al-Ali (2006) argues the exclusion or minimal reference of feminine proper names on a wedding invitation card emphasizes the "the paternal power and gender discrimination" in the Jordanian society and does also symbolize "the dominance of the masculine authority in Jordanian society, in the sense that the roles of men and women are not distributed equally between them, as men remained the guardians of women before and after marriage" (710). Similarly, in her study of obituaries in a major Egyptian newspaper (Al-Ahram), Eid (2002) documented the absence of deceased women's names and their titles. Eid (2002) reported that deceased women were identified in terms of their relation to males (i.e., the wife of, the mother of) rather than by their real names.

Some of the terms Arab men use to talk about or even address their wives is also another example of Arab men silencing the voice of women. Men usually use terms such as *ilmara* 'the woman', *ilahail* 'the family', *umm liŕyaal* 'the mother of the kids', or less frequently the nativized French term *ilmadaam* 'the madam' to talk about their wives, especially in public.

Abd-el-Jawad (1986, 1989) made a number of anecdotal but interesting observations about the relationship between language and women's place in Jordan. These observations include naming conventions for women as well as address and reference terms for women in Jordan. Among these examples, Abd-el-Jawad, (1989) reported 27 terms that Jordanian men often use to address or refer to their wives (or other women); most of those terms are derogatory. Based on an attitudinal survey of 100 respondents divided evenly between men and women, Abd-el-Jawad, (1989) observed that Jordanian men and women overall have a negative attitude towards the use/meaning of these terms, with women being the leaders in this reaction. Similarly, Boussofara (2011) reports that Tunisian husbands often refer to their wives as *l-mra* 'the woman' in order to "carefully guard the sanctity and privacy of the domestic sphere while referring to their wives" (219). Boussofara (2011) explains:

Wives are not referred to by their first names. A wife's first name denotes domesticity and familiarity and its use in public is perceived as intrusion into, if not violation of, the private space of the family. In the old days, but also in traditional and conservative regions of Tunisia today, wives are talked about as *d-dār* 'the home', or *l-mrā* literally 'the woman', or with the nativized and French-flavored word *l-madām*, in urban areas today. 'Marti' (my wife), in Tunisian 'āmiyya, is not used in public spaces because it breaches the complex Islamic/Arab cultural code sanctity-reserve-respect' (El Guindi 1999). (219-220)

The feminine linguistic invisibility in the Arab World can also be seen through the *kunya* terms (nicknames) adopted by married couples or even unmarried men in many Arab cultures, especially in the Levantine and Gulf societies. A social practice that has religious grounding in these societies is for married individuals to introduce themselves, and also to be addressed and referred to, using the genitive construction *abu* 'father of' or *umm* 'mother of' + the name of the eldest child, e.g., *abu Mohammed*, *abu Musa*, etc. Moreover, unmarried men may decide on such nicknames even before getting married and having any children. These nicknames are considered honorific, carry pride in parents' accomplishment of having male offspring, and may also signal

the individual's transition into the phase of marriage/parenthood, a stage which is often associated with maturity and financial independence (Notzon and Nesom, 2005). If the first-born child is a female, married couples may adopt that name until they give birth to a male child, in which case they switch to the name of the male child. Some couples, especially men with pre-marriage nicknames, may insist on their original nicknames even if they already have daughters (Sindi, 2010). In other cases, when men did not have nicknames to start with, married men with no male children may use the name of their fathers for that phrasal nickname.

Overall, the use of Arabic is deeply androcentric and is characterized by a male-biased ideology resulting in a disproportional distribution of power, space, and linguistic visibility. The effect of this gender ideology on the use of English by native speakers of Arabic has not been investigated so far. Moreover, most of the previous studies that have investigated the use of English by native speakers of Arabic have been psycholinguistic in nature and have not considered the effect of sociolinguistic factors such the ideology of the speaker. I argue that native speakers of Arabic transfer a linguistic gender ideology that has its linguistic manifestations, rather than transferring purely linguistic structures, when they communicate gender-related messages in English. This ideology is the same one that makes the structure of Arabic seem androcentric and the use of Arabic heavily male biased. This approach views language learners as “socioculturally... situated individuals with multiple subjectivities and identities (e.g., not only as language learners), which are inculcated, enacted, and co-constructed through social experience in everyday life.” (Duff and Talmy, 2011: 97) However, the communication of this linguistic gender ideology is not independent of factors effecting second language acquisition and use such as L2 proficiency, sociolinguistic competence, input, and linguistic socialization.

## **VI. Second Language Acquisition**

In this section, I discuss a few second language acquisition topics in terms of how they can affect the use of English generic pronouns by second/foreign language learners. These topics are: proficiency, sociolinguistic competence, linguistic input, socialization, and indexicality.

### **1. L2 Proficiency**

Numerous studies have showed a correlation between L2 proficiency and L2 performance, whereby more advanced learners are more successful in approaching L1 (native) norms than less advanced learners. Not only is proficiency correlated with L2 outcomes, but is also associated with the utilization of linguistic strategies. For example, Green and Oxford (1995) found that more advanced learners had an advantage over less advanced learners in terms of level and number of linguistic strategies they employ.

Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the ‘language ability’ and reports that the term has been used to refer “to knowledge, competence, or ability in the use of a language, irrespective of how, where, or under what conditions it has been acquired.” (16) In the context of L2 acquisition and use, Tremblay (2011) reports that proficiency is defined as “an index of the comprehension and production abilities that L2 learners develop across linguistic domains (e.g., lexical competence, grammatical competence, discourse competence) and modalities (spoken and written) to communicate.” (340)

Proficiency is a complex construct, the definition and quantification of which require the consideration of multiple internal and external factors. Among the internal factors are learners’ cognitive abilities, aptitude, and attitude. Among the external (or contextual) factors are duration of stay in the L2 speech community and the nature of L2 input. Along these lines, Cummins (1991) identifies two types of proficiency, namely attribute-based proficiency and input-based

proficiency. According to Cummins (1991), while attribute-based proficiency is largely influenced by some 'stable attributes' of a particular learner such as his or her cognitive and personality variables, input-based proficiency relates to the quality and quantity of L2 input more than to any stable attributes.

Second and foreign language learners, unlike native speakers, show enormous variability in terms of their L2 proficiency (Tremblay, 2011). The variation in L2 proficiency among learners can be attributed to variation in the factors or dimensions that constitute proficiency such as learners' age of first exposure to L2, duration of residence (if any) in the L1 speech community, individual differences among learners, type and amount of L2 authentic input (Rast, 2008; Flege and MacKay, 2011), types of learning strategies (Bialystok, 1981; Gardner and Macintyre, 1993), differences in L2 learners' attitudes and motivations (Macintyre, 1994), distance between L1 and L2, and even competence in L1 or native language proficiency (Cummins 1991; Walqui, 2000). Similarly, several methods were suggested as measures of L2 proficiency. Among these Green and Oxford (1995) report: self-reported proficiency, achievement test scores, college placement examinations, grades in language, duration of language study in years, and career type.

## **2. L2 Sociolinguistic Competence**

Sociolinguistic competence is part of the speaker's overall communicative competence. Communicative competence is broadly defined as the competence to communicate (Bagarić and Djigunović, 2007). The notion of communicative competence is fundamental to research in both language socialization and second/foreign language education (Moore, 2008).

For Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), communicative competence has four components: linguistic (grammatical) competence, discourse competence, strategic competence,

and sociolinguistic competence. This multifaceted view of communicative competence contradicts traditional views, which equated (or limited) communicative competence to grammatical competence. Hymes (1972) argued:

There are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one. Put otherwise, there is behavior, and, underlying it, there are several systems of rules reflected in the judgements and abilities of those whose messages the behavior manifests. (63)

According to Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), sociolinguistic competence refers to the speaker's ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts. Therefore, in the context of second language acquisition, sociolinguistic competence refers to the appropriateness of L2 use rather than to L2 grammaticality. For Howard (2004), sociolinguistic competence is the acquisition of the systematic variation among sociolinguistic variants that native speakers possess as a function of a variety of linguistic and extralinguistic factors. An example of this appropriate sociolinguistic variation is the use of formal and informal variants in the appropriate contexts.

Previous studies have revealed several limitations on the acquisition of target sociolinguistic competence by L2 learners (e.g., Regan, 1995; Howard, 2004; Dewaele, 2004). For example, Howard (2004) reported that classroom L2 learners' use of L2 is characterized by underuse of informal and vernacular sociolinguistic markers. However, Howard (2004) and Dewaele (2004) noted the positive effect of informal and direct contact with L2 outside the classroom, especially with native speakers in the L2 speech community, for the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence and the use of informal sociolinguistic variants. Similarly, Regan (1995) observed that unless L2 learners stay in the target language community for a sufficient duration, during which they have sufficient authentic contact with the target language, the informal variants will not be acquired.

### **3. L2 input**

The topic of linguistic input is central to the theory of second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning (FLL). Existing research has pointed to the important role L2 input plays in developing target language proficiency (Gass and Madden, 1985). In the context of SLA, input can be defined as “the L2 data (form-based and/or meaning-based) that learners receive either in the formal classroom or in a naturalistic setting.” (Leow, 2007: 21) As suggested in this definition, there are two major types of linguistic input: formal (non-authentic) and authentic. Formal sources include L2/FL classroom and learning materials. Authentic input includes sources such as media, Internet-mediated communication (van Compernelle and Williams, 2012), exposure to original L2 materials, and direct contact with the target language community (Howard, 2004). In SLA theories, there is a focus on providing input that is comprehensible (Krashen, 1980) regardless of the source of that input. Krashen (1982) defines “comprehensible input as natural, communicative, and roughly-tuned input”, one that is one step ahead of where the learner is. Krashen (1982) considers comprehensible and natural input as the most important factor facilitating or hindering the acquisition of second or foreign language.

Several studies (e.g., Howard, 2004; van Compernelle and Williams, 2012) noted the limitations of foreign language classroom input for the development of sociolinguistic competence, in particular, by foreign language learners because of the lack of authentic input in these classroom settings. Therefore, foreign language classroom learners are often less sociolinguistically competent than second language learners who studied or resided in the target language community (Howard, 2004). For example, they tend to overuse formal variants at the expense of informal or less formal variants (Regan, 1995 and Howard, 2004).

Corder (1967) is credited to be the first one to make a distinction between 'input' and 'intake' (Rast, 2008). Whether foreign language input can be considered as 'intake' depends on several factors such as the quantity and quality of this input along with other factors such as perceptual saliency (Ito, 2001). Corder (1967) argues:

The simple fact of presenting a certain linguistic form to a learner in the classroom does not necessarily qualify it for the status of input, for the reason that input is 'what goes in' not what is available for going in, and we may reasonably suppose that it is the learner who controls this input, or more properly his intake. This may well be determined by the characteristics of his language acquisition mechanism and not by those, of the syllabus. (165)

Corder's (1967) use of the term 'qualifying input' or 'intake' is in line with Krashen's (1982) view of 'comprehensible input'. Both of them emphasize the quality of input and question its potential to trigger the acquisition of L2 grammatical competence and to result in an appropriate use of L2 (i.e., to trigger the process of language socialization).

#### **4. Language Socialization**

We learn language and we use it in its social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts (Crago, 1992). It is the acquisition of the communicative competence to perform (i.e., communicate) appropriately in these contexts that Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) call *language socialization*. Broadly speaking, language socialization is the acquisition of *habitus* in Bourdieu's terms or to the acquisition of means of being in, and ways of relating to, the world (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004).

Language socialization is the strand of research that examines the lifelong process of language learning and the use of language in its various contexts, whether social, cultural, or interactional (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004; Moore, 2008; Duff and Hornberger, 2010). In other words, language socialization is the process through which children (in L1 acquisition) or novices (in L2 acquisition) transition toward securing membership in a social group or social

groups (Wentworth, 1980; Ochs, 1990) by acquiring the appropriate sociocultural knowledge to become sociolinguistically competent participant in their speech community or communities (Ochs 1990).

Ochs and Schieffelin (2006) define language socialization in the context of first language acquisition as “the process in which children are socialized both through language and to use language within a community.” (73) According to Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), novices are socialized in both ways through their involvement in continuous life-span interactions with expert or more advanced members of the speech community (e.g., child–caregiver, teacher–student, and learner–native speaker). This approach highlights the “interdependence of language and sociocultural structures and processes” (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986: 163), the existence of certain universal relations between linguistic forms and ‘sociocultural order’ (Ochs 1990), and “the diversity of cultural paths to communicative competence and community membership” (Moore, 2008).

There are two types of socialization: explicit socialization and implicit socialization (Ochs 1990). On the one hand, explicit socialization involves giving directions and instructions. On the other hand, implicit socialization can be inferred or indirectly understood from input by children and learners. According to (Ochs 1990), “the greatest part of sociocultural information is cued implicitly, through language use.” (291) Ochs (1990) argues that linguistic structures, such as pronouns, may index social meanings in a way that regulates “the breadth and range of situational and social meanings” (288) that may be associated with the construction.

The extent to which second and foreign novices are socialized into the target language community and culture to use L2 (or FL) appropriately depends on the learning context in which they acquire the language. Moore (2008) explains that “language socialization researchers have

generated new understandings of how language teaching and learning is shaped by the social, cultural, and linguistic systems in which it is embedded.” (183). Unlike second language acquisition, learning a foreign language, normally in classroom, may deprive learners from genuine opportunities to acquire communicative (i.e., social) competence through which they can use language appropriately (Regan, 1995; Howard, 2004).

In the context of this study, language socialization has two sources of significance. The first source of significance concerns the extent to which L2 learners of English are socialized to gender roles as perceived and communicated by competent participants in the target language community (i.e., English native speakers). Gender role assignment is the outcome of the process of socialization, which creates “norms unique to each culture about what normal characteristics of men and women are” (Mollegaard, 2003:1) as a result of the complex interaction of linguistic, cultural, and social structures (Mollegaard, 2003). These socio-cultural norms may result in the formulation of cross-cultural differences in the assumptions and expectations about the appropriate gender roles for men and women, thus, different patterns of language socialization. For example, Gemmill and Zoch Schaible (1991) argued that native culture dictates certain gender roles on individuals. They argued that these ‘appropriate gender roles’ are embedded in individuals and may carry over to L2 interaction and use. The question that arises here concerns the amount and quality of authentic L2 input available (and required) to socialize learners into the appropriate gender roles in the target language community.

The second source of importance concerns the extent to which L2 learners of English are socialized to the target language community in terms of its standards of use of English generic pronouns. Research on the use of English generic pronouns by English native speakers (e.g., Newman, 1992; Matossian, 1997; Baranowski, 2002) indicates an overall inclusive pattern,

whereby native speakers use inclusive pronouns (mainly singular *they*) at the expense of exclusive pronouns (*he, she*). Such linguistic choices have a social meaning (Ochs, 1990) and an ideological significance as suggested by Silverstein (1979). One question that arises here concerns the role of learners' linguistic and social background and the extent to which L1 interferes. In this regard, Ochs (1990) argues that "language must be studied not only as a symbolic system that encodes local social and cultural structures, but also as a *tool* for establishing (i.e., maintain, creating) social and psychological realities." (288) Beliefs (i.e., ideologies) about the appropriate use of language vary from one culture to another. Another question that arises here concerns the authenticity of classroom L2 input and its potential to socialize learners to the native speakers' norms of use of English generic pronouns because language is not only sensitive to culture, but it is also constructive of it (Crago, 1992)

## **5. Indexicality**

Several models and frameworks have been developed for the principle of indexicality. For Ochs (1990), it is the indexing of sociocultural knowledge (i.e., sociolinguistic competence) acquired through language socialization by children and novices in various contexts. Therefore, indexicality involves the creation of semiotic connections and relations between linguistic signs and some social meanings or ideological significance (Silverstein, 1985). Commenting on the role of indexicality in creating such links, Ochs (1990) argues that "language behavior socializes and carries out this function largely (although not exclusively) through its indexical structures." (304) Therefore, indexicality is not only the means through which the outcomes of socialization are performed, but it is also the means through which socialization is achieved by cuing (indexing) social life and situational contexts (Ochs, 1990). For Bucholtz and Hall (2005), indexicality is the mechanism through which identity can be constructed via linguistic means and

resources whereby speakers situate (i.e., index) themselves and others in linguistic discourse.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that:

In identity formation, indexicality relies heavily on ideological structures, for associations between language and identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values – that is, ideologies about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language. (594)

Indexicality is essential to the speaker's (and learner's) acquisition of his or her overall linguistic competence. Indexicality serves as the bridge that links grammatical competence to communicative competence. Ochs (1990) explains that for children and novices to acquire linguistic (grammatical) and sociocultural competence, they need to learn the social meaning and role of indexes, including the role of these indexes in constructing “social personae and social goals” (298). Moreover, Ochs (1990) argues that several types of sociocultural information can be indexed via linguistic signs. According to Ochs (1990), these include “social status, roles, relationships, settings, actions, activities, genres, topics” (293) among many other kinds of information.

Silverstein (1985) differentiates between two types of indexicality: referential and non-referential based on whether these indexicals contribute to the ‘denotational’ meaning of an utterance. While referential indexicals include pronouns and demonstratives, non-referential indexicals include context-indexing features such as code switching and the choice of a specific dialect (Ochs, 1990).

In the context of this study, referential indexicality concerns whether L2 learners may establish meaningful links between gender roles and the use of English generic pronouns. In this sense, indexicality is not only an outcome of the process of socialization (i.e., appropriate gender roles and appropriate use of English generic pronouns), but is also a mechanism for achieving language socialization through the appropriate indexing of the relationship between gender roles

and pronominal choice. Following Ochs (1990), I argue that some sociocultural information (ideological in nature) is communicated by the indexing of these linguistic forms (i.e. pronouns).

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Present Study

The present study investigates the effect of the Arabic heavily-gendered socio-cultural androcentricity in the Arab World (Sadiqi, 2003 and 2006) on the use of English third-person generic pronouns by native speakers (NSs) of Arabic. This sociolinguistic androcentricity is important because it may influence the language users' performance, perception and attitudes toward gender assignment (Sadiqi, 2006).

The envelope of variation in this study is defined as the third-person pronouns *he*, *she*, *he or she*, and singular *they* when referring "to an indefinite, hypothetical, or quantificational human antecedent" that is considered as morphologically singular (Matossian, 1997: 1). In the literature, such usage is designated as either *generic* (e.g., Newman, 1992) or *epicene* (e.g., Matossian, 1997). For the sake of simplicity and clarity, in this study I use the term 'gender-neutral' rather than 'epicene'. Thus, a gender neutral antecedent is one that is regarded as typically gender-inclusive (e.g., *person*, *citizen*, and *student*). In other words, gender neutral nouns are not associated with any gender roles and thus are not associated with any maleness or femaleness likelihood. Contrary to Matossian (1997), I call any pronoun in anaphoric relation to such antecedents as a 'gender neutral' or 'gender-inclusive' generic pronoun rather than an 'epicene' pronoun. In contrast, the term *generic* is used in this study as a broad term and also to indicate reference to typically-male or typically-female antecedents (hence, male/female generic pronouns). Moreover, following Motschenbacher (2008) and contrary to the bulk of the literature, I will use the terms 'male generics' and 'female generics' instead of 'masculine generics' and 'feminine generics' because English does not have grammatical gender.

## **I. Questions and Hypotheses**

### **i. Gender Role Assignment Questionnaire**

1. What gender roles, if any, do English NSs associate with the English personal nouns in this study? How are female English NSs different from their male counterparts in terms of their gender role ratings? Are females less male biased (i.e., relatively more inclusive) than males?
2. What gender roles, if any, do Arabic NSs associate with the English personal nouns in this study? How are female Arabic NSs different from their male counterparts in terms of their gender role ratings? Are females less male biased (i.e., relatively more inclusive) than males?
3. How are Arabic NSs different from English NSs in terms of the gender roles they associate with the English personal nouns in this study? Are Arabic NSs male biased compared to English NSs?

### **ii. Sentence Completion Task**

4. What generic pronouns do English NSs use to pronominalize the typically male, typically female, and gender neutral personal nouns in this study? Do English NSs use inclusive generic pronouns (singular *they*, disjunctive pronominal *he or she*) more than exclusive generic pronouns (prescriptive *he*, feminine *she*)?
5. How are female and male English NSs different from each other in their pronominal choices? Are females less male biased (i.e., relatively more inclusive) than their male counterparts?
6. What generic pronouns do Arabic NSs use to pronominalize the typically male, typically female, and gender neutral personal nouns in this study? Do Arabic NSs use exclusive

generic pronouns (prescriptive *he*, feminine *she*) more than inclusive generic pronouns (singular *they*, disjunctive pronominal *he or she*)?

7. How are female and male Arabic NSs different from each other in their pronominal choices? Are females less male biased (i.e., relatively more inclusive) than their male counterparts?
8. Does English language proficiency have an effect on the Arabic NS's generic pronominal choices? Are more advanced learners more inclusive in their generic usage than less advanced learners?
9. How are Arabic NSs similar to or different from English NSs in terms of their use of English generic pronouns? Are Arabic NSs less gender inclusive?

In order to answer these questions, a number of hypotheses were formulated for both the American English and the Arabic participant groups. The hypotheses are divided into two groups: hypotheses about gender role assignment and hypotheses about the use of English generic pronouns.

**i. Native speakers of American English:**

**a. Perception of gender roles:**

- 1) English NSs will be more inclusive (gender neutral) in their reported gender roles for general personal nouns than for occupational ones.
- 2) Female English NSs will be more inclusive in their self-reported gender roles than their male counterparts.

**b. Use of English generic pronouns:**

- 1) English NSs will predominantly use singular *they* for self-reported general personal nouns (e.g., *person*), self-reported masculine-generic personal nouns (e.g., *engineer*), and feminine-generic personal nouns (e.g., *nurse*).
- 2) English NSs will rarely use generic *he* or *she* even for self-reported typically-male and typically-female personal nouns.
- 3) Female English NSs will be more inclusive in their usage of the generic pronouns than male English NSs.

**ii. Native speakers of Arabic**

**a. Perception of gender roles:**

- 1) Arabic NSs will be more inclusive (gender neutral) in their self-reported gender roles for general personal nouns than for occupational nouns.
- 2) Female Arabic NSs will be less male biased in their gender role associations than male Arabic NSs.
- 3) Overall, Arabic NSs will be less inclusive (i.e., more male biased) in their gender role associations than English NSs.

**b. Use of English generic pronouns:**

- 1) Arabic NSs will be male biased in their generic pronoun usage. They will be more male biased with occupational terms than with general terms (e.g., *person*).
- 2) Both male and female Arabic NSs will predominantly use generic *he* for self-reported general personal nouns and self-reported typically-male personal nouns.
- 3) Both male and female Arabic NSs will predominantly use generic *she* for self-reported typically-female personal nouns.

- 4) Arabic NSs will hardly, if ever, use singular *they* for generic references whether with epicene nouns, typically-male nouns, or typically-female nouns. This may be due to number agreement violation that singular *they* causes and the lack of sufficient input with singular *they*.

## **II. Methods**

### **i. Participants**

There were two participant groups: L1 English (control group) and L1 Arabic (experimental group). The L1 English group included 50 NSs of American English divided evenly between males and females. All of the English NSs were undergraduate students at the University of Kansas studying a variety of majors except for linguistics, anthropology, English, and ‘women, gender, and sexuality studies’. The participants in the English group were selected to fall within the age group of 18 – 24 years.

The L1 Arabic group consisted of 100 participants divided evenly between males and females. These participants were undergraduate students from a variety of majors at Yarmouk University in Jordan. The participants in the L1 Arabic group were divided into two subgroups in terms of their English proficiency: lower proficiency (Level 1) and higher proficiency (Level 2). The textbook for the higher and lower proficiency classes is ‘*Pre-intermediate New Headway English Course*’ by John and Liz Soras. The first level course covers the first half of the textbook and the second level course covers the second half.

These participants are expected to have been studying English as a foreign language for 10 years. Arabic Speakers who stayed in an English speaking country for more than one year in the last 5 years were excluded from the study. Similar to the L1 English group, the participants in

the L1 Arabic group were selected to fall within the age group of 18 – 24 years. No other criteria were used to exclude participants from the experiment.

## **ii. Materials**

The materials for the experiment consist of a list of human formally-singular nouns. These nouns were initially selected from previous studies (e.g., Martyna, 1978; Newman, 1992; Matossian, 1997) to represent the three different types of referents: epicene (gender neutral), typically male, and typically female. Most of the previous studies made claims about the gender roles associated with the selected nouns without providing any evidence for the reliability of their taxonomy. In this study, the list of collected nouns was rated by a separate group of 50 native speakers of American English as gender neutral, typically male, or typically female (See Appendix 2 for the complete results of this rating questionnaire). Then, the final list of nouns was determined by excluding any terms that showed considerable variation in rating among the participants in a way that did not allow for the specification of these terms as typically male, typically female, or gender-neutral. The criterion was to exclude any term that received less than 30 ratings (60% of participants). In order to keep an equal number of terms in the three groups, the 10 top rated terms were selected in each class.

The final list included 27 lexical nouns (e.g., *engineer*, *nurse*, and *person*) and three non-lexical nouns (*everyone*, *someone*, and *anyone*). The lexical nouns represented the three types of gender roles: typically male (e.g., *engineer*), typically female (e.g., *nurse*), and gender neutral (e.g., *person*) as reported initially by a separate group of American English NSs. Non-lexical nouns were included for two reasons. First, previous studies (e.g., Balhorn, 2009) reported that non-lexical nouns triggered pronominal responses different from those triggered by lexical nouns (mainly *he or she*). Second, non-lexical nouns may offer the greatest potential for epicene/neutral

meaning (Newman, 1992) and can serve as a tool to test the hypothesis that women are denied personhood in Arabic (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006). The list of the target terms is presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: List of target nouns (top 10 rated in each group)**

	Typically-male	Typically-female	Gender-neutral
1	Firefighter	Maid	Someone
2	Lumberjack	Beautician	Everyone
3	Carpenter	Secretary	Human being
4	Mechanic	Babysitter	Child
5	Burglar	Nurse	Anyone
6	Police officer	Librarian	Person
7	Private detective	Homemaker	Student
8	Politician	Hairdresser	Adult
9	Engineer	Shopper	Resident
10	Surgeon	Social worker	Citizen

### iii. Experiment

The experiment consisted of two tasks: a written sentence completion task and a gender role assignment written questionnaire. The participants from both language groups performed both tasks consecutively in the same session. The gender role assignment questionnaire was used to examine the gender roles which speakers associate with the English personal nouns. Contrary to most previous studies, this study did not take for granted any gender role taxonomy. On the other hand, the sentence completion task enabled us to investigate what generic pronouns speakers use as a function of the assigned gender roles. Thus, these two tasks combined may enable us to examine gender assignment at the level of thought about language and at the level of use of language revealing any potential correlation between these two. The participants did the sentence completion task first followed by the gender role rating questionnaire. The goal of this task order was to avoid making the participants aware of the issue of gender roles when performing the sentence completion task.

### **Task 1: Sentence completion task**

The final list of nouns (Table 1) was used as antecedents in a written sentence completion task. A pilot study was conducted in order to determine the sentence type that would elicit the largest number of pronouns in the actual experiment (i.e., the sentence completion task). Three types of sentences were considered and contrasted in terms of the grammatical role of the antecedent (Subject vs. Object) and Voice (Active vs. Passive). These three sentence types were:

- 1) Type I: subject antecedent , active voice: (e.g., *If a mechanic fixes the car on time,*)
- 2) Type II: subject antecedent, passive voice: (e.g., *If a mechanic is paid on time,*)
- 3) Type III: object antecedent, active voice (e.g., *If you pay a mechanic on time,*)

Ten native speakers of English (5 males and 5 females) and 10 intermediate second language learners of English native speakers of Arabic (5 males and 5 females) participated in the pilot study. The materials for this experiment consisted of 6 personal nouns: 2 typically male (*doctor* and *mechanic*), 2 typically female (*maid* and *nurse*), and 2 gender-neutral (*person* and *someone*). These gender associations were based on an earlier gender role assignment questionnaire. Each one of these nouns was used as an antecedent in the three sentence types in a sentence completion task. Therefore, the total number of sentences in this task was 18 sentences.

The results showed that native speakers of English provided more pronouns in Type I and Type II sentences (87% and 90%, respectively) than in Type III sentences (78%). However, there was no significant difference between these three sentence types for the English L2 learners, who provided 88% of the pronouns for Type I, 85% for Type II, and 83% for Type III. Therefore, only Type I and Type II sentences were used in the actual experiment as there was no difference between them for both language groups.

In terms of the type of specifier of the antecedent NP, only indefinites (e.g., a professor) were used because they are more likely to be interpreted as generic than definite NPs (McConnell-Ginet, 1979; Newman, 1992). Moreover, none of the sentences included any human antecedent other than the target one in order to avoid pronominal reference to non-target referents. All of the target antecedents were in the subject position and the distance between the antecedent and the pronoun gap was controlled for. Also, the length of the sentences was controlled for. The grammatical gender of the non-target non-human nouns was controlled for across the three groups of sentences (typically male, typically female, and gender neutral sentences).

The experiment sentences were presented in neutral contexts in order to avoid any traits or characteristics that may trigger any gender stereotypes other than those associated with the intended referent. Therefore, efforts were made to avoid sentences with potential gender contextual cues such as "*If a person runs out of sugar while baking a cake...*" and "*If a neighbor needs a screwdriver when the hardware store is closed*", both quoted from Matossian (1997). All of the sentences were in the present tense in order to avoid any specific reference reading that past tense sentences may trigger.

Three types of control sentences were used. First, eight sentences with lexically gendered antecedents were included. Four of these were male antecedents (*man, father, boy, son*), and four were female antecedents (*woman, mother, girl, daughter*). These were used to check learners' performance of gender agreement (*father – he, mother – she*). Second, four sentences with plural 'gender-neutral' antecedents (*human beings, persons, people, parents*) were included. These were used to check learners' performance of number agreement in English as an indicator of their potential to use singular *they* for generic reference. Third, the task included eight sentences

with non-human antecedents that corresponded to grammatically-gendered nouns in Arabic. Four of these sentences had masculine antecedents (*train, chair, pencil, and door*) and the other four had feminine antecedents (*car, table, watch, and apple*). These sentences served an important function; they were included to examine the potential transfer of grammatical gender from Arabic into English. Finally, the sentences were randomized. Here are few examples of the critical sentences (see the complete list of sentences in Appendix 3):

- 1) If a mechanic is paid on time,
- 2) After a nurse completes all hospital training,
- 3) When a citizen wants to get a passport,

## **Task 2: Gender role questionnaire**

The second task elicited the gender roles the participants (from both language groups) assign to the same noun antecedents from the sentence completion task (Task 1). Using a written questionnaire (*see* Appendix 4), the participants were asked to rate those personal nouns as typically male, typically female, or gender neutral. Also, the list included 8 lexically-gendered nouns as control items. Four of these control items were male nouns (*man, brother, boy, uncle*) and the other four items were female nouns (*woman, sister, girl, and aunt*). Finally, the list was randomized.

### **iv. Procedures**

A questionnaire was used to collect information about the participants (of both groups) regarding their gender, age, major of study, and languages spoken other than their mother tongue. The confidentiality of collected information was emphasized and human subject consent forms were distributed to the participants. Next, the participants were asked to complete the fragments in the sentence-completion task. Following the first task, the participants were asked to rate the target

personal nouns from the sentence-completion task as: typically male, typically female, or gender-neutral.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

In this chapter I present the results of the two tasks in this study: the gender role assignment questionnaire and the sentence completion task. For each task, I first present the results for the English NSs followed by the results for the Arabic NSs (English L2 learners, henceforth). For each language group, I compare the results for the male and female participants. Finally, I make comparisons between the results for the two language groups (English NSs and English L2 learners).

#### I. Analysis of Results

For the purpose of analysis of data from the gender role assignment questionnaire, GENDER ROLE was defined as the dependent variable with three values: typically male, typically female, and gender neutral. The dependent variable was coded as the number of ‘typically male’, ‘typically female’, or ‘gender neutral’ ratings per participant. The independent variables are FIRST LANGUAGE (Arabic, English), GENDER OF PARTICIPANT, and PROFICIENCY (learners’ English proficiency: lower proficiency, higher proficiency). One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to assess the potential main effect of these variables on the dependent variable (i.e., GENDER ROLE). Two-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess the effect of the interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER OF PARTICIPANT on the one hand and PROFICIENCY and GENDER OF PARTICIPANT on the other hand on GENDER ROLE; the latter test being relevant to the English L2 group only.

For the purpose of analysis of data from the sentence completion task, PRONOMINAL CHOICE was defined as the dependent variable with four values: *he*, *she*, *he or she*, and *they*. Frequencies of use of each pronoun were calculated (across males and females and across all

types of gender roles) in order to see the most commonly used pronoun for each language group. The dependent variable was coded as the number of occurrences of each pronoun as a function of the assigned gender role. On the other hand, the independent variables were defined as FIRST LANGUAGE (Arabic, English), GENDER OF PARTICIPANT, GENDER ROLE (typically male, typically female, and gender-neutral), and PROFICIENCY (lower proficiency, higher proficiency).

The main effect of each of the independent variables on the dependent variable was assessed using One-way ANOVA. These statistical analyses helped assess the potential effect of first language, gender of the participant, the gender role associated with a noun item, and learners' English proficiency on the choice of an English generic pronoun. Moreover, the effect of the interaction between/among the independent variables on the pronominal choice was evaluated using Two-way ANOVA and Multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA). Therefore, the dependent variable (PRONOMINAL CHOICE) was examined as a function of the potential interaction between: FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER OF PARTICIPANT, FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER ROLE, GENDER OF PARTICIPANT and GENDER ROLE, GENDER OF PARTICIPANT and PROFICIENCY, GENDER ROLE and PROFICIENCY.

## **II. Task 1: Sentence Completion Task**

In this task the participants from both language groups were asked to complete a number of generic sentence fragments that included one of the target nouns from the gender role questionnaire as an antecedent (see the complete list of sentences in Appendix 3). The goal of this task was to see what pronouns the participants from both language groups use as a generic pronoun and also to see what pronouns they use to index self-reported gender neutral nouns and the various self-reported gender roles (i.e., typically male and typically female). Moreover, this

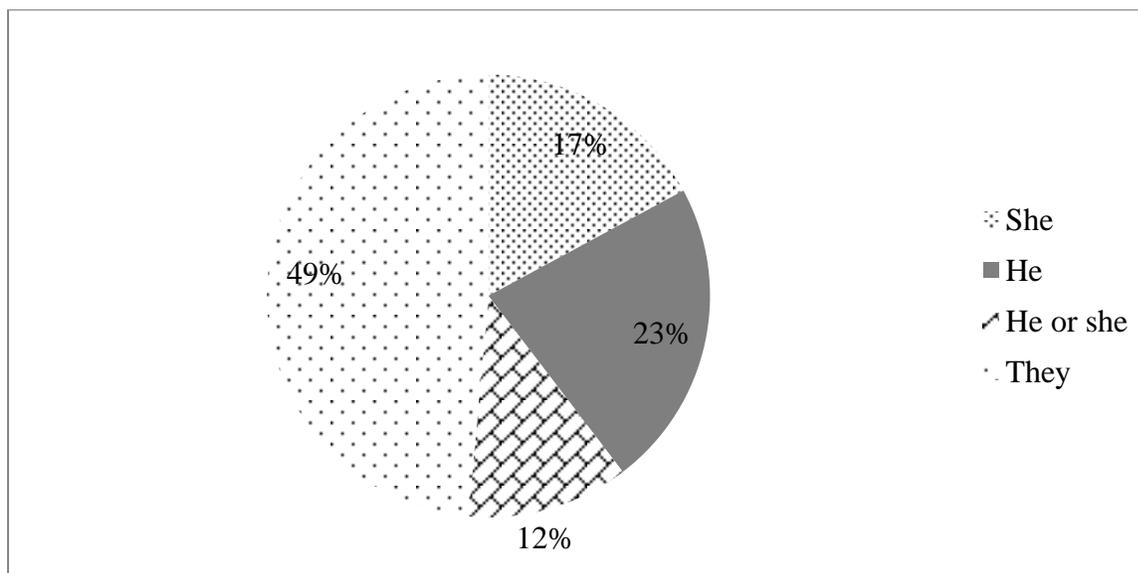
task allows us to see whether there are any differences in pronominal choices between males and females in each language group and also whether there are any differences between the two language groups overall.

### **i. Overall Use of Pronouns**

#### **1. English NSs**

The number of pronouns provided by the English L1 group was 1,377, which is 92% of the number of pronouns possible. None of the English participants was excluded due to ungrammatical responses to the control items. Overall, and as Figure 3 below shows, English NSs provided singular *they* as a generic pronoun for just under half of the sentences followed by *he* (23%), *she* (17%), and *he or she* (12%).

**Figure 3: Overall Pronoun Distribution - English NSs**



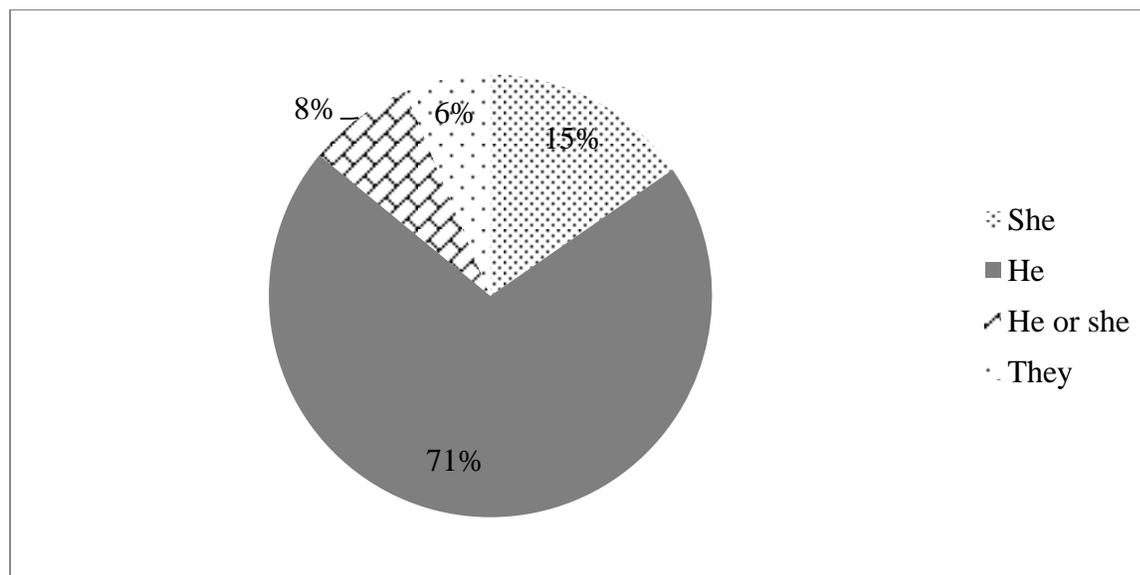
#### **2. English L2s**

Seven participants were excluded in the second task due to their ungrammatical responses to some of the control items. The exclusion criteria were to disregard any participant who made 2 errors or more on any single set of control items or made 4 errors or more in total across the

control sets. These control sets were: 4 lexically-gendered antecedents (e.g., father, mother), 4 antecedents with corresponding grammatically gendered nouns in Arabic (e.g., chair MASC, table FEM), and 4 plural antecedents (e.g., people, parents). Therefore, the total number of participants included in the following analysis is 93 ( $100 - 7 = 93$ ), and the number of possible pronouns was 2,790 ( $93 * 30 = 2,790$ ). The number of pronouns provided by the English L2 group was 2,194, which is 81% of the number of possible pronouns ( $2,194 / 2,700 = 81\%$ ).

Overall, the results showed that English L2 learners provided the masculine pronoun *he* as a generic pronoun for the majority of sentences (71%). This was followed by the feminine pronoun *she* (15%), pronominal *he or she* (8%), and singular *they* (6%) as shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Overall Pronoun Distribution - English L2s**



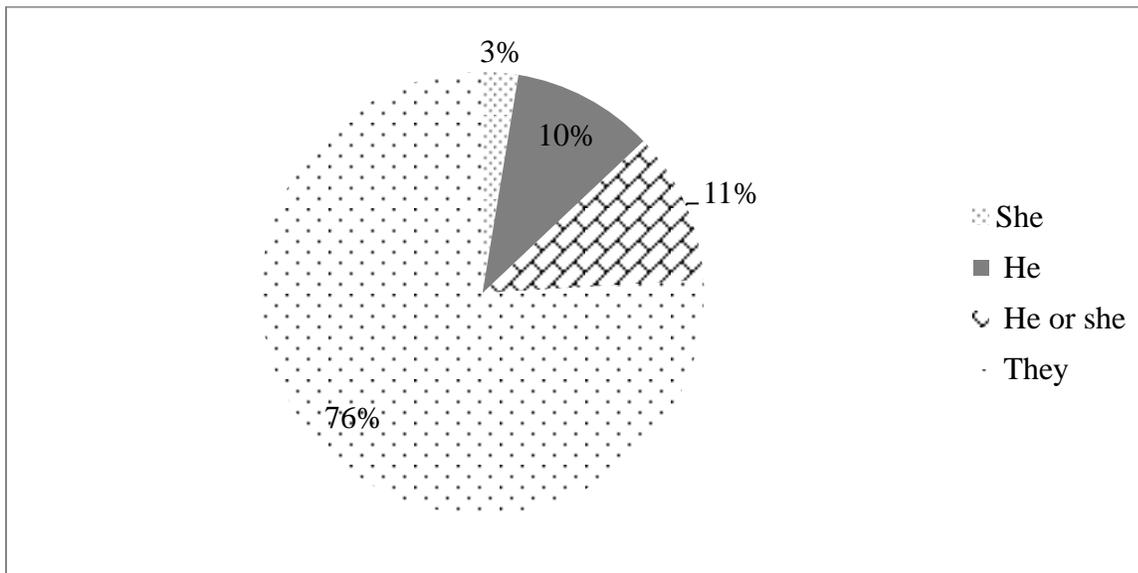
### ii. Pronominal Choice as a Function of Original Gender Roles

In the following, I present the results for Task 1 (Sentence Completion Task) in terms of the original gender role assignment results as elicited in the pilot study (see Table 1). I present and discuss the results in terms of the following order: gender neutral, typically male, and typically

female. In each case, I examine what pronouns each participant used to index the antecedents as rated in Table 1. I start with English NSs followed by English L2 learners.

As presented in Figure 5 below, English NSs used singular *they* for the majority of gender neutral antecedents. The masculine pronoun and the pronominal *he or she* were used at a very similar rate. The feminine pronoun was rarely provided for gender neutral antecedents. The results indicated that there was no main effect of GENDER (i.e., gender of the speaker) on the use of any of the four generic pronouns with gender neutral antecedents, indicating that male and female English NSs were not different in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = .245, p = .624$ ], the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = .143, p = .707$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 48) = 2.35, p = .135$ ], and singular *they* [ $F(1, 48) = .475, p = .496$ ].

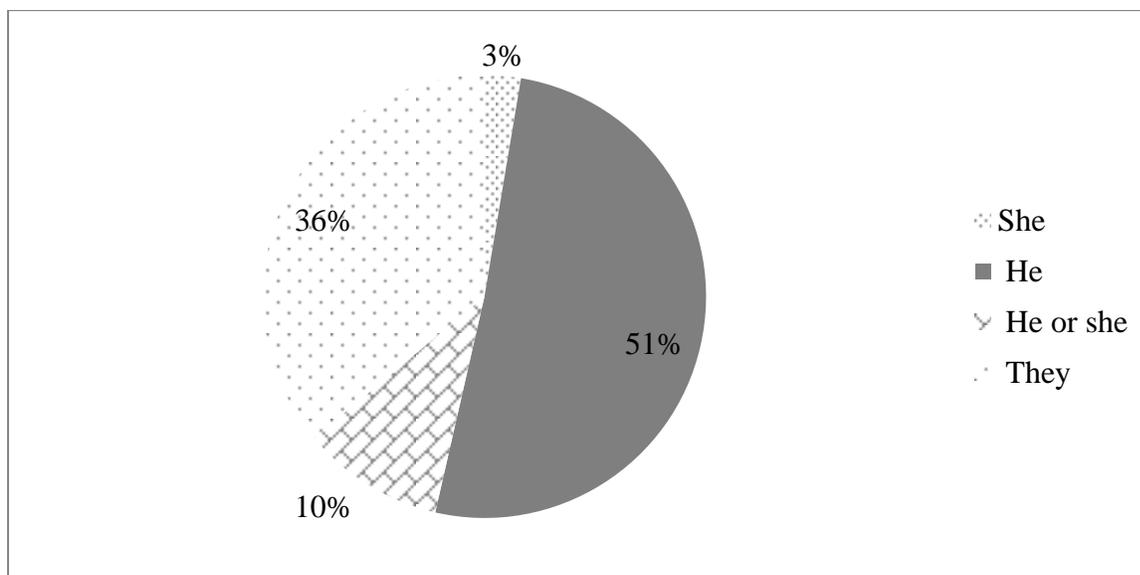
**Figure 5: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - English NSs**



As presented in Figure 6 below, English NSs used the masculine pronoun for about half of the typically male antecedents. Singular *they* was used for more than one third of the typically male antecedents showing around 50% decrease compared with the use of this pronoun with gender neutral antecedents. Just like gender neutral antecedents, 10% of typically male

antecedents were indexed by the pronominal *he or she*. Again, the feminine pronoun was rarely provided for typically male antecedents. Again, there was no main effect of GENDER on the use of the four generic pronouns with typically male antecedents, indicating that male and female English NSs were not different in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = 1.149, p = .291$ ], the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = .35, p = .558$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 48) = 2.256, p = .143$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 48) = 1.21, p = .279$ ].

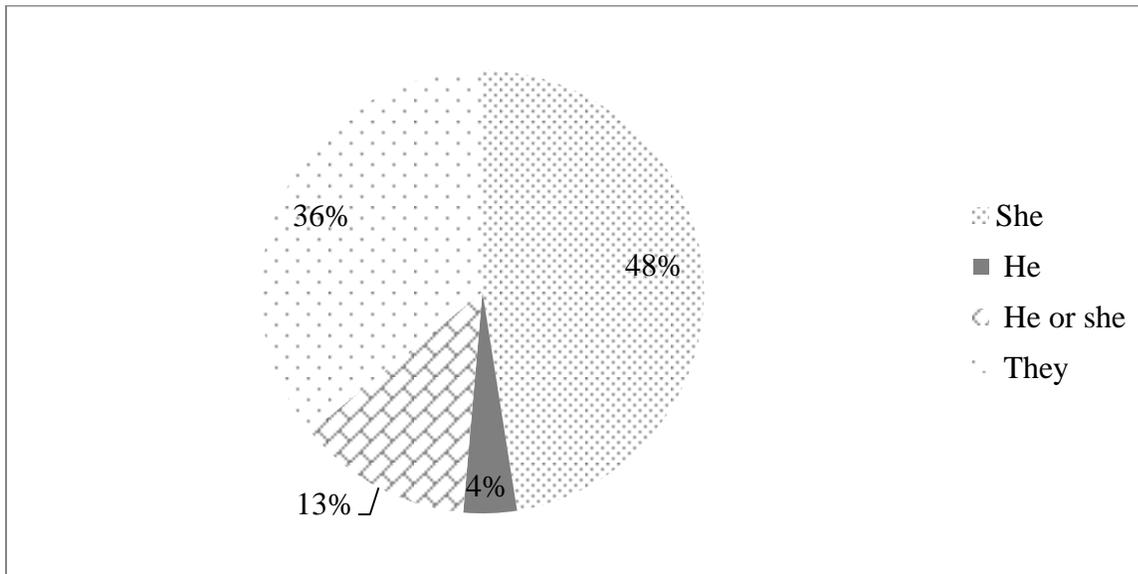
**Figure 6: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - English NSs**



The results indicate that English NSs provided the feminine pronoun for just under half of the typically female antecedents as shown in Figure 7. Singular *they* was used for 36% of these antecedents, thus maintaining the same rate of use with typically male antecedents. The pronominal *he or she* was used for 13% of typically female antecedents, just slightly more than with gender neutral (11%) and typically male (10%) antecedents. English NSs rarely used the masculine pronoun to pronominalize typically female antecedents. Again, there was no main effect of GENDER on the NSs' use of these four generic pronouns with typically female antecedents, indicating that male and female English NSs were not different in terms of their use

of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = .246, p = .623$ ], the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 48) = .672, p = .418$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 48) = 1.956, p = .171$ ], and singular *they* [ $F(1, 48) = 1.094, p = .303$ ] with typically female antecedents.

**Figure 7: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - English NSs**

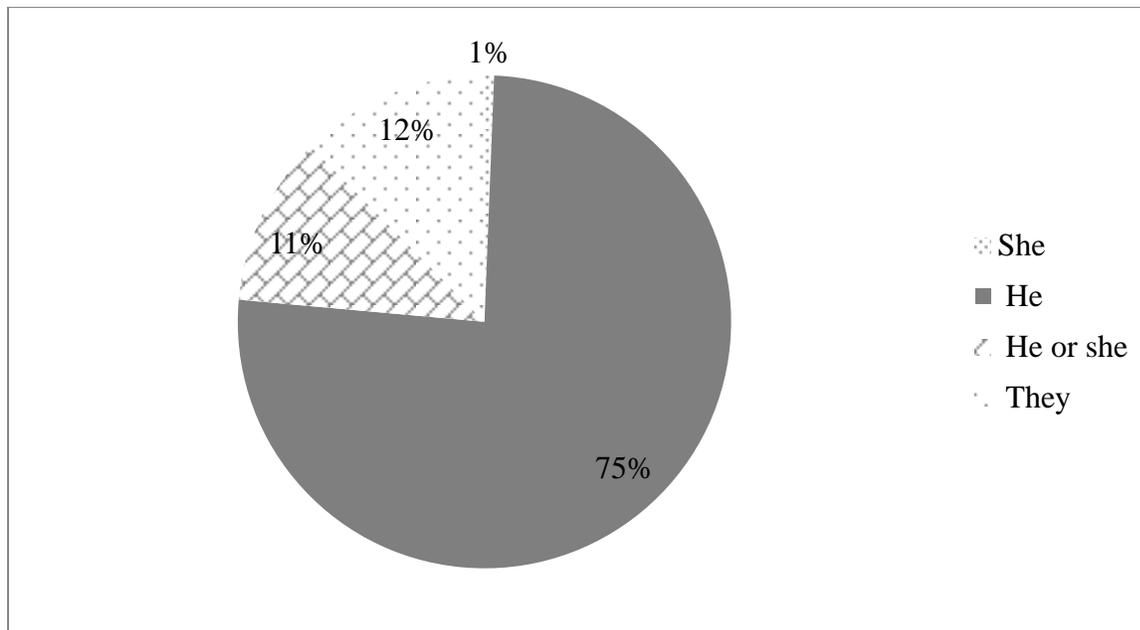


Now I present the results for English L2 learners in terms of the original gender role assignment as shown in Table 1. In doing so, I follow the same gender role order as with English NSs: gender neutral, typically male, typically female.

As shown in Figure 8 below, English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun with the majority of gender neutral antecedents (75%). The gender inclusive pronouns singular *they* and *he or she* were provided for 12% and 11%, respectively. The feminine pronoun was rarely used with gender neutral antecedents. There was no difference between male and female English L2 learners in terms of their use of the four English generic pronouns with gender neutral antecedents: *she* [ $F(1, 88) = 3.089, p = .082$ ], *he* [ $F(1, 88) = .067, p = .797$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 88) = 1.714, p = .194$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 88) = 2.593, p = .111$ ]. Also, there was no main effect of PROFICIENCY on the use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = 1.366, p = .246$ ], masculine

pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = .097, p = .756$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 88) = 3.33, p = .071$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 88) = .343, p = .764$ ]. There was no significant interaction between GENDER and PROFICIENCY in terms of the use of the four generic pronouns with gender neutral antecedents.

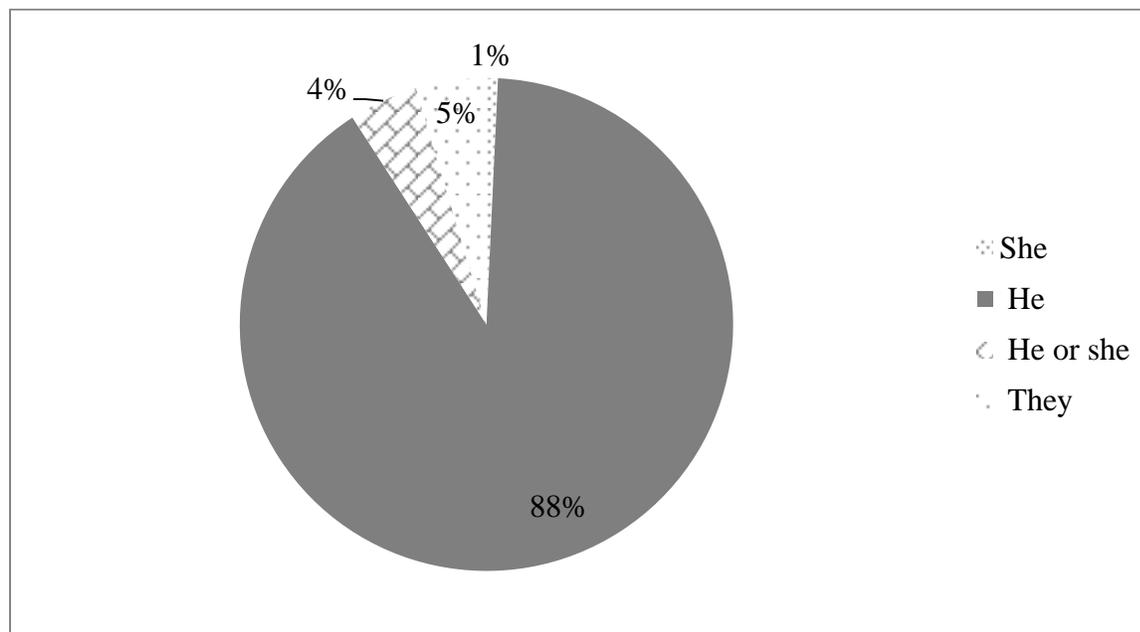
**Figure 8: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - English L2**



English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun for the vast majority of typically male antecedents and rarely provided the other three pronouns. As shown in Figure 9 below, English L2 learners provided the pronoun *he* for 88% of typically male antecedents and used singular *they*, *he or she*, and *she* with 5%, 4%, and 1% of typically male antecedents. One more time, there was no main effect of GENDER in terms of English L2 learners' use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = .65, p = .422$ ], the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = .066, p = .798$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 88) = .046, p = .831$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 88) = 1.234, p = .269$ ]. Also, there was neither a main effect of PROFICIENCY on the use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = .65, p = .422$ ], masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 88) = 1.1, p = .297$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 88) = .288, p = .593$ ], or singular

*they* [F(1, 88) = 1.151, p = .286] nor any significant interaction between GENDER and PROFICIENCY.

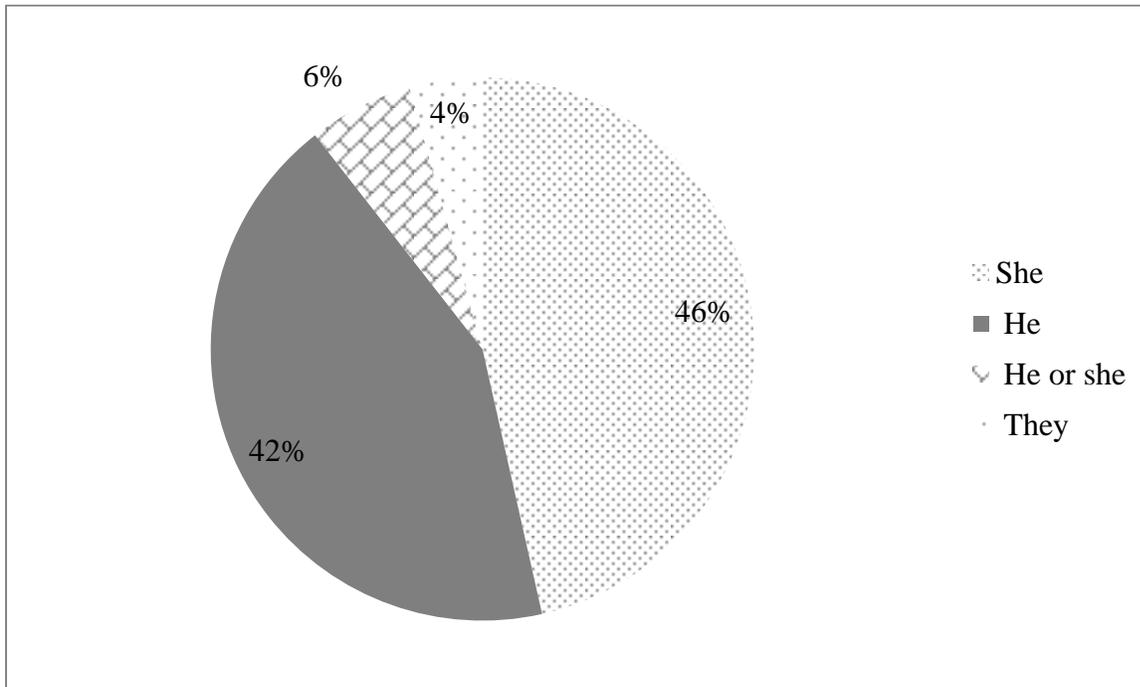
**Figure 9: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - English L2**



For typically female antecedents, English L2 learners provided the feminine pronoun in 46% of the times as presented in Figure 10. However, they used the masculine pronoun for 42% of these antecedents. The gender inclusive pronouns (*he or she*, singular *they*) were used with 6% and 4% of the typically female antecedents, respectively. There was no main effect of GENDER on the use of the four generic pronouns with typically female antecedents, indicating that male and female English L2 learners did not differ in terms of their use of *she* [F(1, 88) = 1.935, p = .168], *he* [F(1, 88) = 1.111, p = .295], *he or she* [F(1, 88) = .00, p = .988], or singular *they* [F(1, 88) = 3.517, p = .064] with these antecedents. Moreover, there was no main effect of PROFICIENCY, indicating that there was no significant difference between less advanced and more advanced learners in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [F(1, 88) = 2.381, p =

.126], masculine pronoun [F(1, 88) = 1.699, p = .196], *he or she* [F(1, 88) = .059, p = .808], or singular *they* [F(1, 88) = 2.966, p = .088] with typically female antecedents.

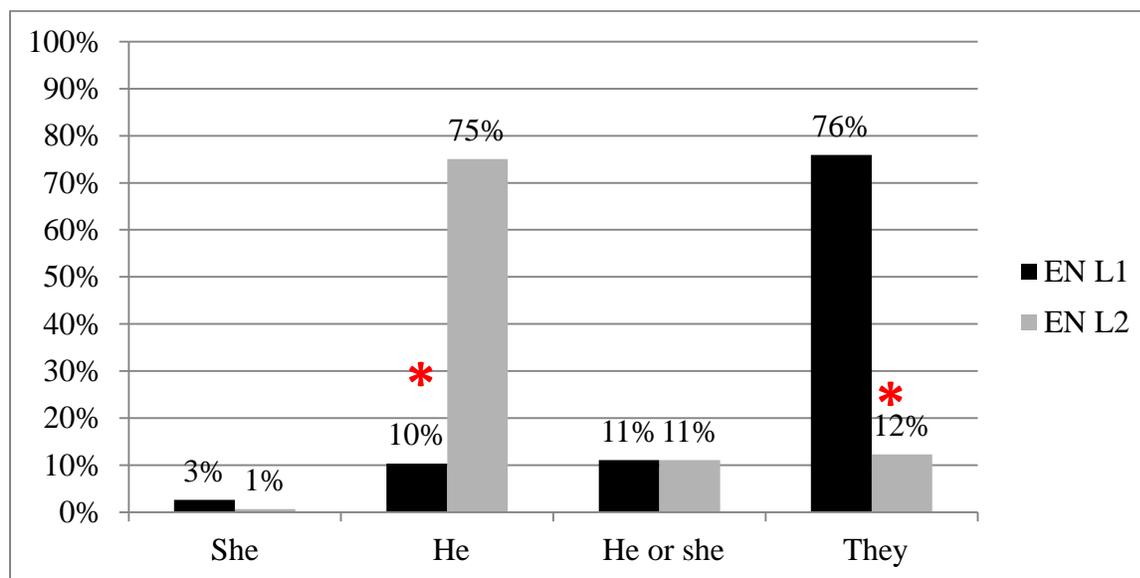
**Figure 10: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - English L2**



### iii. Language Group Comparisons

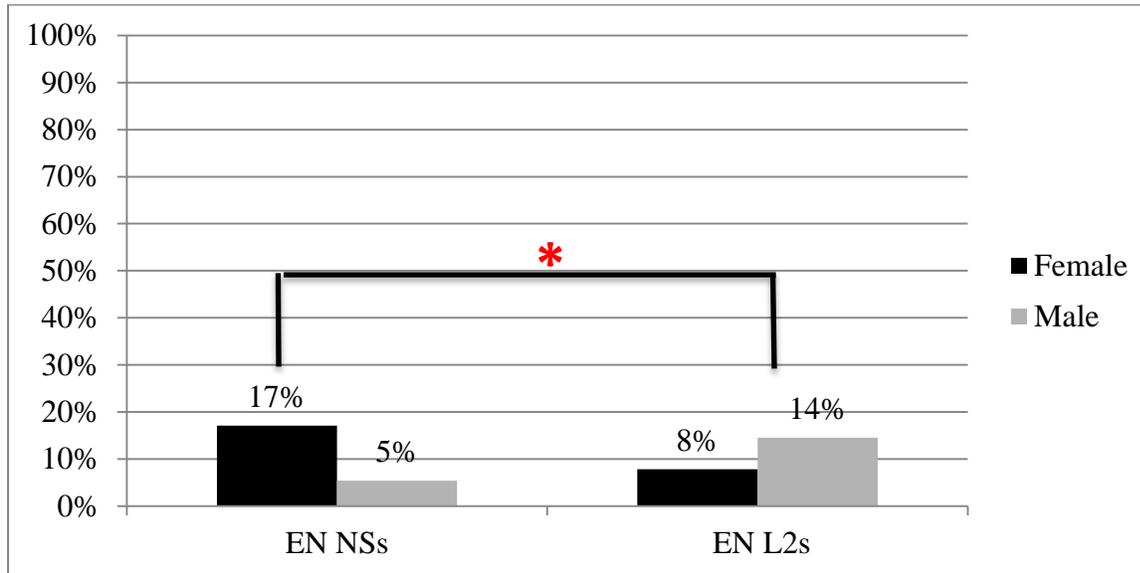
The results show that there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the masculine pronoun *he* and singular *they* with gender neutral antecedents. While English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun more than English NSs did [F(1, 138) = 143.99, p = .000], English NSs used singular *they* [F(1, 138) = 209.88, p = .000] more than English L2 learners did. There was no significant difference between English NSs and English L2s in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [F(1, 138) = 3.47, p = .065] or the pronominal *he or she* [F(1, 138) = 00.00, p = .982].

**Figure 11: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



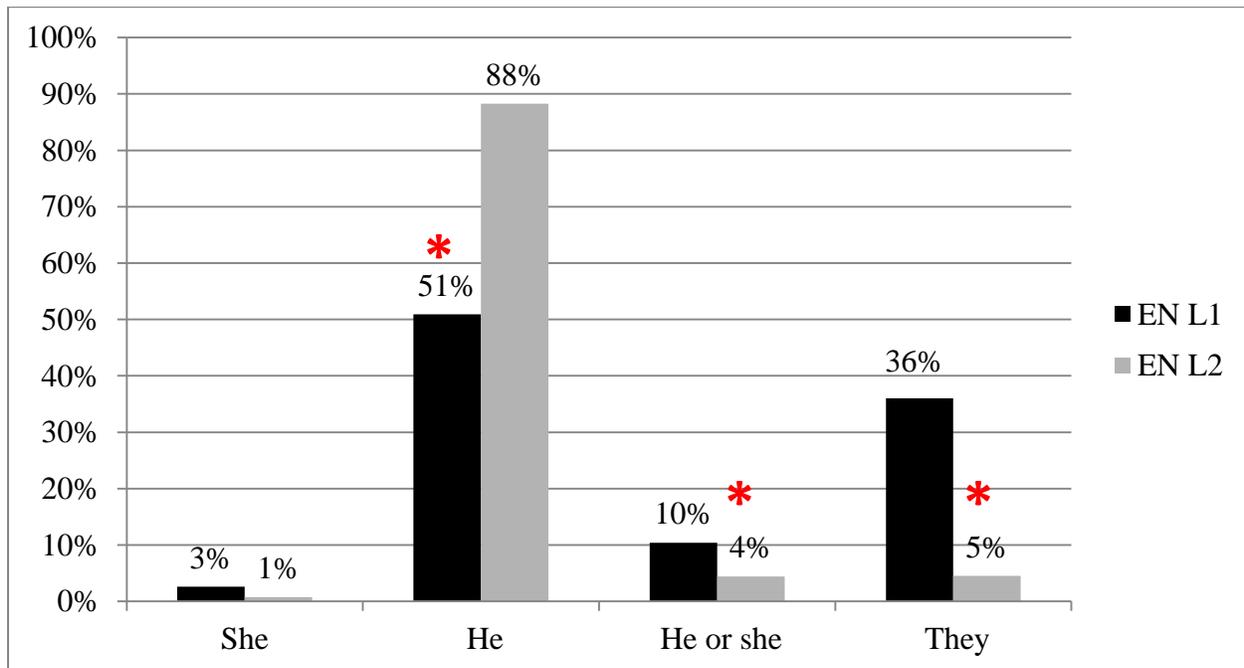
As shown in Figure 12, there was a significant interaction between GENDER and FIRST LANGUAGE only in terms of the use of the pronominal *he or she* with gender neutral antecedents [ $F(1, 138) = 3.991, p = .048$ ], indicating that the difference between male and female speakers was in the opposite direction for each language group. While female English NSs used *he or she* more than their male counterparts did, female English L2 learners used the pronominal *he or she* less than male English L2 learners. However, there was no interaction between GENDER and FIRST LANGUAGE in terms of the use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 138) = 1.601, p = .208$ ], the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 138) = .172, p = .679$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = 2.304, p = .132$ ].

**Figure 12: Interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER in terms of the use of *he or she* with Gender Neutral Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



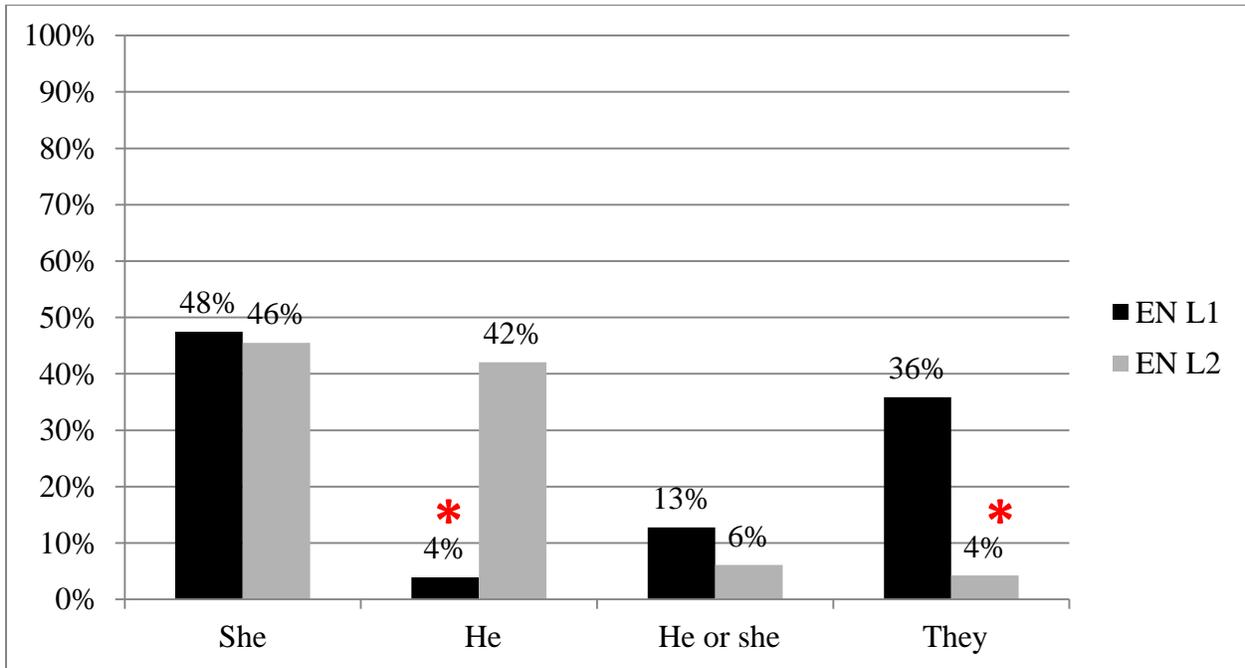
The results show that there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the masculine pronoun *he*, the pronominal *he or she*, and singular *they* with typically male antecedents. Just like for gender neutral antecedents, English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun more than English NSs did [ $F(1, 138) = 47.84, p = .000$ ]. However, English NSs used singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = 49.38, p = .000$ ] and *he or she* [ $F(1, 138) = 4.38, p = .038$ ] more than English L2 learners did. Again, there was no significant difference between English NSs and English L2s in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 138) = 3.62, p = .059$ ]. There was no significant interaction between GENDER and FIRST LANGUAGE in terms of the use of any of the four pronouns with typically male antecedents: *she* [ $F(1, 138) = 1.469, p = .228$ ], *he* [ $F(1, 138) = .685, p = .409$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 138) = 2.467, p = .119$ ], or singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = 1.738, p = .190$ ].

**Figure 13: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



The results show that there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the masculine pronoun *he* and singular *they* with typically female antecedents. While English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun more than English NSs did [ $F(1, 138) = 87.63, p = .000$ ], English NSs used singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = 55.24, p = .000$ ] more than English L2 learners did. There was no significant difference between English NSs and English L2s in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun [ $F(1, 138) = 00.19, p = .664$ ] or the pronominal *he or she* [ $F(1, 138) = 03.69, p = .057$ ]. There was no significant interaction between GENDER and FIRST LANGUAGE for the use of any of the four pronouns with typically female antecedents: *she* [ $F(1, 138) = .001, p = .971$ ], *he* [ $F(1, 138) = .008, p = .928$ ], *he or she* [ $F(1, 138) = 2.418, p = .122$ ], and singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = .923, p = .339$ ].

**Figure 14: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



### III. Task 2: Gender Role Questionnaire

In this task the participants from both language groups were asked to rate a list of English personal nouns as typically male, typically female, or gender neutral (see the complete list of nouns in Appendix 4). The exclusion criterion was to disregard any participant who made two errors on one of the two control groups (lexically male, lexically female) or made three errors or more on any of these control items.

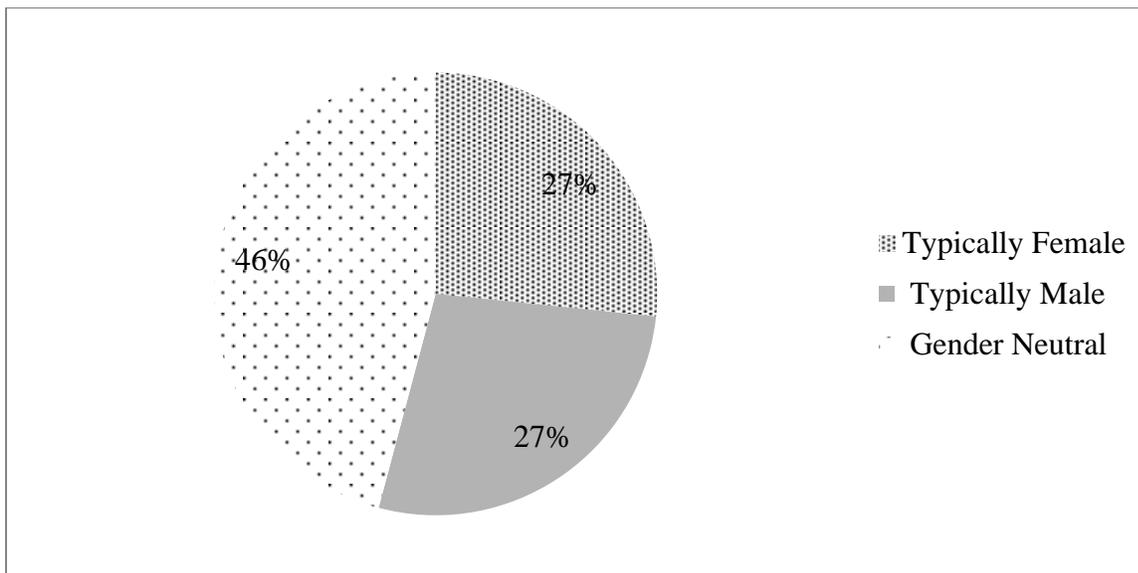
The goal of this task was to examine what gender roles the participants assign to the listed personal nouns in order to see if these assigned gender roles have an effect on the pronominal choices the participants made in the sentence completion task. Moreover, this task allows us to see whether there are any gender role assignment differences in terms of first language, gender of the speaker, and English proficiency (only for English L2 group). To this end, the main effects of (and the interaction between) FIRST LANGUAGE, GENDER (of the

speaker), and PROFICIENCY on the dependent variable (GENDER ROLE) were examined through One-Way and Two-Way ANOVA.

**i. English NSs**

The total number of rating responses for the English group was 1,498 (only two missing responses). None of the English participants was excluded due to ungrammatical responses to the control items. The results indicated that English NSs show a preference for a ‘gender neutral’ response and were pretty balanced in terms of their ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ responses. While ‘gender neutral’ ratings received 46% of the total number of responses, ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ ratings each accounted for 27% of the total number of ratings as shown in Figure 15 below:

**Figure 15: Overall Gender Role Assignment by English NSs**



There was more agreement among English NSs on the self-reported ‘gender neutral’ nouns than on the self-reported ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ nouns. For the latter two types of gender roles, none of the nouns received unanimous agreement among the English participants (i.e., 100% rating).

Ten noun items were rated as ‘gender neutral’ by the majority of English NSs (+51% of the participants). These noun items are listed in Table 2 along with their rating percentages (Mean = 99%, SD = 0.01). As shown below, most of these nouns received unanimous agreement among the English NSs reflecting the absence of any gender associations (i.e., gender roles). Altogether these ten items were rated as ‘gender neutral’ in 99.2% of the times (496 out of 500 possible ratings).

**Table 2: Percentage of English NSs who rated items as gender-neutral**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Everyone	100%	6	Citizen	100%
2	Someone	100%	7	Anyone	98%
3	Human being	100%	8	Person	98%
4	Resident	100%	9	Student	98%
5	Adult	100%	10	Child	98%

Ten noun items received a majority of ‘typically male’ ratings among the English NSs. Table 3 below shows these noun items with their ‘typically male’ rating percentages (Mean = 80%, SD = .16). English NSs did not show as much agreement on these nouns as they did on the gender neutral nouns in Table 2. None of these ‘typically male’ items received a unanimous agreement among the participants. The variation in rating percentages among these items may reflect ‘strong stereotypical gender associations’ and ‘weaker stereotypical gender associations’ (Motschenbacher, 2008). Items such as *mechanic*, *lumberjack*, and *firefighter* may have stronger stereotypical male associations than items such as *police officer*, *surgeon*, and *politician*.

**Table 3: Percentage of English NSs who rated items as typically male**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Mechanic	98%	6	Detective	82%
2	Lumberjack	98%	7	Engineer	66%
3	Firefighter	94%	8	Police officer	66%
4	Carpenter	94%	9	Surgeon	60%
5	Burglar	82%	10	Politician	58%

Eight noun items were rated as ‘typically female’ by the majority of English NSs. Table 4 shows these items along with their rating percentages. These noun items received less agreement among the English NSs than ‘gender neutral’ nouns (Mean = 87%, SD = .06). Again, the variation in the rating percentages among these ‘typically female’ noun items may reflect different degrees of stereotypical gender associations. Items such as *maid*, *nurse*, and *beautician* may have stronger stereotypical female associations than items such as *librarian*.

**Table 4: Percentage of English NSs who rated items as typically female**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Maid	94%	5	Secretary	88%
2	Nurse	92%	6	Babysitter	86%
3	Beautician	88%	7	Homemaker	82%
4	Hairdresser	88%	8	Librarian	74%

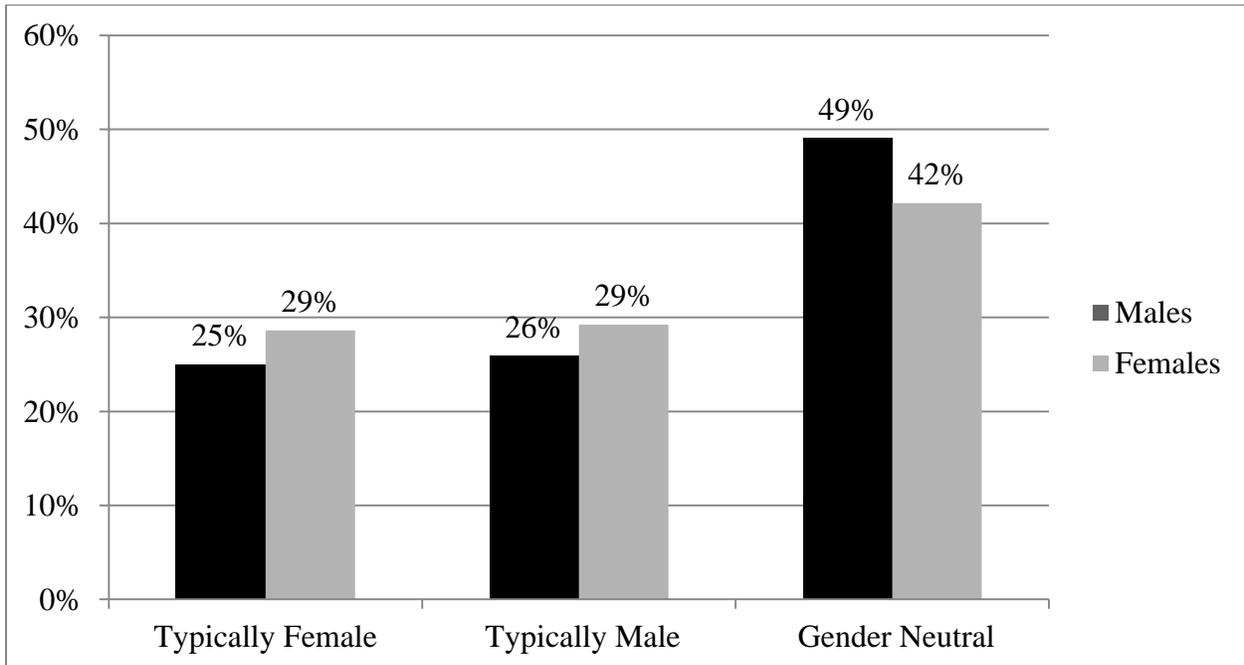
Finally, two noun items (*shopper* and *social worker*) did not receive a majority of ratings as ‘gender neutral’, ‘typically male’, or ‘typically female’. The complete rating percentages for these two items are presented in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: *shopper and social worker* as rated by English NSs**

Item	Typically Female	Typically Male	Gender Neutral
Shopper	50%	0%	50%
Social worker	48%	6%	46%

There was no main effect of GENDER (i.e., gender of the participant) on GENDER ROLE (i.e., gender role assignment). As shown in Figure 16 below, there were no significant differences between the male and female English NSs in term of the number of ‘gender neutral’ ratings [ $F(1, 48) = 1.74, p > .196$ ], the number of ‘typically male’ ratings [ $F(1, 48) = 1.30, p > .262$ ], or the number of ‘typically female’ ratings [ $F(1, 48) = 1.89, p > .178$ ]. Unlike the prediction in this study, female English NSs were not more gender neutral (i.e., more gender inclusive) in their gender role assignment than male NSs, who were not in their turn more male biased than their female counterparts.

**Figure 16: Male and Female Gender Role Assignment - English NSs**

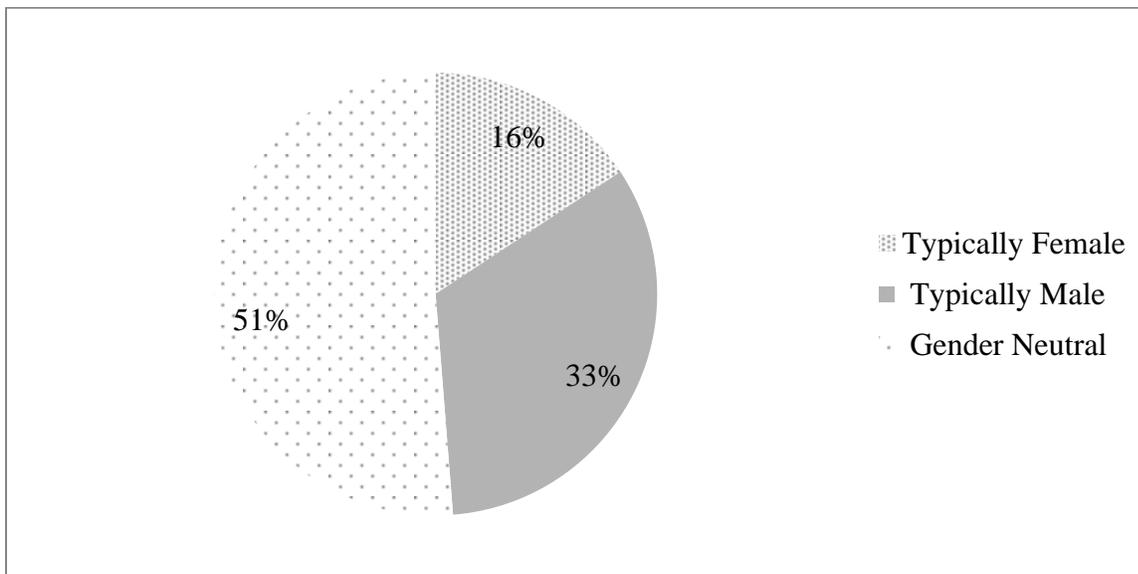


## ii. English L2 Learners

The total number of rating responses for the English L2 group was 2824 (out of 3,000 possible responses). Six participants were excluded due to their ungrammatical responses to the control items following the exclusion criteria described earlier in this section.

Similar to the English NSs in this study, the English L2 learners showed a preference for a ‘gender neutral’ response, which constituted 51% of the total number of ratings. However, the English L2 learners showed less amount of agreement than the English NSs on the gender neutral ratings as none of the noun items in this list received 100% rating. Moreover, the English L2 learners were not balanced in terms of their ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ responses. While ‘typically male’ ratings constituted 33% of the total number of responses, ‘typically female’ ratings were only 16% of the total number of responses as presented in Figure 17 below:

**Figure 17: Overall Gender Role Assignment by English L2 learners**



The distribution of responses indicates that the relatively greater number of ‘gender neutral’ responses by English L2 learners (compared with English NSs) was at the expense of ‘typically female’ responses and not at the expense of ‘typically male’ responses.

As shown in Table 6 below, 14 noun items were rated by the majority (+51%) of English L2 learners as ‘gender neutral’ (Mean = 77%, SD = .16). None of these noun items received 100% rating, indicating that English L2 learners showed less agreement on the ‘gender neutral’ ratings compared with English NSs. All of the noun items that were rated by the majority of English NSs as ‘gender neutral’ were also rated by the majority of English L2 learners as ‘gender neutral’ (items 1-9 and 11). However, the English L2 learners’ list of gender neutral items included four more items: *engineer* (‘typically male’ for the majority of English NSs), *librarian* (‘typically female’ for the majority of English NSs), *social worker*, and *shopper* (both undetermined in the English group).

**Table 6: Percentage of English L2 learners who rated items as gender-neutral**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Everyone	97%	8	Citizen	82%
2	Anyone	94%	9	Child	81%
3	Student	91%	10	Engineer	63%
4	Someone	90%	11	Resident	60%
5	Human being	88%	12	Social worker	60%
6	Person	86%	13	Librarian	52%
7	Adult	83%	14	Shopper	51%

Eight noun items were rated as ‘typically male’ by the majority of English L2 learners. Table 7 below shows these noun items along with their rating percentages (Mean = 73%, SD = 0.10). The variation in the rating percentages among these items suggests that English L2 learners had stronger stereotypical male associations for items such as *mechanic*, *firefighter*, and *police officer* than for items such as *politician* and *burglar*. All of the items that were rated by

the majority of English L2 learners as ‘typically male’ were also rated by the majority of English NSs as ‘typically male’. However, the English L2 learners’ list of ‘typically male’ noun items does not include the items *engineer* and *surgeon*, which were both rated as ‘typically male’ by the majority of English NSs as shown in Table 3 above.

**Table 7: Percentage of English L2 learners who rated items as typically male**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Mechanic	86%	5	Carpenter	75%
2	Firefighter	81%	6	Detective	69%
3	Police officer	81%	7	Politician	61%
4	Lumberjack	75%	8	Burglar	59%

As Table 8 below shows, only six noun items were rated by the majority of English L2 learners as ‘typically female’ (mean = 64%, SD = .15). The results suggest that English L2 learners had stronger stereotypical female associations for *babysitter*, *maid*, and *nurse* than for *hairdresser*, *beautician*, and *secretary*. The six noun items that were rated by the majority of English L2 learners as ‘typically female’ were rated so by the English NSs. However, the English L2 learners’ list of ‘typically female’ nouns has two items less than the English NSs’ corresponding list, namely *homemaker* and *librarian*.

**Table 8: Percentage of English L2 learners who rated items as typically female**

No.	Item	Percentage	No.	Item	Percentage
1	Babysitter	88%	4	Hairdresser	53%
2	Maid	69%	5	Beautician	51%
3	Nurse	69%	6	Secretary	51%

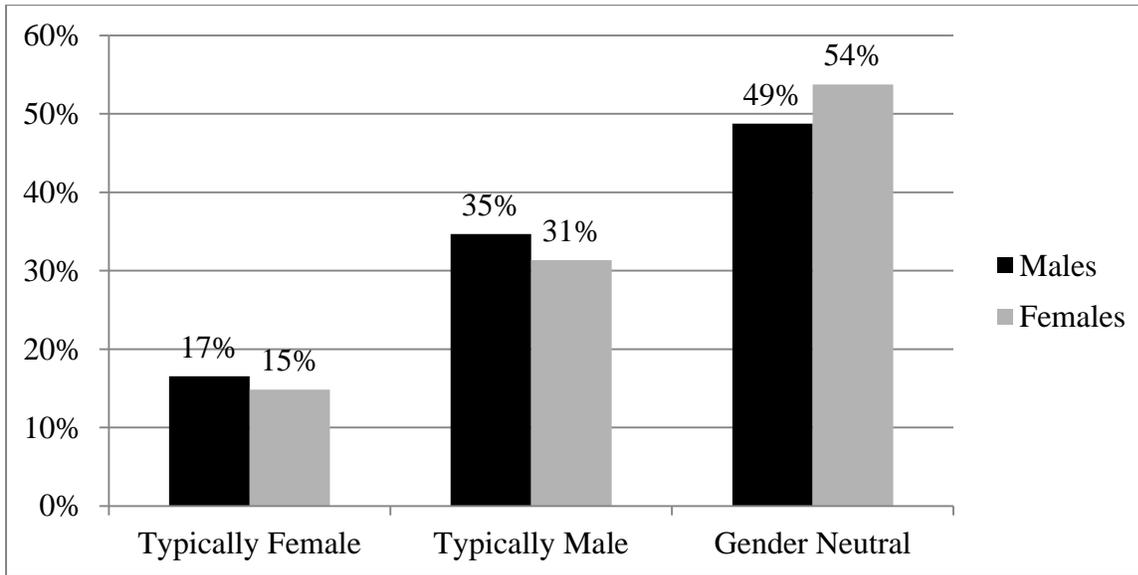
The noun items *surgeon* and *homemaker* were not consistently rated by the majority of English L2 learners. As Table 9 below shows, the ratings for *surgeon* were divided almost equally between ‘typically male’ and ‘gender neutral’ and the ratings for *homemaker* were divided across the three gender roles.

**Table 9: *surgeon* and *homemaker* as rated by English L2 learners**

Item	Typically Female	Typically Male	Gender Neutral
Surgeon	6%	46%	48%
Homemaker	36%	35%	29%

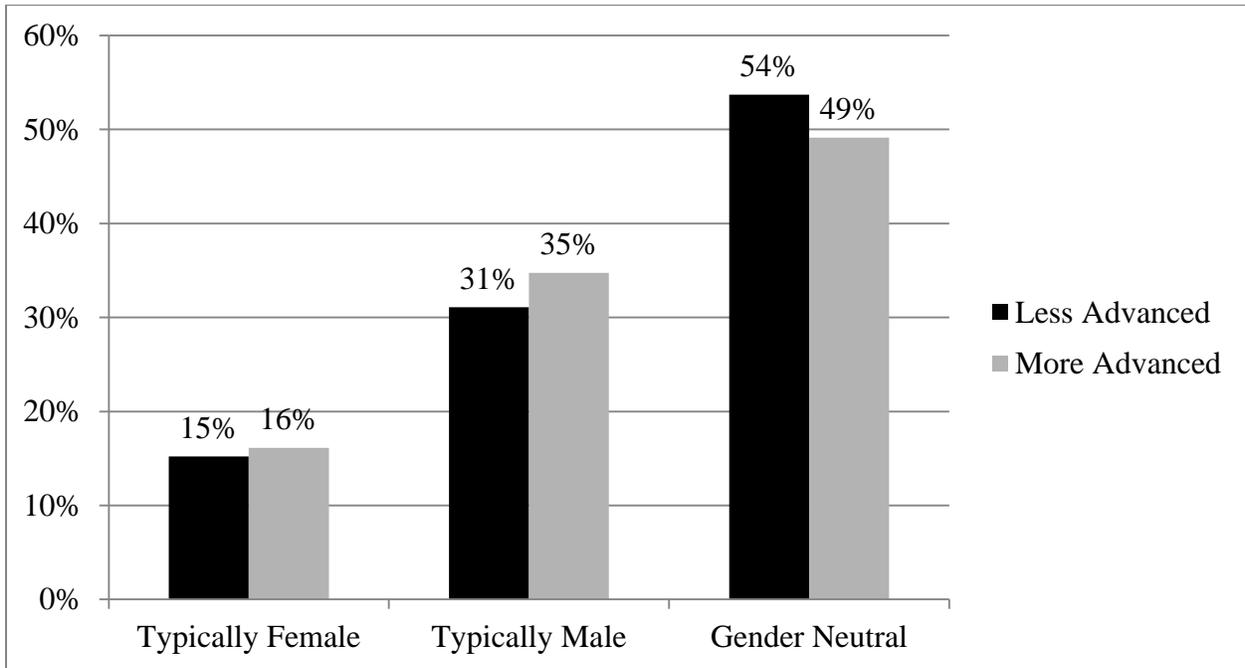
There was no main effect of GENDER (i.e., gender of the participant) on GENDER ROLE (i.e., gender role assignment). The results show that there was no significant difference between the male and female English L2 learners in term of their gender role assignment. As shown in Figure 18 below, the numbers of ‘gender neutral’ [ $F(1, 93) = .44, p > .509$ ], ‘typically male’ [ $F(1, 93) = 2.22, p > .140$ ], and ‘typically female’ [ $F(1, 93) = 2.75, p > .101$ ] ratings were not significantly different for male and female English L2 learners. Contrary to the prediction in this study, male English L2 learners were not more male biased in their gender role assignment than their female counterparts. Also, female English L2 learners were neither more gender neutral (i.e., more gender inclusive) nor more female biased in their gender role assignment than males.

**Figure 18: Male and Female Gender Role Assignment - English L2 Learners**



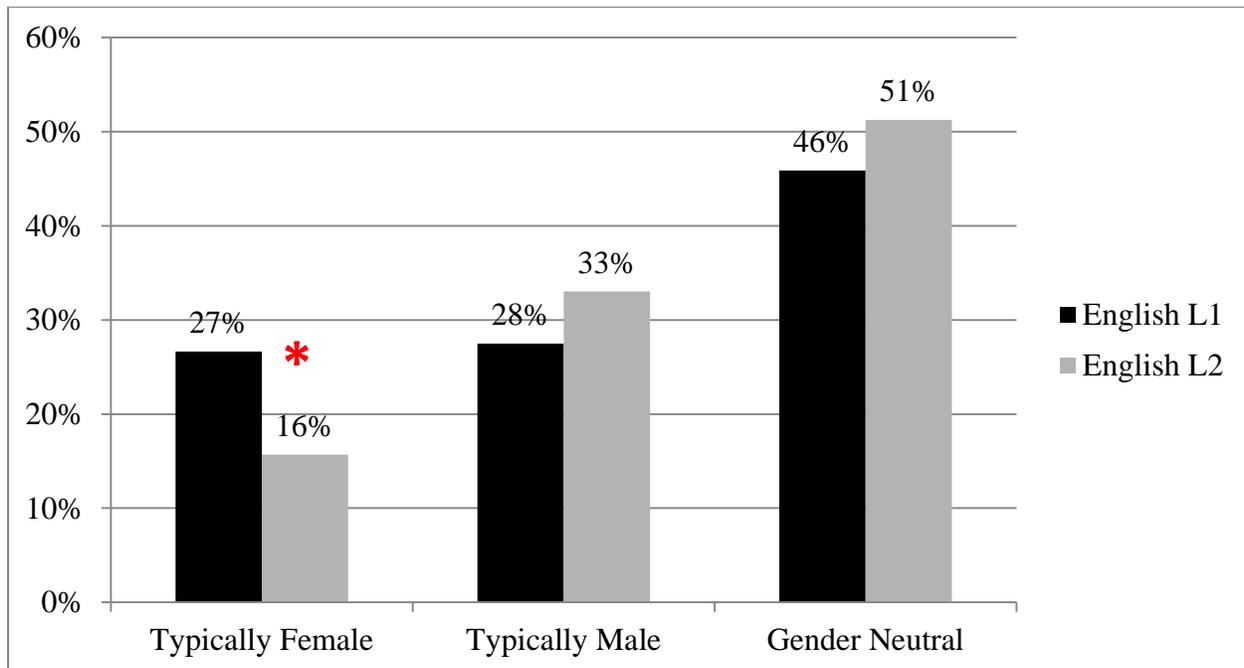
The prediction was that the more advanced English L2 learners will be more inclusive in their gender role assignment than the less advanced learners. However, the results showed that there was no main effect of PROFICIENCY on GENDER ROLE. There were no statistically significant differences between the less advanced and the more advanced English L2 learners in terms of the number of ‘gender neutral’ ratings [ $F(1, 93) = .34, p > .559$ ], ‘typically male’ ratings [ $F(1, 93) = 2.18, p > .143$ ], or ‘typically female’ ratings [ $F(1, 93) = .98, p > .326$ ]. Finally, there was no significant interaction between PROFICIENCY and GENDER. Figure 19 below shows the results for the less advanced and the more advanced English L2 groups.

**Figure 19: Proficiency and Gender Role Assignment - English L2 Learners**



A One-Way ANOVA indicated that there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE (English vs. Arabic) on the average number of 'typically female' ratings the participants provided [ $F(1, 143) = 68.54, p = .000$ ]. While 27% of the responses by English NSs (total = 404 ratings, mean = 8.1 ratings per participant) were 'typically female', only 16% of the ratings by English L2 learners (total = 420 ratings, mean = 4.5 ratings per participant) were 'typically female'. Despite the numeric advantage English L2 learners had in terms of the average number of 'typically male' and 'gender neutral' ratings, there were no statistically significant differences between English NSs and English L2 learners in terms of the number of 'typically male' ratings [ $F(1, 143) = 2.42, p > .122$ ] or the number of 'gender neutral' ratings [ $F(1, 143) = 1.13, p > .290$ ]. Contrary to the prediction in this study, English NSs were not more gender neutral than English L2 learners, who were not in their turn more male biased than English NSs as shown in Figure 20 below:

**Figure 20: Gender Role Assignment - English NSs and English L2 Learners**



Finally, there was a significant interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER (i.e., gender of the participant) only in terms of the number of ‘typically female’ ratings [ $F(1, 143) = 4.43, p = .037$ ], indicating that the difference between English NSs and English L2 learners was greater between female English NSs and female English L2 learners (29% and 15%, respectively) than between their male counterparts (25% and 17%, respectively).

#### **IV. Pronominal Choice as a Function of Self-reported Gender Role**

I will now present the results separately for gender neutral, typically male, and typically female antecedents (all as self-reported by the participants in the Gender Role Assignment Questionnaire). In other words, I examine the use of English generic pronouns in terms of which gender role each speaker assigned to the co-referring English personal nouns in Task 2. I will also compare these patterns of use with the overall use of pronouns (as shown in Figure 3) across all assigned gender roles.

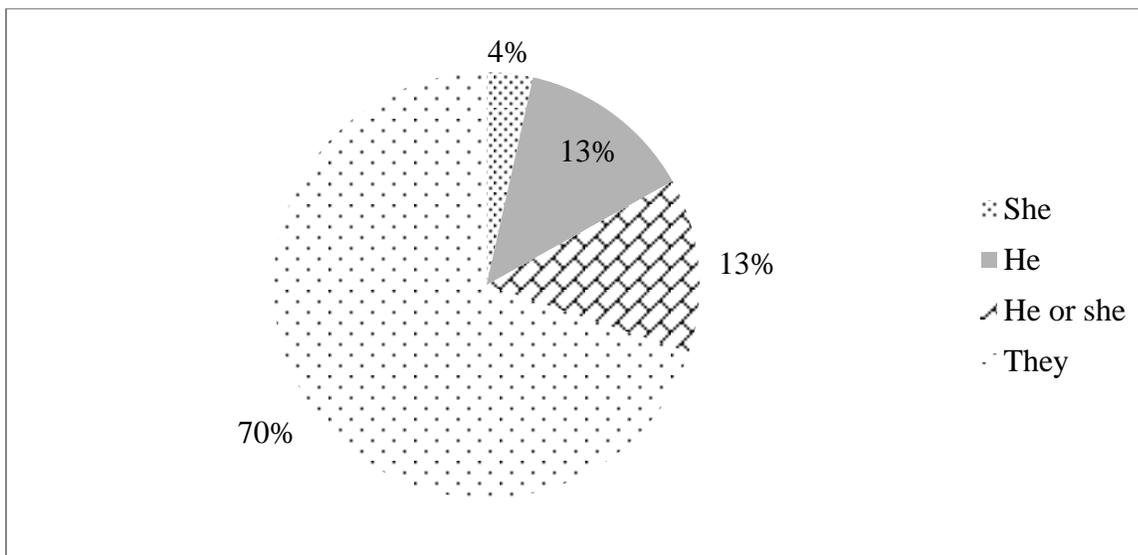
### i. English NSs

In the following, I present the results of Task 1 (Sentence Completion Task) for English NSs as a function of their self-reported gender roles in Task 2 (Gender Role Assignment Questionnaire).

#### 1. Gender Neutral Antecedents

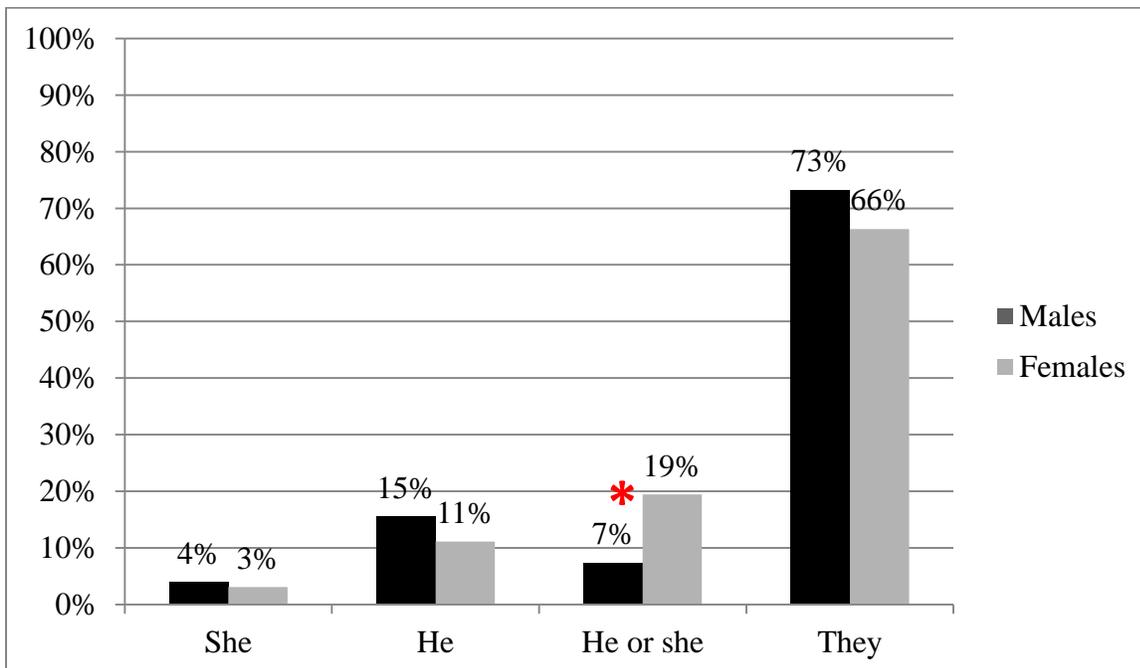
As shown in Figure 21 below, the use of singular *they* increased from 49% to 70% when considering only sentences with gender neutral antecedents as self-reported by the participants. This indicates that singular *they* is the preferred generic pronoun by English NSs for the majority of 'gender neutral' antecedents. However, the other inclusive pronominal (*he or she*) did not really change. The use of the two exclusive pronouns *he* and *she* decreased from 23% to 13% and from 17% to 4%, respectively. Clearly, the feminine pronoun was rarely used to index self-reported gender neutral antecedents. This also indicates that the increase in use of singular *they* (when considering only self-reported gender neutral antecedents) came mainly from the decrease in using the masculine and the feminine pronouns and not at the expense of the other inclusive pronominal (*he or she*).

**Figure 21: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - English NSs**



There was a main effect of GENDER (i.e., gender of the participant) on the use of the pronominal *he or she* with self-reported gender neutral antecedents [ $F(1, 48) = 5.93, p = .019$ ]. As Figure 22 show, while female English NSs used the pronominal *he or she* with 19% of the self-reported gender neutral antecedents, their male counterparts provided the same pronoun for only 7% of these antecedents. Inversely, while female English NSs provided singular *they* for 66% of the gender neutral antecedents, their male counterparts used the same pronoun for 73% of the gender neutral antecedents. However, the effect of GENDER on the use of singular *they* with self-reported gender neutral antecedents did not reach significance [ $F(1, 48) = 2.06, p > .158$ ]. There was no significant difference between male and female English NSs in terms of their use of the two gender exclusive pronouns (*he, she*) with the self-reported gender neutral antecedents.

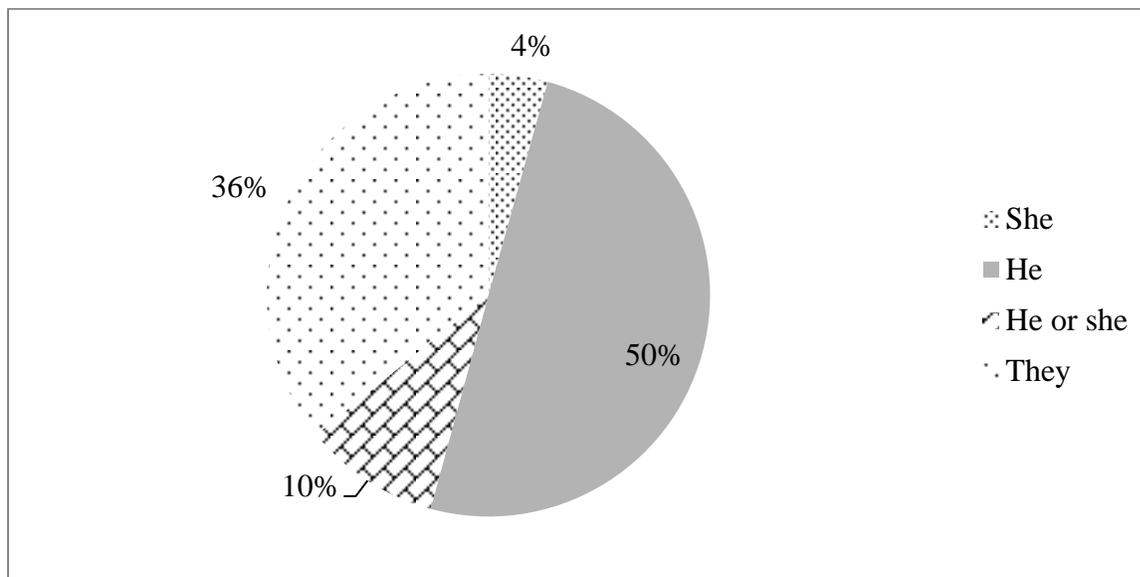
**Figure 22: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents -English NSs**



## 2. Typically Male Antecedents

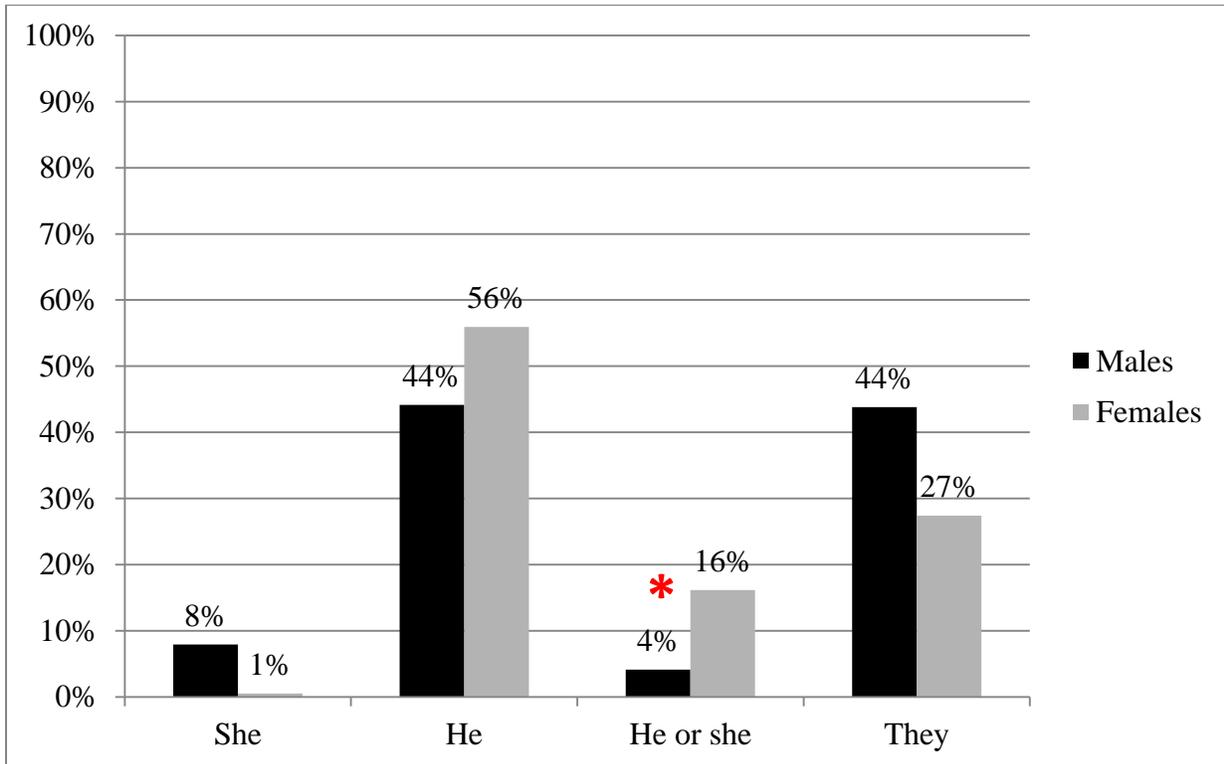
As Figure 23 shows, the use of the pronoun *he* increased from 23% to 50% when considering only self-reported typically male antecedents. This means that English NSs provided the masculine pronoun for half of the self-reported typically male antecedents in this study. The use of singular *they* dropped from 49% to 36%. Likewise, the use of the pronoun *she* dropped from 17% to 4%. The use of the pronominal *he or she* decreased slightly from 12% to 10%.

**Figure 23: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - English NSs**



There was a main effect of GENDER on the use of the pronominal *he or she* with self-reported typically male antecedents [ $F(1, 48) = 4.35, p = .042$ ]. As presented in Figure 24 below, female English NSs provided the pronominal *he or she* for typically male antecedents (16%) more than male English NSs did (4%). One more time, male English NSs led their female counterparts in using singular *they* as a generic pronoun (44% and 27%, respectively). Surprisingly, this difference did not reach significance [ $F(1, 48) = 2.18, p > .146$ ]. Also, there were no gender-related differences in terms of the use of the two gender-exclusive pronouns (*he*, *she*).

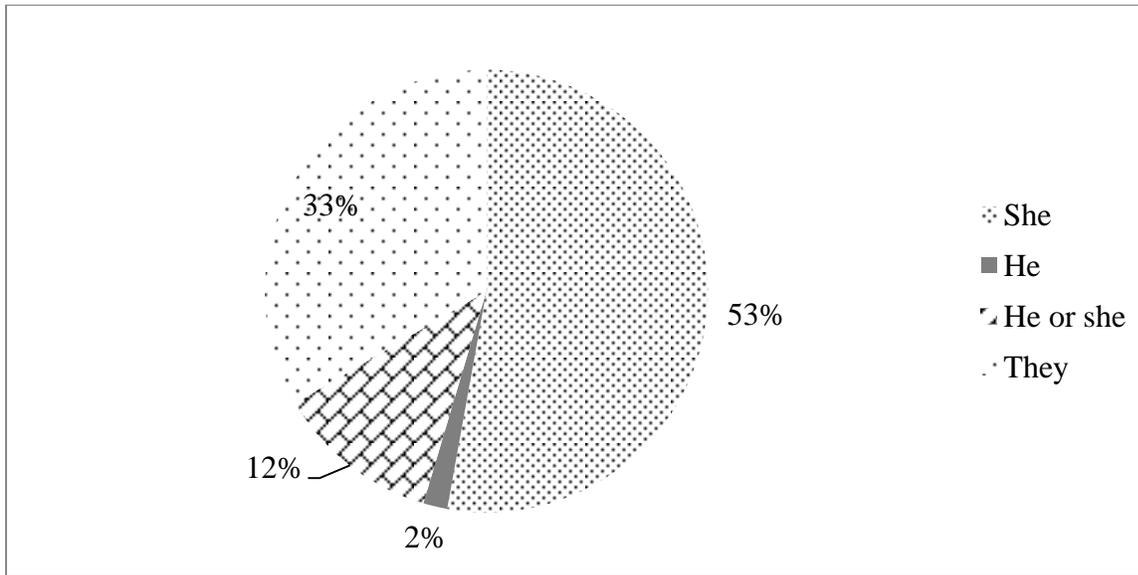
**Figure 24: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents -English NSs**



### 3. Typically Female Antecedents

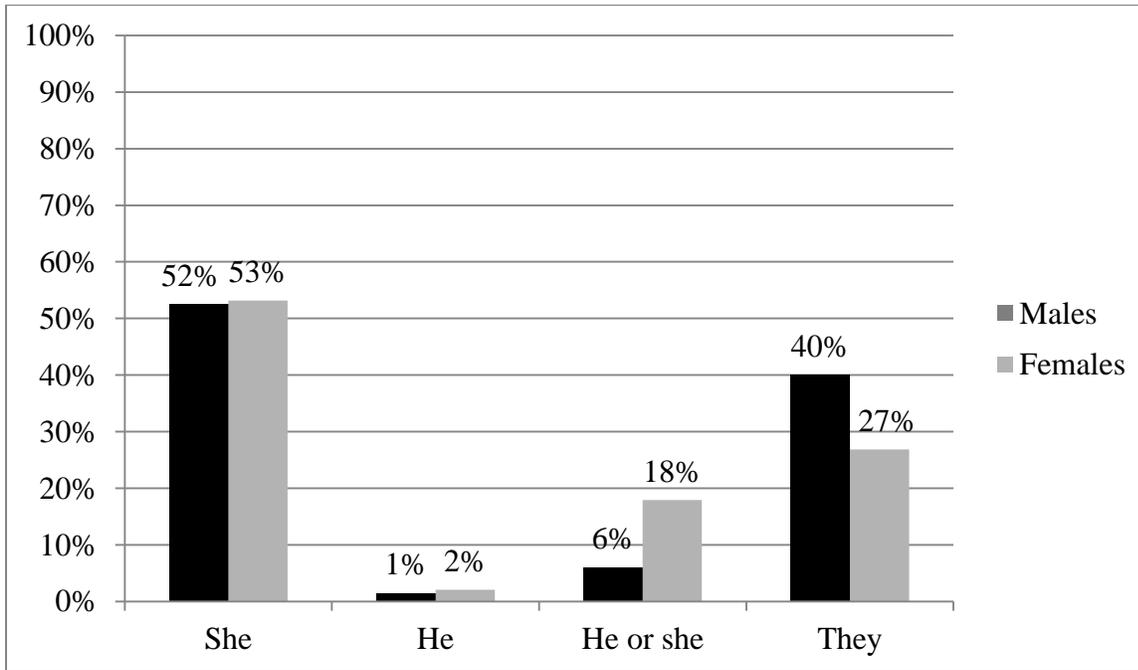
As shown in Figure 25 below, the feminine pronoun was used for just over half of the self-reported typically female antecedents. This means that English NSs used the pronoun *she* with 53% of the self-reported typically female antecedents in this study. Singular *they* came second (32%) followed by the pronominal *he or she* (12%). The masculine pronoun was rarely used in the sentences with self-reported typically female antecedents.

**Figure 25: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - English NSs**



One more time, the major numeric difference between male and female English NSs was in terms of their use of the inclusive pronouns (*they, he or she*) and not in terms of their use of the exclusive pronouns (*she, he*). As shown in Figure 26 below, although both male and female English NSs preferred singular *they* to the pronominal *he or she* as an inclusive generic pronoun for self-reported typically female antecedents, male English NSs (40%) used singular *they* more often than their female counterparts (27%) did. However, this difference did not reach significance [ $F(1, 48) = 1.21, p > .276$ ]. Inversely, female English NSs led male English NSs in terms of the use of pronominal *he or she* with self-reported typically female antecedents (18% and 6%, respectively). This difference was not significant either [ $F(1, 48) = 3.12, p > .084$ ]. Also, there were no gender-related differences in terms of the participants' use of the masculine pronoun (*he*) or the feminine pronoun (*she*).

**Figure 26: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents-English NSs**



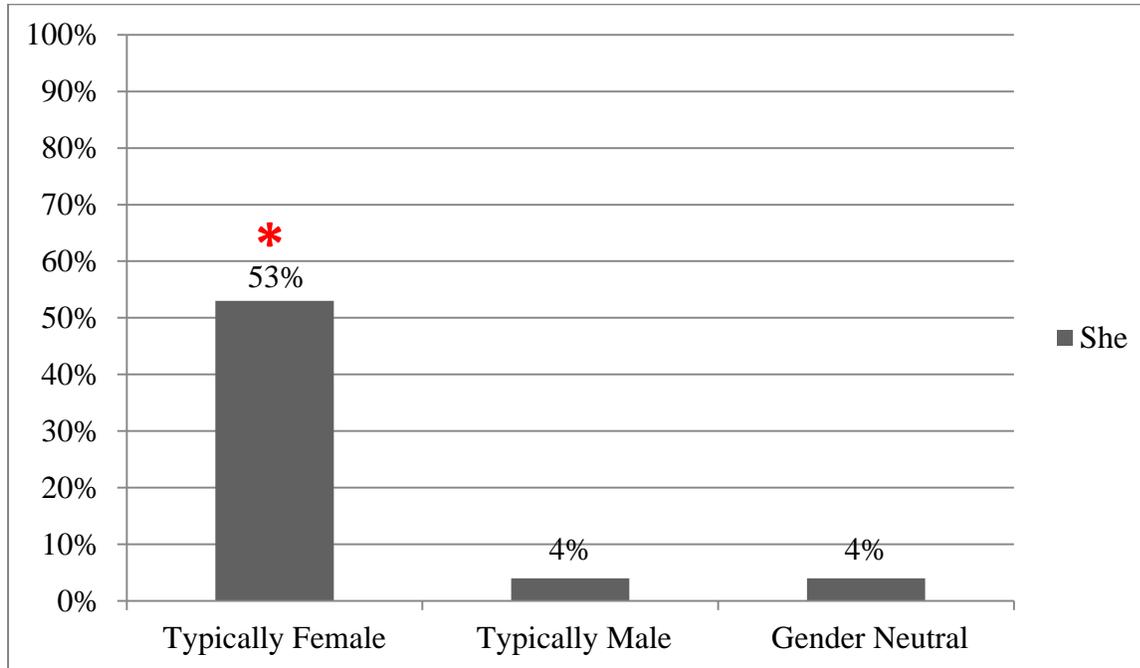
#### **4. Results by Pronoun**

In the following, I present the results by pronoun rather than by rating. This enables us to compare the use of each pronoun variant by English NSs across the three rated gender categories: gender neutral, typically male, and typically female.

There was a main effect of ROLE (i.e., gender neutral, typically male, and typically female) on the use of the feminine pronoun by English NSs [ $F(2, 147) = 44.64, p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English NSs used the feminine pronoun with self-reported typically female antecedents more than with self-reported typically male or gender neutral antecedents. As Figure 27 shows, while the pronoun *she* was provided for 53% of the typically female antecedents, it was used with only 4% of both typically male and gender neutral antecedents. There was no difference between the use of *she* with typically male antecedents and gender neutral antecedents. There was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER,

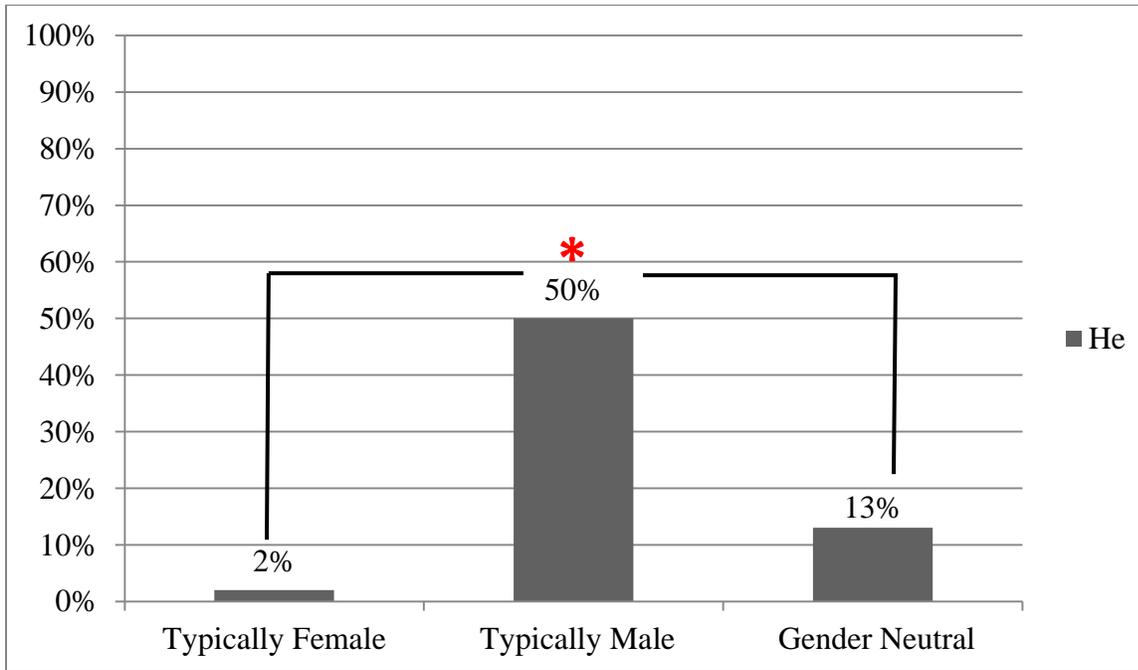
indicating that there was no significant difference between male and female English NSs in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun with the three different gender categories.

**Figure 27: Use of *she* by English NSs across all gender categories**



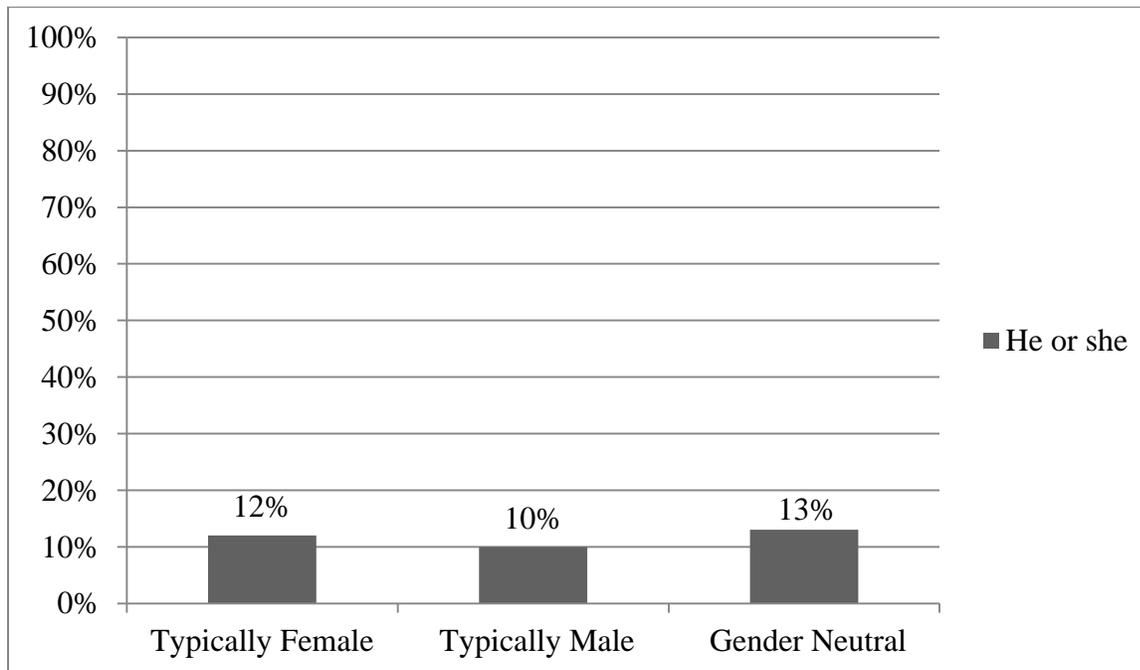
There was a main effect of ROLE on the use of the masculine pronoun by English NSs [ $F(2, 147) = 31.96, p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English NSs used the masculine pronoun with self-reported typically male antecedents more than with self-reported typically female or gender neutral antecedents. As Figure 28 shows, while the pronoun *he* was provided for 50% of the typically male antecedents, it was used with only 2% of the typically female antecedents and 13% of the gender neutral antecedents. Despite the numeric advantage for gender neutral antecedents, there was no significant difference between typically female antecedents and gender neutral antecedents in terms of the use of *he*. Just like with the feminine pronoun, there was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER in terms of the use of the masculine pronoun with the three different gender categories.

**Figure 28: Use of *he* by English NSs across all gender categories**



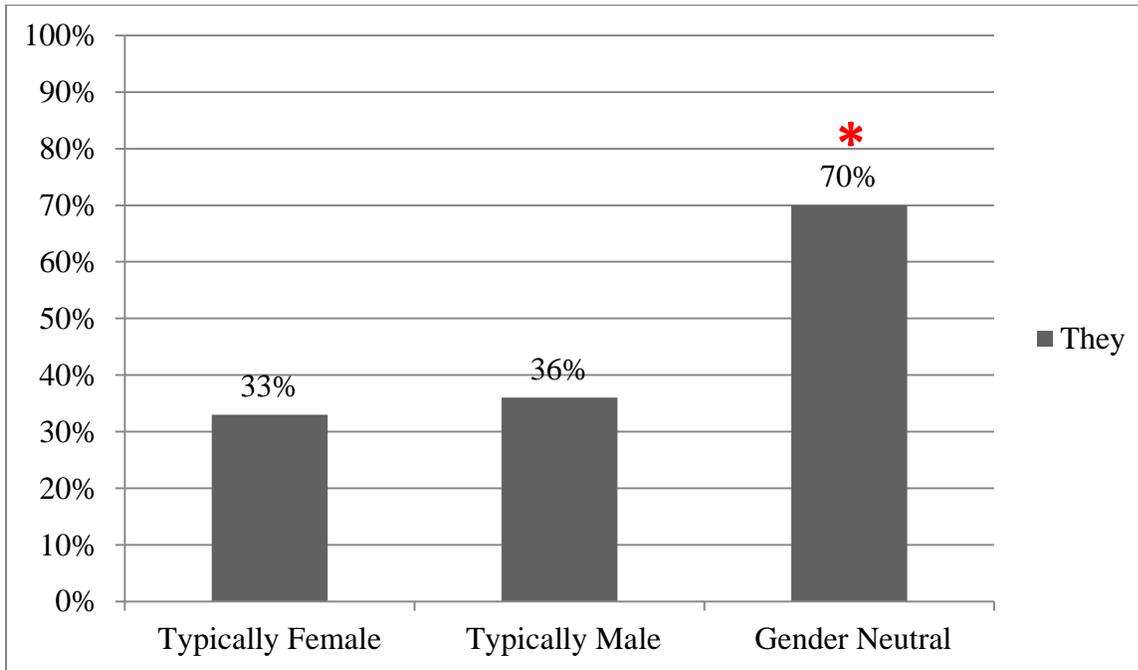
There was no effect of ROLE on the use of the pronominal *he or she* by English NSs [ $F(2, 147) = .17, p > .840$ ], indicating that the use of *he or she* was not significantly different across the self-reported typically female, typically male, and gender neutral antecedents. As Figure 29 below shows, the pronominal *he or she* was used for 12%, 10%, and 13% of the typically female, typically male, and gender neutral antecedents, respectively. However, there was a significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER in terms of the use of the pronominal *he or she* with gender neutral antecedents and typically male antecedents, confirming the results in Figures 22 and 24. For both gender categories, female English NSs used *he or she* more than male English NSs did.

**Figure 29: Use of *he or she* by English NSs across all gender categories**



There was a main effect of ROLE on the use of singular *they* by English NSs [ $F(2, 147) = 11.65, p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English NSs used singular *they* with self-reported gender neutral antecedents more than with self-reported typically female or typically male antecedents. As Figure 30 below shows, while singular *they* was provided for 70% of the gender neutral antecedents, it was provided for only 33% of the typically female antecedents and for 36% of the typically male antecedents. There was no significant difference between the use of singular *they* with typically female antecedents and typically male antecedents. Also, there was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER, indicating that male and female English NSs did not differ in terms of their use of singular *they* with any of the gender categories of the antecedents.

**Figure 30: Use of *they* by English NSs across all gender categories**



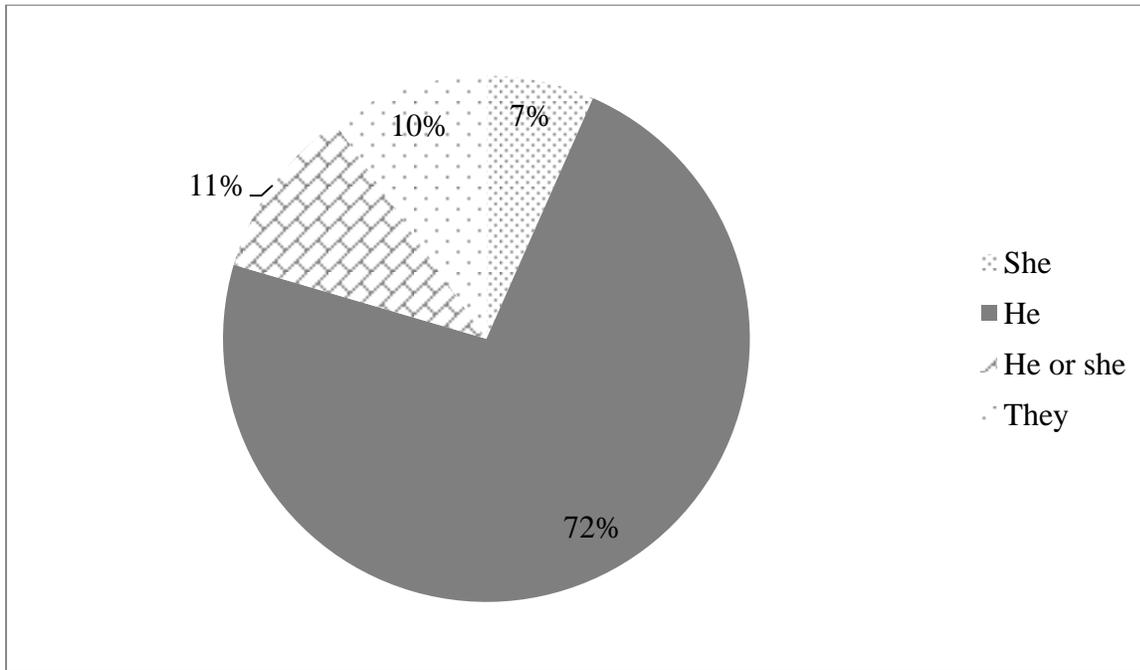
**ii. English L2s**

I will now present the results for English L2s separately for gender neutral, typically male, and typically female antecedents (all as self-reported by the participants). I will also compare these patterns of use to the overall use of pronouns across all assigned gender roles as shown earlier in Figure 4.

**1. Gender Neutral Antecedents**

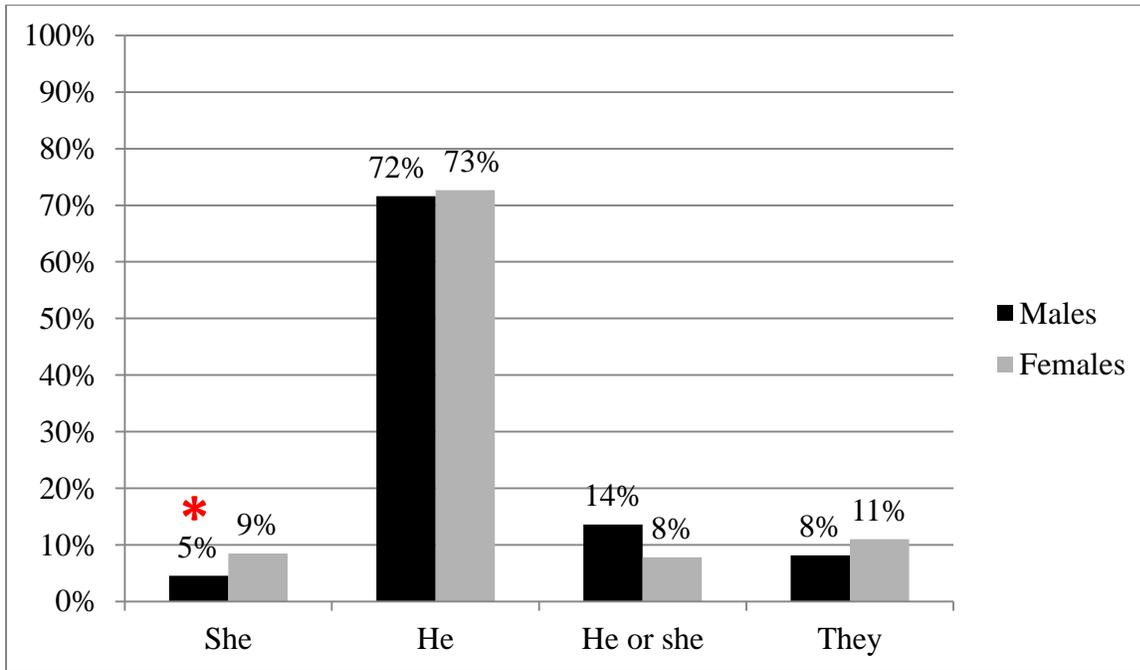
The male generic pronoun was provided for the majority of the self-reported gender neutral antecedents. As shown in Figure 31 below, English L2 learners used the pronoun *he* in 72% of the sentences with self-reported gender neutral antecedents followed by *he or she* (11%) and singular *they* (10%). The feminine pronoun was the least pronoun provided for gender neutral antecedents (7%).

**Figure 31: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - English L2s**



There was a significant difference between male and female English L2 learners in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun (*she*) with self-reported gender neutral antecedents [ $F(1, 88) = 5.59, p = .02$ ]. As shown in Figure 32 below, female English L2 learners used the pronoun *she* (9% = 40 items) with gender neutral antecedents more often than their male counterparts did (5% = 23 items). However, few items contributed to this effect. Therefore, the validity of this difference remains questionable. Also, while female English L2 learners showed a numeric preference for singular *they* as an inclusive pronoun over pronominal *he or she*, their male counterparts showed the opposite trend. However, these numeric differences were not significant. Finally, there was no statistically significant difference between male and female English L2 learners in terms of their use of the pronoun *he* with the self-reported gender neutral antecedents. There was no effect of PROFICIENCY or any significant interaction between PROFICIENCY and GENDER in terms of the use of the four generic pronouns with self-reported gender neutral antecedents.

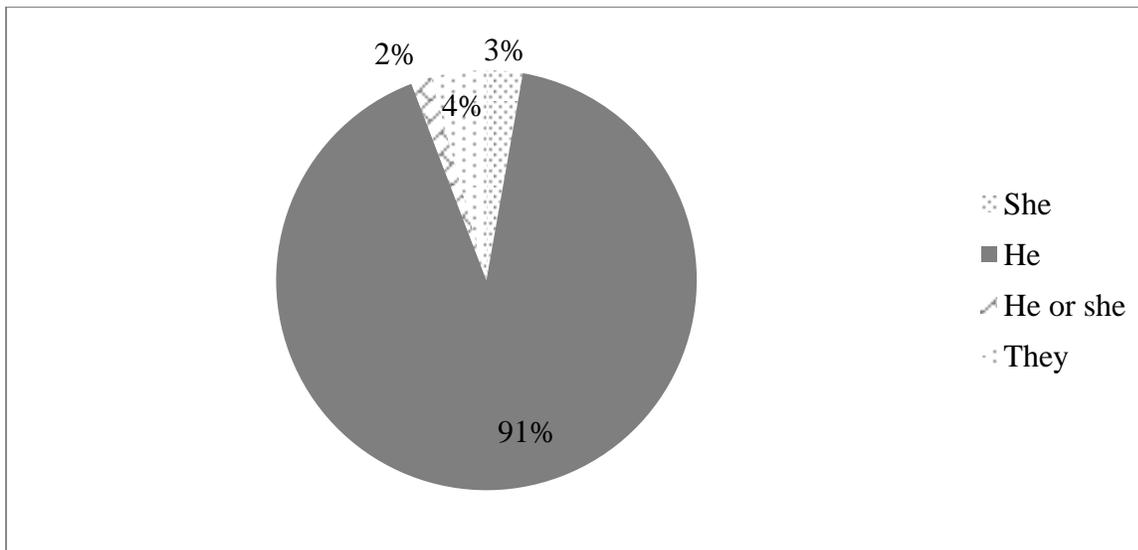
**Figure 32: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - English L2s**



## 2. Typically Male Antecedents

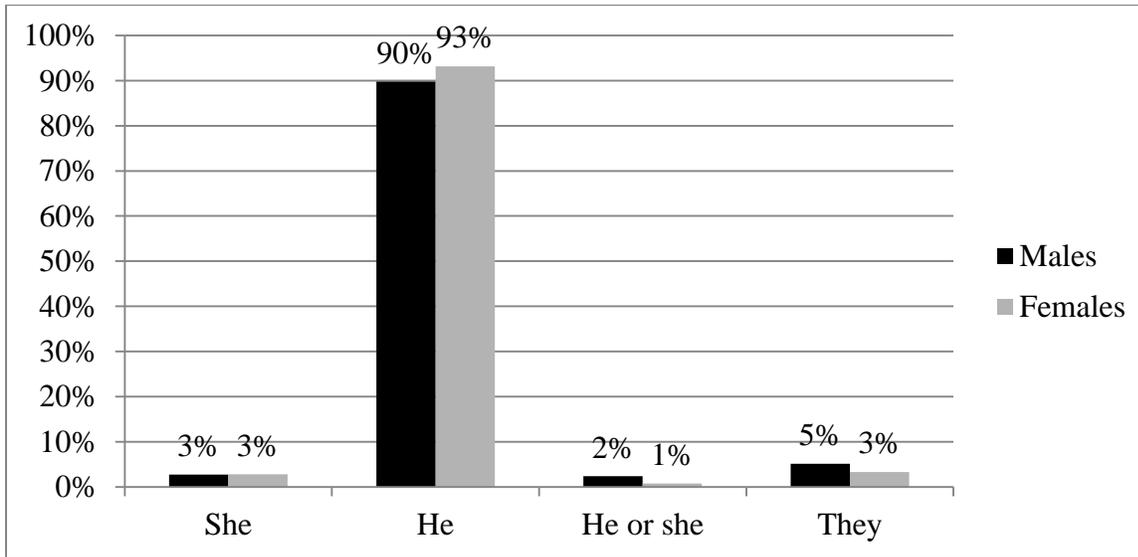
As presented in Figure 33 below, the use of the male generic pronoun becomes more prevalent when considering only self-reported typically male antecedents. For these sentences, English L2 learners provided the pronoun *he* in 91% of the times. The other generic alternatives (singular *they*, *she*, and *he or she*) were rarely used to index self-reported typically male antecedents.

**Figure 33: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - English L2s**



As presented in Figure 34 below, there were no significant differences between male and female English L2 learners in terms of their use of the four English generic pronouns with the self-reported typically male antecedents. For both males and females, the masculine pronoun was the prevalent pronoun and the other generic pronouns were rarely provided. There was a main effect of PROFICIENCY only on the use of the feminine pronoun (*she*) with the self-reported typically male antecedents [ $F(1, 88) = 5.27, p = .02$ ], indicating that English L2 learners with higher proficiency used the feminine pronoun with typically male antecedents more than the English L2 learners with lower proficiency did (4% and 1%, respectively). There was no significant interaction between PROFICIENCY and GENDER in terms of the use of any of the four generic pronouns with typically male antecedents.

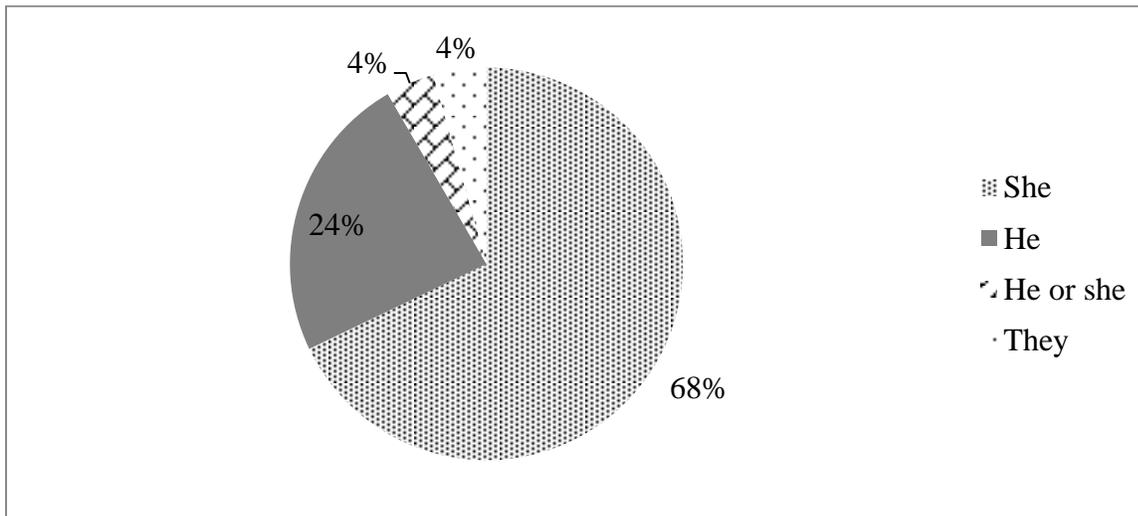
**Figure 34: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents -English L2s**



### 3. Typically Female Antecedents

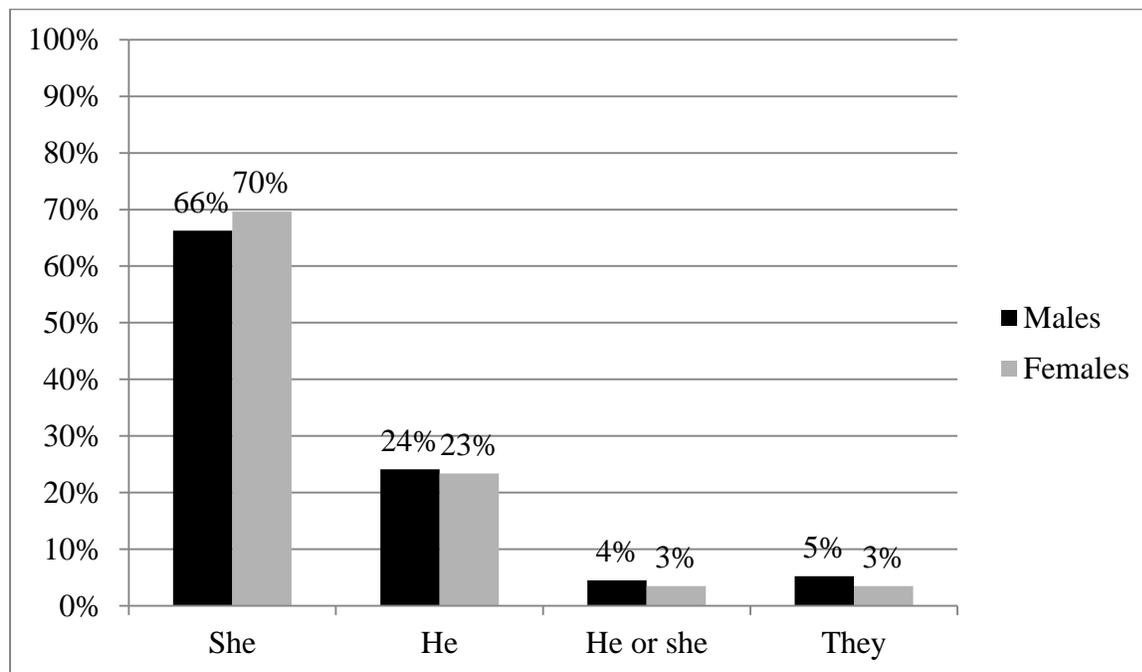
English L2 learners provided the feminine pronoun for the majority of sentences with self-reported typically female antecedents. As presented in Figure 35 below, the pronoun *she* was used in 68% of the sentences with self-reported typically female antecedents. The masculine pronoun *he* was used with 24% of these sentences. Singular *they* and the pronominal *he or she* were rarely provided for self-reported typically female antecedents (4% each).

**Figure 35: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - English L2s**



There was no main effect of GENDER on the use of the four generic pronouns with the self-reported typically female antecedents. As presented in Figure 36 below, there were no significant differences between male and female English L2 learners in terms of their use of the four generic pronouns with the self-reported typically female antecedents. Both males and females provided the feminine pronoun for the majority of sentences with self-reported typically female antecedents (66% and 70%, respectively) and used the masculine pronoun in 24% and 23% of these sentences, respectively.

**Figure 36: Male and Female Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents -English L2s**



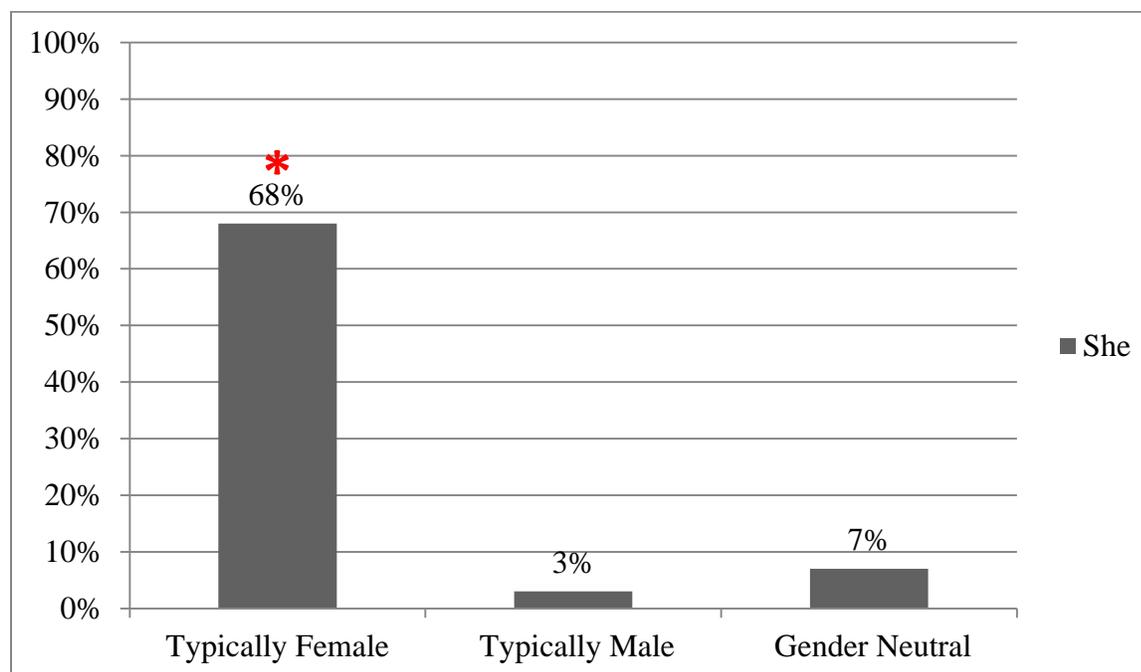
#### 4. Results by Pronoun

In the following, I present the results by pronoun rather than by rating. This enables us to compare the use of each pronoun variant by English L2 learners across the three gender ratings: gender neutral, typically male, and typically female.

Similar to English NSs, there was a main effect of ROLE (i.e., gender neutral, typically male, and typically female) on the use of the feminine pronoun by English L2 learners [F(2, 267)

= 246.43,  $p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English L2 learners used the feminine pronoun with self-reported typically female antecedents more than with self-reported typically male or gender neutral antecedents. As Figure 37 shows, while the pronoun *she* was provided for 68% of the typically female antecedents, it was provided for only 3% of the typically male antecedents and 7% of gender neutral antecedents. There was no difference between the use of *she* with typically male antecedents and gender neutral antecedents for English L2 learners. Also, there was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER (gender of the participant) for the use of the feminine pronoun with the various gender categories except for gender neutral antecedents (which was reported earlier in Figure 32 above), whereby female English L2 learners provided *she* for gender neutral antecedents more than their male counterparts did (9% and 5%, respectively).

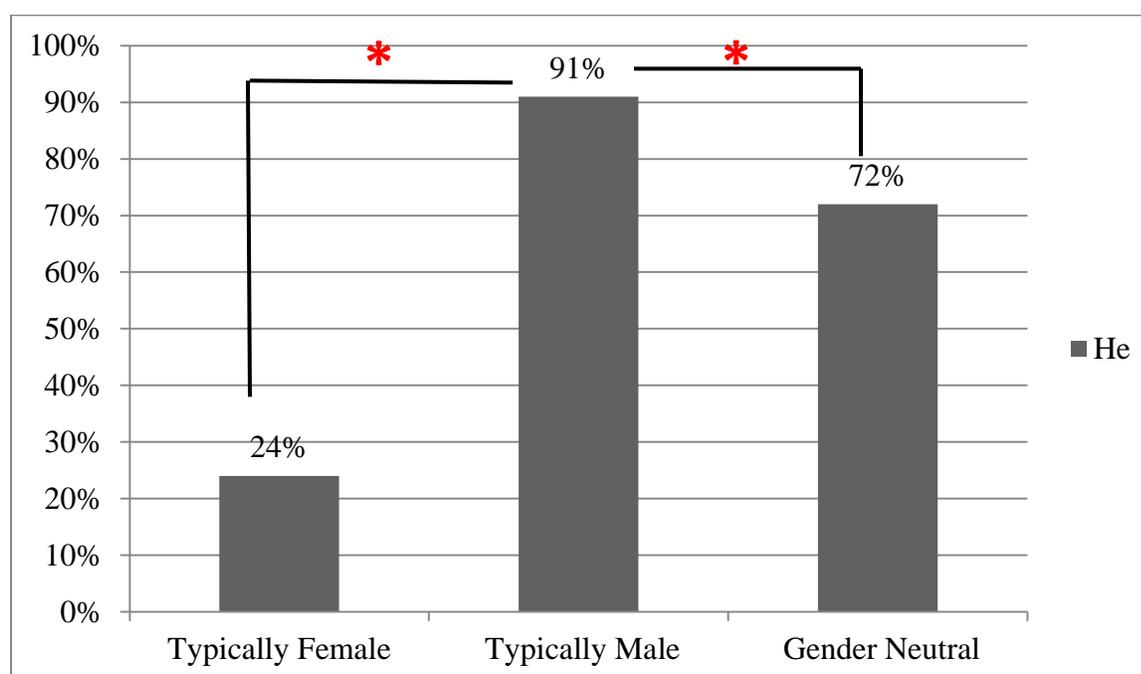
**Figure 37: Use of *she* by English L2 learners across all gender categories**



There was a main effect of ROLE on the use of the masculine pronoun by English L2 learners [ $F(2, 267) = 135.68, p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English

L2 learners' use of the masculine pronoun was different across the three gender categories. As Figure 38 shows, the pronoun *he* was provided for the typically male antecedents (91%) more than for the gender neutral antecedents (72%), which in turn was more than for typically female antecedents (24%). There was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER for the use of the masculine pronoun with the various gender categories, indicating that male and female English L2 learners did not differ in terms of the use of the pronoun *he* with the typically female, typically male, and gender neutral antecedents.

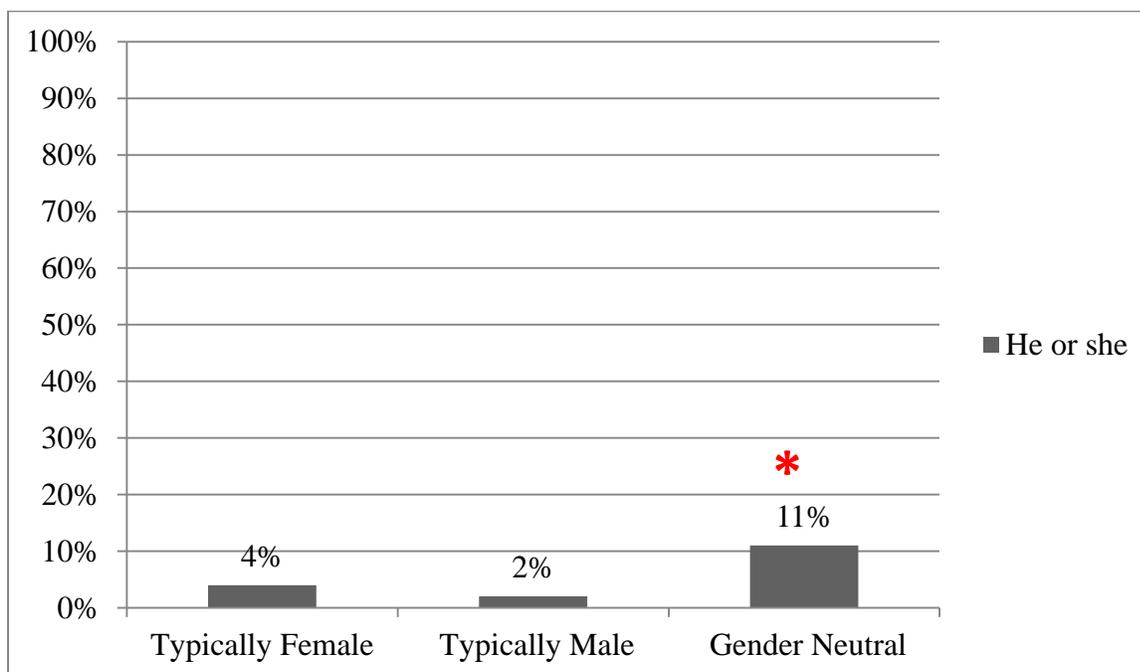
**Figure 38: Use of *he* by English L2 learners across all gender categories**



Unlike the use of *he* or *she* by English NSs, there was a main effect of ROLE on the use of this disjunctive pronominal by English L2 learners [ $F(2, 267) = 8.64, p = .000$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English L2 learners used *he* or *she* with self-reported gender neutral antecedents more than with self-reported typically female or typically male antecedents. As Figure 39 shows, while the pronominal *he* or *she* was provided for 11% of the gender neutral antecedents, it was provided for only 4% and 2% of the typically female antecedents and the

typically male antecedents, respectively. Again, there was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER for the use of *he or she* with the various gender categories. However, there was a significant interaction between GENDER and PROFICIENCY [ $F(2, 258) = 7.28, p = .007$ ], indicating that there was a significant difference between lower proficiency and higher proficiency participants only for males in terms of the use of *he or she*, whereby higher proficiency participants used *he or she* more than lower proficiency participants (10% and 2%, respectively).

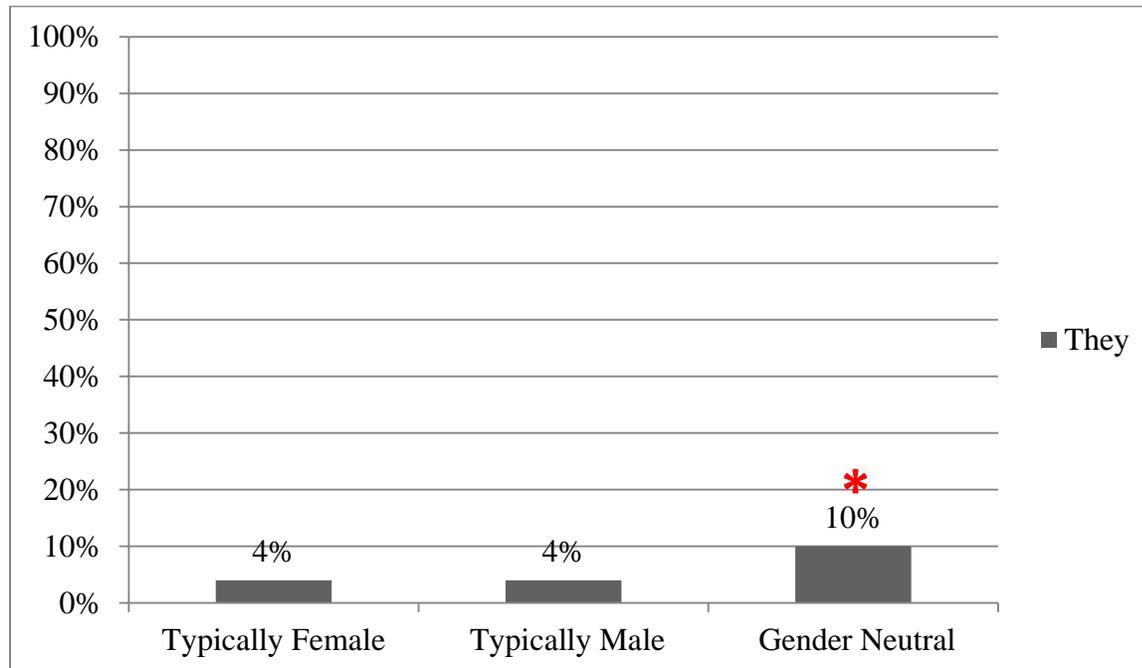
**Figure 39: Use of *he or she* by English L2 learners across all gender categories**



There was a main effect of ROLE on the use of singular *they* by English L2 learners [ $F(2, 267) = 5.32, p = .005$ ]. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis determined that English L2 learners provided singular *they* for self-reported gender neutral antecedents more than for self-reported typically female and typically male antecedents. As Figure 40 shows, while singular *they* was used with 10% of the gender neutral antecedents, it was used with only 4% of the typically

female and typically male antecedents. There was no significant interaction between ROLE and GENDER for the use of singular *they* with the various gender categories.

**Figure 40: Use of singular *they* by English L2 learners across all gender categories**



### iii. Language Group Comparisons

The comparison between the overall use of English generic pronouns by English NSs and English L2 learners reveals several interesting observations. While singular *they* was the most frequent generic pronoun for English NSs, the male generic was the most commonly used pronoun by English L2 learners. In fact, singular *they* was scarce in the English L2 data. In terms of order, English NSs used the four generic pronouns in the following order: singular *they*, *he*, *she*, and *he or she*. English L2 learners used these pronouns in the following order: *he*, *she*, *he or she*, and singular *they*.

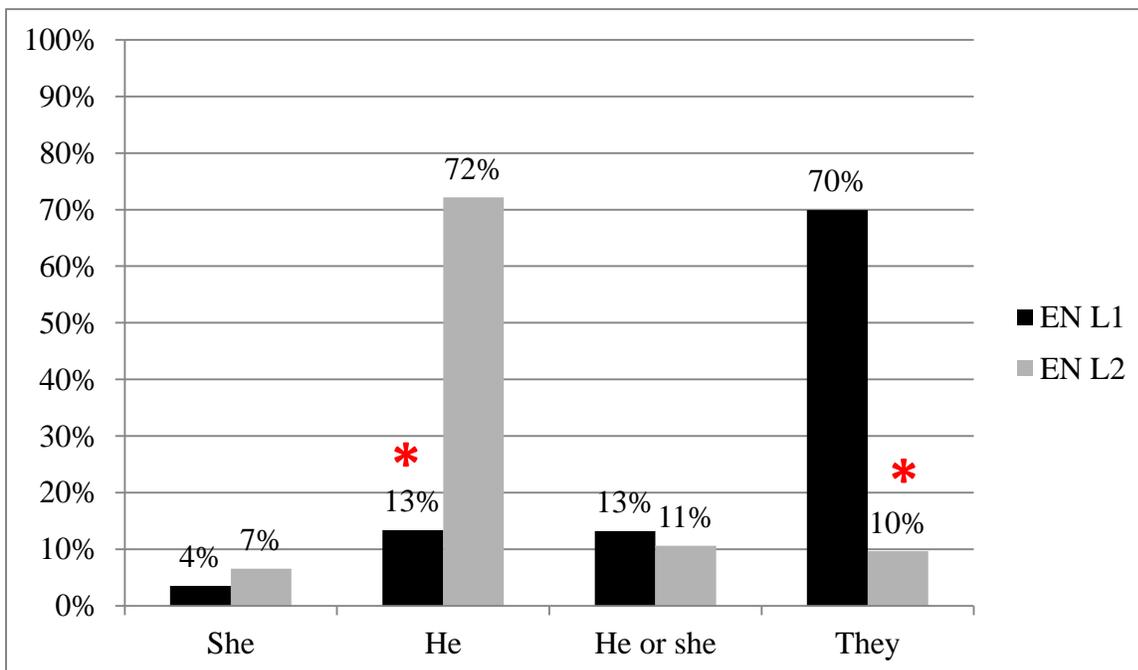
In the following I compare the results for the English L2 learners to the results for the English NSs in terms of the use of the four generic pronouns with self-reported gender neutral,

typically male, and typically female antecedents. I also assess the potential effect of the interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER.

### 1. Gender Neutral Antecedents

As presented in Figure 41 below, there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the masculine pronoun *he* [ $F(1, 138) = 139.41, p = .000$ ] and the use of singular *they* [ $F(1, 138) = 218.55, p = .000$ ] with self-reported gender neutral antecedents. English L2 learners used the pronoun *he* considerably more often than English NSs did (72% and 13%, respectively). Conversely, English NSs provided singular *they* for self-reported gender neutral antecedents considerably more than English L2 learners did (70% and 10%, respectively). This suggests that while English NSs prefer singular *they* as a generic pronoun for self-reported gender neutral antecedents, English L2 learners prefer the masculine pronoun for this purpose. The interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER was not significant in terms of the use of the four generic pronouns with self-reported gender neutral antecedents.

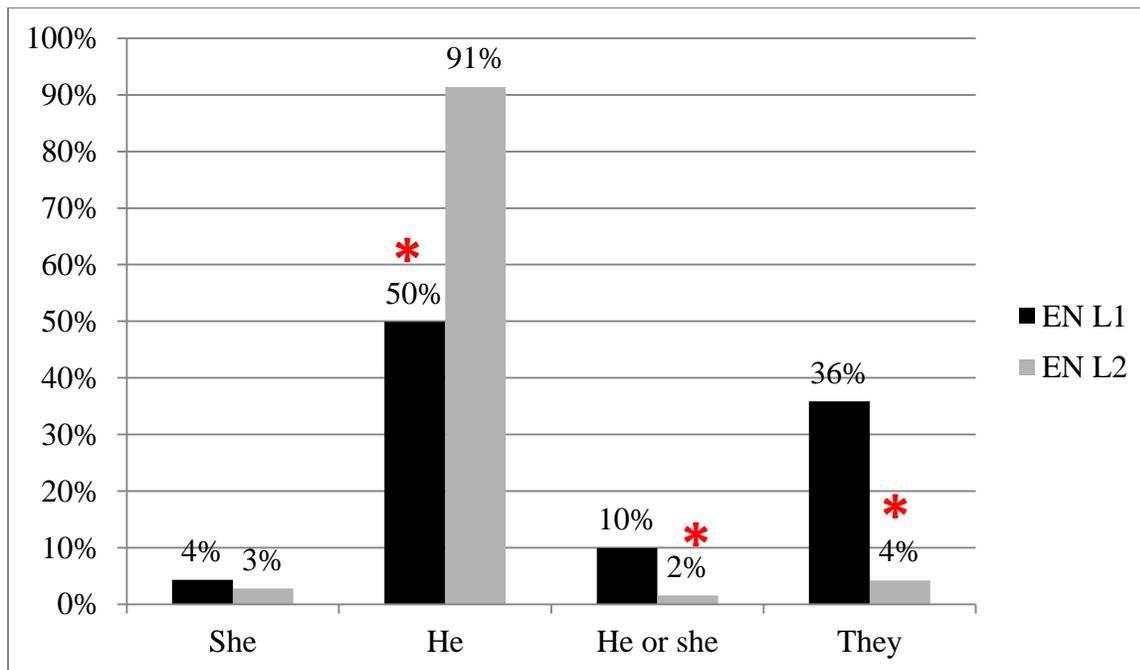
**Figure 41: Pronoun Use with Gender Neutral Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



## 2. Typically Male Antecedents

As presented in Figure 42 below, There was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the masculine pronoun *he*, pronominal *he or she*, and singular *they* with self-reported typically male antecedents. English L2 learners used the masculine pronoun predominantly (91%) for self-reported typically male antecedents and much more often than English NSs did [ $F(1, 138) = 73.02, p = .000$ ]. One more time, English NSs used the inclusive pronouns (*he or she*, singular *they*) more often than English L2 learners did [ $F(1, 138) = 13.45, p = .000$ ] and [ $F(1, 138) = 46.47, p = .000$ ], respectively. There was no difference between the two language groups in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun (*she*) with self-reported typically male antecedents [ $F(1, 138) = .55, p > .460$ ]. For both groups, this pronominal choice was very rare.

**Figure 42: Pronoun Use with Typically Male Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



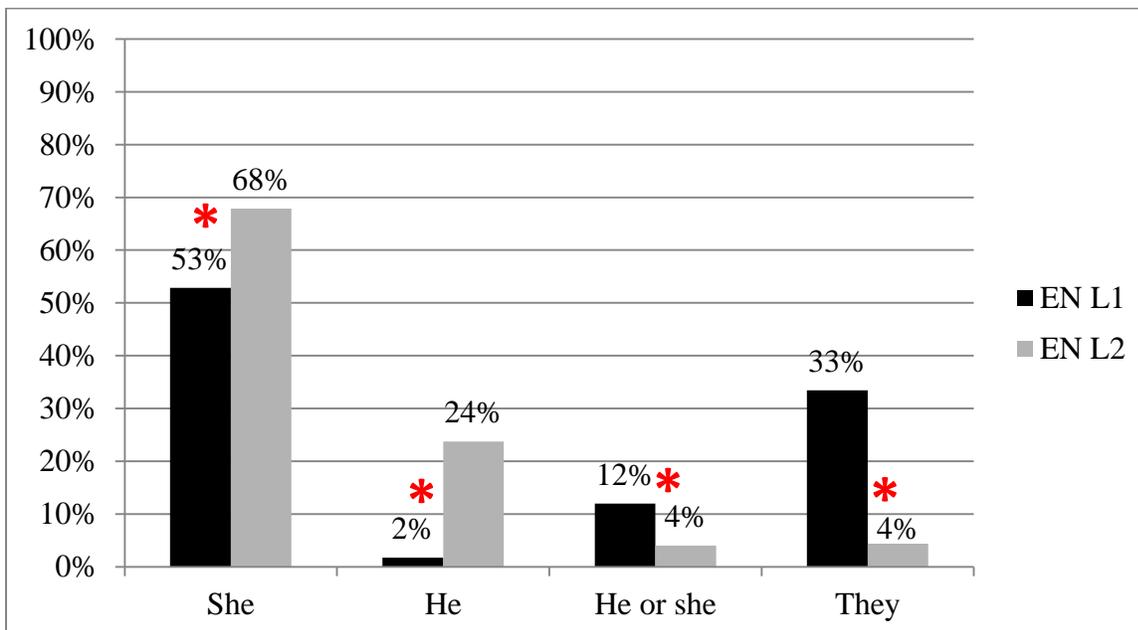
Moreover, there was a significant interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER in terms of the use of the pronominal *he or she* with self-reported typically male antecedents [ $F(1, 138) = 9.51, p = .003$ ], indicating that the difference between the male and

female participants in the use of *he or she* for typically male antecedents is significant only for the English group, where females (16%) used the pronominal *he or she* more than males did (4%).

### 3. Typically Female Antecedents

As shown in Figure 43 below, there was a main effect of FIRST LANGUAGE on the use of the four generic pronouns with self-reported typically female antecedents. First, English L2 learners used the pronoun *she* with self-reported typically female antecedents more often than English NSs did [ $F(1, 138) = 6.51, p = .012$ ]. Second, English L2 learners provided the pronoun *he* for self-reported typically female antecedents more than English NSs did [ $F(1, 138) = 26.35, p = .000$ ]. Finally, English NSs used the inclusive pronouns *he or she* and singular *they* with self-reported typically female antecedents more than English L2 learners did [ $F(1, 137) = 4.47, p = .037$ ] and [ $F(1, 138) = 35.70, p = .000$ ], respectively. These results indicate that while English NSs lead the English L2 learners in using the inclusive generic pronouns, English L2 learners lead the English NSs in using the exclusive generic pronouns.

**Figure 43: Pronoun Use with Typically Female Antecedents - EN L1 and EN L2**



There was no interaction between FIRST LANGUAGE and GENDER (i.e., gender of participant) in terms of the use of these four generic pronouns with self-reported typically female antecedents.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussions and Conclusions

This dissertation sought to examine the use of English third person generic pronouns by English L2 Arabic NSs as a function of both self-reported gender roles and linguistic gender ideology. Taking a controlled experimental approach, this dissertation investigated the variable use of English third person generic pronouns by English NSs and Arabic NSs who are classroom L2 learners of English in Jordan. In this study, the use of the multiple English generic variants (*he*, *she*, *he or she*, and singular *they*) was considered in terms of the potential effect of the participants' L1 social background (i.e., gender roles), gender of the participant, and linguistic ideology. In the following I will discuss the results for both tasks (gender role assignment questionnaire and sentence completion task) in terms of women and men's linguistic tendencies and strategies, sociolinguistic competence, and linguistic gender ideology.

#### I. Gender Roles

As mentioned earlier in this study, the list of human nouns in the gender role questionnaire was selected in a way to reflect the three types of gender classification: gender neutral, typically male, and typically female. English NSs showed a preference for a gender neutral response because around half of their total number of ratings was 'gender neutral'. English NSs were more inclusive (i.e., gender neutral) in their ratings of non-lexical nouns (e.g., *anyone*) and general non-occupational personal nouns (e.g., *person*) than for occupational ones (e.g., *mechanic*, *nurse*). While occupational nouns (except for *shopper*<sup>5</sup> and *social worker*) were rated by the majority of English NSs as either 'typically male' or 'typically female', non-lexical nouns and non-occupational personal nouns were almost unanimously rated as 'gender neutral'

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<sup>5</sup> The term *shopper* is not truly occupational. However, its ratings were equally divided between 'typically female' and 'gender neutral', reflecting some female stereotypical association for half of the participants.

by English NSs. In other words, non-lexical nouns and non-occupational personal nouns do not seem to evoke any gender stereotypes or gender roles (i.e., non-stereotypical roles). Therefore, these noun items may provide the greatest potential to use inclusive pronouns (i.e., singular *they*, pronominal *he or she*) compared with typically-female and typically-male terms. There was no difference between non-occupational lexical nouns and non-lexical nouns in terms of the number of gender neutral ratings these nouns received.

As noted above, the majority of English NSs rated most occupational nouns in a gender exclusive way (i.e., as either ‘typically male’ or ‘typically female’), reflecting a binary, sexist perception of gender roles (e.g., *firefighter* = male, *nurse* = female). In other words, the vast majority of English NSs responded to the traditionally assigned gender roles. However, English NSs were pretty balanced in terms of the total number of their ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ ratings. As predicted in this study, some of these ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ terms had well-established stereotypical associations and some had weaker stereotypical associations as measured in terms of the number of corresponding gender ratings these items received. For example, terms like *mechanic*, *lumberjack*, *firefighter*, and *carpenter* had stronger male associations than *engineer*, *police officer*, *surgeon*, and *politician*. Also, terms such as *maid* and *nurse* had more established female associations than terms like *homemaker* and *librarian*. The varying degrees of stereotypical gender associations these terms carry may reflect the variation among the participants in terms of how they socialize gender roles.

The terms *shopper* and *social worker* that were claimed to be typically female in the literature (e.g., Martyna, 1978; Kennison and Trofe, 2003<sup>6</sup>) did not prove to be so. Although these two terms were rarely rated as typically male, English NSs were almost equally divided

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<sup>6</sup> Kennison and Trofe (2003) followed a different methodology from the current study. They Asked their participants to rate the noun items on a scale of 1 ‘mostly female’ to 7 ‘mostly male’.

between ‘typically female’ and ‘gender neutral’ ratings for these two terms. The large number of ‘gender neutral’ ratings these two terms received may reflect an ongoing socioeconomic change in gender stereotypes (for *shopper*) and in the division of labor (for *social worker*) or may indicate a challenge by half of the participants to the traditional gender roles associated with these two terms. In fact, young men and women were found to have a greater tendency to challenge traditionally assigned gender roles (Brewster and Padavic, 2000). However, the participants’ overall response pattern to the occupational terms yields the former account (i.e., an ongoing change) more plausible. As societal gender norms and roles change, the strength of the word-specific gender stereotypes undergoes change as well. (Kennison and Trofe, 2003)

Contrary to the prediction in this study, female English NSs were not more inclusive in their gender role assignment than their male counterparts. In their turn, male English NSs were not more male biased than their female counterparts. These results suggest that there was no gender-related variation (i.e., gender of the speaker) in terms of the perception of gender roles.

However, this study documented some variation among the participants in their perception of gender roles. There was some variation among the participants in their ratings of occupational terms, which was not the case for non-occupational terms and non-lexical nouns. For example, while the non-occupational term *citizen* was unanimously rated as ‘gender neutral’, the occupational term *engineer* was rated by almost two thirds of English speakers as ‘typically male’ and by one third of them as ‘gender neutral’. Likewise, the occupational term *librarian* was rated by three fourths of the participants as ‘typically female’ but was rated by one fourth of them as ‘gender neutral’. Despite this variation, there was very little overlap, if any, among the participants in terms of their ‘typically male’ and ‘typically female’ ratings for the same term. Instead, the variation among the participants, when present, was in terms of either their ‘typically

male' or 'typically female' ratings on the one hand and their 'gender neutral' ratings on the other hand.

Similar to English NSs, Arabic NSs overall preferred 'gender neutral' ratings to 'typically male' or 'typically female' ratings in terms of the total number of responses in Task 2. Half of the total number of rating responses by Arabic NSs was 'gender neutral'. However, Arabic NSs were less balanced than English NSs in terms of the number of 'typically male' and 'typically female' rating responses, the former being twice the number of the latter. As predicted in this study, the majority of Arabic NSs rated all non-lexical nouns and general non-occupational personal nouns as 'gender neutral' (*see* Table 6), reflecting the absence of any gender roles or stereotypical associations to these nouns. Also, most occupational nouns (14 out of 20) were rated gender exclusively by the majority of Arabic NSs as either 'typically male' (8 nouns, *see* Table 7) or 'typically female' (6 nouns, *see* Table 8). Four of the remaining occupational terms were rated as 'gender neutral' by the majority of Arabic NSs.

Contrary to the prediction in this study, there was no difference between male and female Arabic NSs in terms of the number of gender neutral, typically male, and typically female ratings. Female Arabic NSs were not more inclusive in their gender role assignment than male Arabic NSs, who were not more male biased than their female counterparts. One more prediction in this study fails as there was no difference between English NSs and Arabic NSs in terms of their average number of 'gender neutral' and 'typically male' ratings. In other words, Arabic NSs were neither less gender neutral nor were they more male biased than English NSs, suggesting that Arabic sociolinguistic androcentricity did not have an effect in terms of the number of either 'gender neutral' or 'typically male' responses. However, Arabic sociolinguistic androcentricity was manifested in terms of the lower percentage of 'typically female' responses

by Arabic NSs compared with the percentage of ‘typically female’ responses by English NSs. Interestingly, by rating a smaller proportion of noun items as ‘typically female’, Arabic NSs seem to be more gender inclusive than English NSs, who were more gender exclusive (more female biased). This observation is supported by the results that show that fewer noun items were rated gender exclusively (as either ‘typically male’ or ‘typically female’) and more items were rated as ‘gender neutral’ by the majority of Arabic NSs. While 14 items were rated as ‘gender neutral’, only 8 items as ‘typically male’, and just 6 items as ‘typically female’ by the majority of Arabic NSs (Tables 6-8), the majority of English NSs rated 10 items as ‘gender neutral’, 10 items as ‘typically male’, and 8 items as ‘typically female’ (Tables 2, 3 and 4).

In sum, the Arab androcentricity in gender role assignment does not seem to be articulated in terms of what specific terms were rated as ‘gender neutral’, ‘typically male’, or ‘typically female’. Instead, it was manifested in terms of the relative number of ‘typically female’ ratings among the overall number of rating responses by Arabic NSs.

## **II. Generic Pronominal Choice**

In this section, I discuss the results of the sentence completion task concerning the use of the multiple English generic variants (*he*, *she*, *he or she*, and singular *they*) by both English NSs and Arabic NSs. I also compare these patterns of use for the two language groups. Because “pronominal choice can be itself a mode of expression” (Newman, 1992: 470) and because the grammatical categories used in linguistic descriptions cannot be “neutral, objective and devoid of ideological significance” (Cameron, 1985:19), I argue that a social import (a sociolinguistic or an ideological significance) is associated with the choice one generic variant over another.

## **i. Summary of Results**

### **1. English NSs**

Overall, singular *they* was the most provided generic pronoun by English NSs in the current study. English NSs used singular *they* in about half of the times. For the second half of the data, English NSs used the other generic alternatives in the following order: *he*, *she*, and *he or she*. This pattern is in line with the relatively recent research, which showed that singular *they* is the most commonly used generic pronoun by English NSs (e.g., 60% in Newman, 1992 and 81% in Matossian, 1997). Moreover, this study confirms the decrease in use of the male generic pronoun compared with the norms of the traditional prescriptive approach.

The use of singular *they* became even more prevalent when considering only self-reported gender neutral antecedents, which are non-lexical nouns and general non-occupational nouns in this study. English NSs used singular *they* predominantly to pronominalize gender neutral antecedents. Two other pronominal alternatives *he* and *he or she* were equally used (13% each) and failed to compete with singular *they* for gender neutral antecedents. The feminine pronoun was rarely used, indicating that the vast majority of English NSs did not consider it as a truly generic pronoun for gender neutral antecedents. Combining the proportion of singular *they* with the proportion of the pronominal *he or she* indicates that English NSs used inclusive pronouns for 83% of gender neutral antecedents. These results suggest that English NSs were inclusive in their generic pronominal choices when gender neutral reference was established

The results of this study are partially in line with Newman (1992) and Matossian (1997). In Newman (1992), speakers used singular *they* for around 60% of the gender neutral (i.e., epicene in Newman, 1992) antecedents and used *he* for 28% of those antecedents. However, Newman (1992) was very tolerant in his classification of gender neutral antecedents. Among

those were *guy*, *Man*, and *lumberjack* which he claimed to be logically neutral. Therefore, the percentage of use of singular *they* might have been higher and that of *he* might have been lower if such antecedents had not been used. In Matossian (1997), singular *they* was provided in 81% of the total sample followed by *he*, which was provided in 16% of the times. It is worth noting that Newman (1992) and Matossian (1997), contrary to the current study, did not elicit the participants' responses regarding the gender classification they employed in their studies.

English NSs used the male generic pronoun for half of the typically male antecedents. This replicates the results by Matossian (1997), whereby *he* was also used about half the time for typically male antecedents ('masculine-generic referents' in Matossian, 1997). On the other hand, singular *they*, which was prevalent with gender neutral antecedents, dropped into just 36%, indicating that it was a strong competitor to the male generic as it was used for more than one third of the typically male antecedents. The pronominal *he or she* came third with 10% rate of use, indicating that its use did not really differ with typically male antecedents from with gender neutral antecedents. Just like with gender neutral antecedents, the feminine pronoun failed to compete again as English NSs rarely used to index typically male antecedents.

Combining the proportion of singular *they* with the proportion of the pronominal *he or she* indicates that English NSs used inclusive pronouns for almost half (46%) of the typically male antecedents. However, English NSs were less inclusive with typically male antecedents compared with gender neutral antecedents.

English NSs used the feminine pronoun for just over half (53%) of the self-reported typically female antecedents. The use of singular *they* dropped from 70% (the use of singular *they* with gender neutral antecedents) into 33% with typically female antecedents. However, being used with one third of these antecedents, singular *they* was yet a strong competitor to the

pronoun *she*. English NSs provided the pronominal *he or she* in 12% of the times. Combining the proportion of use of singular *they* with the proportion of the pronominal *he or she* indicates that English NSs used inclusive pronouns for just under half (45%) of the typically female antecedents. Finally, English NSs rarely used the masculine pronoun for typically female antecedents.

In sum, there are interesting patterns in the use of English generic pronouns by English NSs. First, singular *they* is the most commonly used generic pronoun by English NSs. Second, English NSs used singular *they* for the majority of self-reported gender neutral nouns and used inclusive pronouns (singular *they* + *he or she*) for the vast majority of these antecedents. Third, with typically male and typically female antecedents, English NSs used the corresponding gendered pronoun (*he, she*) for around half of the antecedents, rarely used the opposite gendered pronoun, used *they* for almost one third of these antecedents, and used inclusive pronouns for almost half of these antecedents. Fourth, English NSs maintained the same rate of use of the pronominal *he or she* across all three gender categories. Finally, male and female English NSs did not differ in terms of their use of the four generic pronouns except for the use of the pronominal *he or she* with gender neutral and typically male antecedents. For both gender categories, female English NSs used the pronominal *he or she* more than male NSs did. Despite this difference, female English NSs were not more gender inclusive in their pronominal choices than their male counterparts, indicating that the difference is mainly in some of the strategies males and females employed.

The almost sheer absence of the masculine pronoun and the feminine pronoun in the typically male and typically female antecedent categories, respectively, suggest that both pronouns fail to be truly generic. In particular, this was more true for the feminine pronoun,

which failed in both gender neutral and typically male categories than for the masculine pronoun. It seems that generic *she* is more successful as an ‘effective consciousness-raiser’ (Cameron, 1985) rather than as generic pronoun. For similar reasons, the male generic has been called ‘false generic’ (Frank and Treichler, 1989) or ‘pseudo-generics’ Cameron (1985, 1990).

On the other hand, singular *they* proved to be truly generic as it was used not only with the majority of gender neutral antecedents, but also with one third of both typically male and typically female antecedents. Also, the pronominal *he or she* proves to be truly generic as it was used invariantly across the three gender categories. The overall pattern for English NSs is illustrated in Figure 44 below (adapted from Matossian, 1997):

**Figure 44: Overall use of English generic pronouns by English NSs**

Gender Role	Female	Neutral	Male
<b>Pronouns</b>		<b>HE</b>	
	<b>SHE</b>	<b>HE OR SHE</b>	
			<b>THEY</b>

Despite all the grammatical reservations (as discussed earlier) about singular *they*, the use of this pronoun is predominant in L1 English and is expanding compared with the results of

previous research (e.g., Meyers, 1990) as shown in Figure 44. The success of singular *they* as an alternative to the traditionally prescribed masculine pronoun and the failure of other generic alternatives may be attributed to three interdependent semantic factors that Newman (1992) discussed, namely gender determinacy, notional (i.e. semantic) number, and referential solidity. These factors are crucial to construct truly generic reference. A generic referent can be (and should be) of either sex, is not limited to one member of that category (e.g., nurse), and does not refer to a specific or concrete entity.

In terms of gender determinacy, both the masculine pronoun and the feminine pronoun fail as both are not free of gender connotations as experimental and non-experimental research on perception of ‘generic *he*’ and ‘generic *she*’ suggest (e.g., Khosroshahi, 1989; Gastil, 1990; and McConnell-Ginet, 2008). Both singular *they* and the pronominal *he or she* are gender indeterminate and thus meet the first requirement. Newman (1992: 470) argues “*They* [singular *they*] most strongly corresponds to epicene [neutral] gender, and the singular pronominals to their respective genders.”

In terms of notional number, Newman (1992) suggests that the generic NP antecedent (e.g., *a person*) is formally singular but notionally plural (as a referent). For this reason, Newman (1992) criticizes the term ‘singular *they*’ and claims that the generic use of *they* does not violate number agreement. Following Newman’s argument, the masculine pronoun and the feminine pronoun do not meet the ‘notional number’ condition as these pronouns are both formally and notionally singular. The pronominal *he or she* has the same problem as the masculine and feminine pronouns in terms of notional number.

Newman (1992: 447) defines referential solidity as “the extent to which the referent can be posited as a specific individual.” Therefore, he differentiates between concrete or specific

referents (solid) and hypothetical or generic referents (non-solid). In terms of referential solidity, the pronoun *he* is claimed to be ‘referentially solid’, the pronoun *she* is ‘referentially marked’, and singular *they* is ‘referentially nonsolid’ (Matossian, 1997). The pronominal *he or she*, though gender neutral, combines both referential solidity and referential markedness. Therefore, it is only singular *they* that satisfies the non-solidity requirement through its ‘nonassertiveness’ (Weidmann, 1984) that masks the identity of the referent.

## 2. Arabic NSs

As presented earlier, the masculine pronoun was the most widely-used generic pronoun by Arabic NSs in the current study. Arabic NSs used the pronoun *he* for 70% of the antecedents across all gender categories. The feminine pronoun was used in 15% of the times followed by *he or she* (8%) and singular *they* (6%). While singular *they* was the most commonly used generic pronoun by English NSs, the pronoun *he* was the predominant pronoun for Arabic NSs. The scarcity of singular *they* in the L2 data while it is prevalent in L1 data points to the importance of classroom L2 input.

Although singular *they* is so common and widespread in the current use of English (Laitinen, 2002), it is still considered an informal and nonstandard variant (Newman, 1992 and Matossian 1997). Therefore, this pronoun is not often part of foreign classroom input. Several studies (e.g., Howard, 2004; van Compernelle and Williams, 2012) noted the limitations of foreign classroom for the development of sociolinguistic competence (and sociolinguistic variation) by L2 learners because of the lack of authentic input in L2 classroom settings. Indeed, there is no reference to singular *they* at all in the textbook ‘*Intermediate New Headway English Course*’, which the participating Arabic L2 learners of English studied. Therefore, L2 classroom learners are less sociolinguistically competent and tend to overuse formal variants at the expense

of informal or less formal variants (Howard, 2004). Regan (1995) noticed that unless L2 learners stay in the target language community for a sufficient duration, during which they have sufficient contact with native speakers, the informal variants will not be acquired. Given that none of the participants in this study stayed in an English speaking community for more than a year as self-reported, the low use of singular *they* was predicted. It is worth noting here that L2 input is not limited to classroom textbooks and immediate contact with L2 culture. Other sources of L2 input include, among other sources, media, Internet-mediated communication (van Compernelle and Williams, 2012), and exposure to L2 materials. These sources of L2 input may account for the few cases of singular *they* in the English L2 data.

While English NSs provided singular *they* for the vast majority of gender neutral antecedents, Arabic NSs used the male generic pronoun for 72% of their self-reported gender neutral antecedents. The other generic alternatives (*she*, *he or she*, and singular *they*) accounted for the remaining 28% of these antecedents and were used for 7%, 11%, and 10%, respectively. In other words, Arabic NSs were gender exclusive for 79% of the gender neutral antecedents and gender inclusive for only 21% of these antecedents in terms of their pronominal choices. While English NSs and Arabic NSs did not differ in terms of their use of the pronominal *he or she* and the feminine pronoun, they showed reversed roles for singular *they* and the masculine pronoun. For English NSs, singular *they* was the predominant pronoun for gender neutral nouns and the pronoun *he* was rarely provided. For Arabic NSs, the pronoun *he* was the predominant pronoun with singular *they* being very rarely used.

When considering only typically male antecedents, the use of the male generic increased into 91% of the times. Although the masculine generic was the most provided pronoun by English NSs for typically male antecedents, the proportion of use of the pronoun *he* was almost

doubled by the Arabic NSs. One more difference between Arabic NSs and English NSs come for the use of singular *they* with typically male antecedents. While English NSs provided singular *they* for almost one third of these antecedents, Arabic NSs provided the same pronoun for only 4% of the times. In other words, the male generic pronoun did not have any pronoun competitor with typically male antecedents in the L2 data. Arabic NSs and English NSs were not different in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun with typically male antecedents. Arabic NSs were gender exclusive for 94% of the typically male antecedents and gender inclusive for only 6% of them.

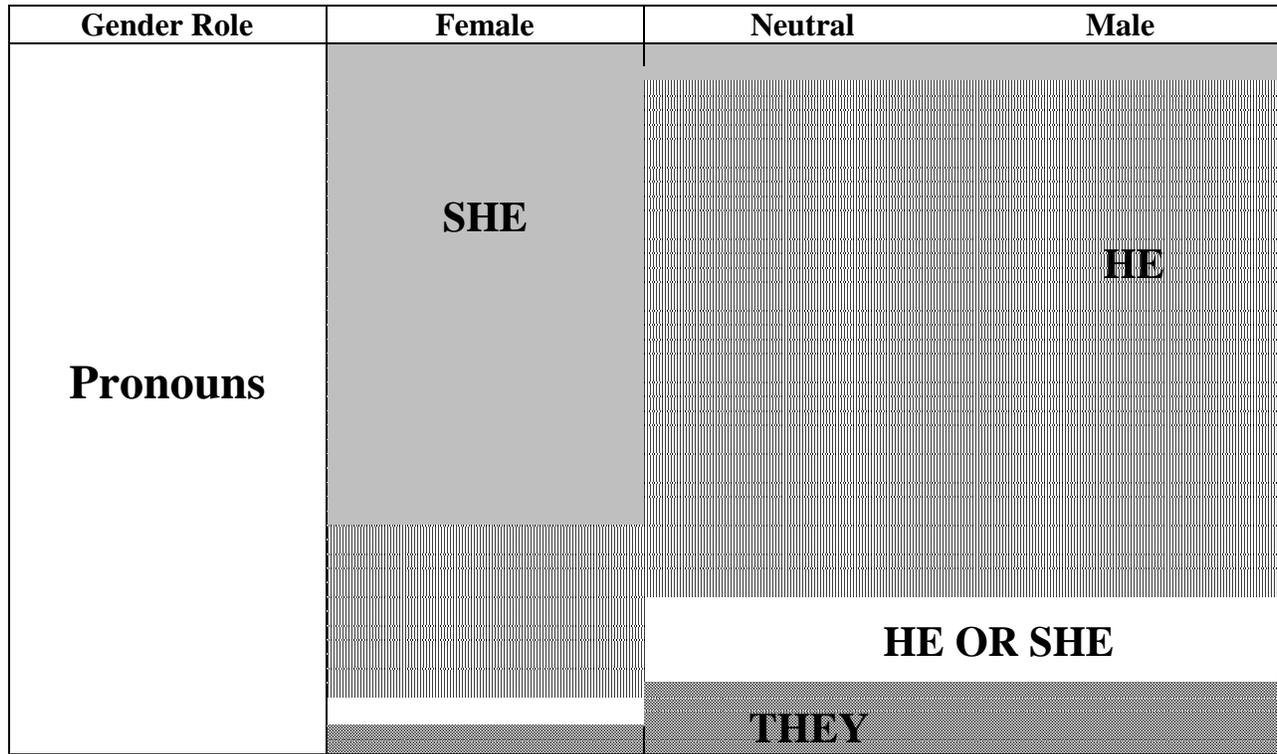
Like English NSs, Arabic NSs provided the feminine pronoun for the majority of typically female antecedents. However, the proportion of use of the pronoun *she* was higher for the Arabic group (68%) than for the English group (53%). Other areas of differences come from the use of the other generic alternatives. While the masculine pronoun was rarely provided by English NSs for typically female antecedents, it was provided by Arabic NSs for one fourth of these antecedents. Also, while English NSs provided inclusive pronouns (*he or she*, singular *they*) for 12% and 33%, respectively, Arabic NSs rarely provided these pronouns. Overall, While Arabic NSs were gender exclusive for 92% of typically female antecedents; English NSs were gender exclusive for only 55% of these antecedents.

The fact that Arabic NSs prefer the pronominal *he or she* to singular *they* does not necessarily suggest a conscious intentional choice of a strategy. Arabic offers more potential to splitting given the fact that it has both masculine and feminine counterparts. My suggestion is that while English NSs have access to all of these strategies, Arabic NSs do not have access to the neutralization strategy (i.e., singular *they*). Arabic NSs do not have access to the neutralization strategy because Arabic is an agreement language in terms of number and also

because of the lack of singular *they* in L2 classroom input. Moreover, the avoidance of singular *they* by Arabic NSs may be due to linguistic factors rather than ideological factors per se. Arabic is an agreement language, including tight number agreement between nouns and pronouns. Despite Newman's (1992) semantic account, in which singular *they* does not violate number agreement, the use of singular *they* to pronominalize formally singular antecedents may be perceived by Arabic NSs (English L2 learners) as ungrammatical. In fact, this variant is considered ungrammatical by some English NSs (Newman, 1992). The effect of this *stigma* is the restriction of the scope of Arabic NSs's neutralization strategy to the pronominal *he or she*.

This study did not find any proficiency-related differences among English L2 learners. The absence of advantage for higher-level learners over lower-level learners (more advanced vs. less advanced) points to the limitations of foreign language classroom setting in developing sociocultural competence, rather than merely grammatical competence, to perform appropriately (in native-like norms) in the target language. In other words, the foreign language classroom input is not 'comprehensible' enough, or may not be sufficient in quantity, to trigger the process of socialization through which the indexing of gender roles can be performed according to the norms of native speakers. The overall pattern for Arabic NSs is illustrated in Figure 45 below (adapted from Matossian, 1997):

**Figure 45: Overall use of English generic pronouns by Arabic NSs**



**ii. Gender of the speaker**

**1. English NSs**

This study predicted that female English NSs will be more gender inclusive and less male biased in their use of English generic pronouns than male English NSs. Compared with male English NSs, female English NSs were expected to use more inclusive generic pronouns (pronominal *he or she*, singular *they*), to use the masculine pronoun less, and to be the main users of the feminine pronoun. These predictions were based on the previous studies of the use of English generic pronouns in American English (e.g., Martyna, 1978 and Matossian, 1997). However, the results of this study show that male English NSs were as much gender inclusive as their female counterparts in terms of their use of the pronominal *he or she* and singular *they* across the three gender categories. Moreover, male and female English NSs were not different in

terms of their use of the exclusive generic pronouns (i.e., *he*, *she*). In other words, female English speakers were neither less male biased than male English speakers nor were they the main users of the feminine pronoun. These results seem to conflict with Labov's (1972: 243) observation that "women are more sensitive than men to overt sociolinguistic values" (i.e., markers that carry a positive sociolinguistic significance) and are more 'sociolinguistically correct' than men especially in formal settings.

The question that remains unanswered for now is why female English NSs are not more sensitive to this sociolinguistic variable than male English NSs. In other words, the question is why female English NSs do not lead in the change from the traditional prescriptive norms in the use of generic pronouns towards the 'new' inclusive norms, which are mainly characterized by the overwhelming use of singular *they*. In general, women (especially younger ones) are found to be pioneering in adopting new linguistic variants in their speech communities, especially when these new variants have a positive social evaluation or are less socially stigmatized (e.g., Martyna, 1978; Abd-El-Jawad, 1986; Milroy et al., 1994; and Eddington & Taylor, 2009). Therefore, women were expected to lead men in the avoidance of the male generic pronoun and in the use of the relatively 'innovative' 'inclusive generic pronouns as well. In other words, women were predicted to show more commitment towards a language-inclusive ideology that does not exclude them from linguistic representation. However, that was not the case as no major differences were found between women and men in terms of their overall gender inclusive vs. gender exclusive use.

The answer to the above question may lie in the sociolinguistic status of the variable 'generic pronoun'. First, the variation in the use of English generic pronouns is not really new but dates as far back as late Middle English (Newman, 1992). That said, my suggestion is that

the use of English generic pronouns has become a relatively more ‘stable sociolinguistic variable’ (Labov, 2001) rather than a ‘change in progress’. However, the extent to which a sociolinguistic variable can be posited as a stable variable depends on the availability of both positive and negative evidence (Labov, 2001). On the one hand, negative evidence includes (1) stability over time to the extent that there are no major age-related differences and (2) a macro change in that linguistic practice that includes the community as a whole (Labov, 2001). Indeed, some of the available evidence supports the designation of generic pronouns as a stable sociolinguistic variable. For example, Matossian (1997) found no difference between two 10-year-a-part generations in terms of the use of English generic pronouns. On the other hand, positive evidence is illustrated by a stronger variation in the same linguistic practice under consideration during an earlier time period, Labov argues. This evidence may be available through the results of the relatively older studies such as Martyna (1978, 1983) and Meyers (1990). The results of these studies showed more variation among the speakers in terms of the use of English generic pronouns. For example, the speakers in Meyers (1990) were divided among the pronouns *he* (34%), singular *they* (32%), and *he or she* (22%) when pronominalizing the gender neutral noun ‘person’. Twenty-years later, the results of the current study show much less variation in reference to gender neutral antecedents: *he* (13%), singular *they* (70%), and *he or she* (13%).

Being a stable sociolinguistic variable does not negate the possibility of all sorts of variation. It just means that a given linguistic practice may not be subject to variation as a function of one or some social factors (gender of the speakers in this case). Moreover, Labov (2001) argues that the speech community is both unified and differentiated by a stable sociolinguistic variable. He explains that the various social groups within a speech community

will be similar in terms of the patterns of a stable sociolinguistic variable but will differ in terms of their treatment of such variable. Labov's (2001) observation suggests a difference in the strategies utilized by the different social groups to achieve the same linguistic end. The results of this study lend support to this unifying/differentiating role of a stable sociolinguistic variable; while male and female English NSs were not different in terms of the degree of gender inclusiveness when using English generic pronouns, females used an additional strategy to achieve this inclusive usage.

Although male and female English NSs did not differ in terms of how much gender inclusive they were in their use of the generic pronouns, they followed somehow different strategies to achieve gender inclusiveness. While both male and female English NSs relied more on singular *they* than on the disjunctive pronominal *he or she* as an inclusive pronoun with all antecedent gender categories, female speakers used the pronominal *he or she* more than male speakers did.

The tendency documented hereby for female English NSs to use the pronominal *he or she* more than their male counterparts did may be understood in terms of what Labov (1972, 1991) and Trudgill (2000) described and documented as a women's tendency to favor standard forms (*he or she* in this case) and to use fewer non-standard forms (singular *they*) relative to men. Such account may apparently contradict with the women's indifferent use of the 'standard' prescriptive masculine pronoun. My suggestion is that the 'once standard' male generic pronoun (Silverstein 1985) is no more considered the standard generic pronominal form. New standard forms and strategies are promoted by the various writing and editing guidelines and manuals and are already evident in the current usage. To answer the question of which pronominal form is the standard form in the current use of English, several factors need to be considered. For example,

the term ‘standard’ has been used as an indicator of socioeconomic stratification (e.g., Labov, 1972) where nonstandard forms correlate inversely with the socioeconomic status of the speaker (Eckert, 2012). Labov (1972) associates non-standard, or vernacular, variants with the lack of ‘conscious interference’ and describes them as part of unmonitored spontaneous speech.

Commenting on the multifaceted nature of the term, Eckert (2012) explains:

The term standard has been used to refer to speech that lacks clear regional and/or socially stigmatized features - the variety legitimized by, and required for meaningful participation in, institutions of education and economic and political power. This is the variety typical of the educated upper middle class. The assumption from the start has been that language varieties carry the social status of their speakers, making the class stratification of language a continuum of linguistic prestige. (3)

That said, we need to consider the regional (e.g., urban vs. rural), social (e.g., upper class vs. working class), stylistic (formal vs. casual), and socioeconomic associations singular *they* and the masculine pronoun *he* and the roles of individual speakers and institutions before we can make claims about the status of these pronominal variants. One more factor to consider is the psychological reality of these variants (conscious vs. unconscious).

I argue that the difference in the use of English generic pronouns between male and female English NSs is manifested in terms of the strategies they employ rather than in the inclusive/exclusive contrast. Several strategies have been suggested and advocated in order to eliminate male bias in language. These corrective strategies were proposed as alternatives to the ‘He/Man Approach’ (Martyna, 1978) that characterized the use of most human languages (*see* Hellinger and Bubmann, 2001 for a review of the linguistic representation of women and men across several languages). Michard and Viollet (1991) and Matossian (1997) discussed three corrective strategies to overcome male bias in language. These are: neutralization (i.e., use of gender-neutral terms), splitting (i.e., alternating masculine and feminine forms), and

feminization. In terms of pronouns, these strategies translate into the use of singular *they*, pronominal *he or she*, pronoun *she*.

The results of this study indicate that while both male and female English NSs rely mainly on the neutralization strategy (i.e., the use of singular *they*), female English NSs place more emphasis on the splitting (i.e., *he or she*) strategy than their male counterparts. In doing so, female speakers are using a standard form more than male speakers are. Overall, women are found to utilize more linguistic strategies compared with men (Lakoff, 1973). In their discussion of these (and other) multiple strategies, Frank and Treichler (1989) argue that speakers who wish to be understood inclusively (i.e., project a fair language ideology) often adopt multiple strategies. This suggests that women use more inclusive language strategies than men because they may have a greater need to be perceived as gender neutral.

## **2. Arabic NSs**

This study predicted that female Arabic NSs will be more gender inclusive and hence less male biased in their use of English generic pronouns than male Arabic NSs. Compared with male Arabic NSs, female Arabic NSs were expected to use more gender-inclusive generic pronouns (pronominal *he or she*, singular *they*), to use the masculine pronoun less, and to be the main users of the feminine pronoun.

However, the results of this study show that female Arabic NSs were as much gender exclusive as their male counterparts in terms of their generic pronominal choices across the three gender categories. As far as the use of English generic pronouns is concerned, this study did not find any differences between male and female Arabic NSs except in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun with gender neutral antecedents where females used the pronoun *she* more often than their male counterparts did. There were no other gender-related differences between

Arabic NSs in terms of their use of the four generic pronouns with the gender neutral, typically male, and typically female antecedents.

These results may appear to be contradictory to Labov's (1972) observation noted earlier about a women's tendency to be more sensitive than men to markers that carry a positive sociolinguistic significance, and hence, to be more 'sociolinguistically correct' than men. However, Labov's observation was based on English native speakers. The extent to which this observation can be generalized to second language learners remains unclear as it is tied to the learner's categorization of L1 variants into standard (or less stigmatized) and non-standard (or more stigmatized). In fact, young Arab women were found to favor prestigious forms and variants that carry a positive social meaning. In his discussion of the emergent urban forms in Jordanian Arabic, Abd-El-Jawad (1986) observed that young Jordanian women aspired to new prestigious forms and led in the adoption of the emerging variants that were associated with a positive social evaluation. However, the English generic variants (and the issue of generic reference as a whole) are not subject to social evaluation in their speech community.

Except for the differential use of *she* with gender neutral antecedents (a feminization strategy), female Arabic NSs did not differentially utilize any of the 'corrective' strategies (neutralization, splitting, or feminization) employed by female English NSs. Overall, male and female Arabic NSs did not use any of these strategies effectively enough to be more gender-neutral or less male biased. Instead, they relied on the masculine pronoun as the norm for the vast majority of typically male and gender neutral antecedents and used the feminine pronoun only with stereotypically female antecedents. In doing so, they echoed the sexist linguistic practice described by MacKinnon (1987:55), while men are granted both the male and neutral

positions, women are relegated to “the marked, the gendered, the different, the forever-female position.”

Arabic NSs’ predominant use of the feminine pronoun with typically female antecedents may not be considered an example of a feminization strategy because this use was restricted to self-reported typically female nouns; hence, it is a response to socially imposed gender roles rather than being a corrective strategy. Examples of a feminization strategy include ‘intentional role-reversals’ (Martyna, 1978) and the use of the feminine pronoun across all gender roles and with gender neutral nouns.

The gender of the speaker does not guarantee the use of a given linguistic strategy. In other words, female Arabic NSs do not necessarily utilize the same linguistic strategy as English NSs. Tannen (1994) argues that linguistic strategies are cultural-specific and do not have to be shared by women or men in different speech communities.

### **iii. The use of English Generic Pronouns as an Ideology**

Direct first language comparisons reveal interesting differences between English NSs and Arabic NSs in terms of their pronominal choices with the three gender categories of antecedents. First, while English NSs used singular *they* with gender neutral antecedents more than Arabic NSs did (70% and 10%, respectively), Arabic NSs used the masculine pronoun with these antecedents more than English NSs did (72% and 13%, respectively). However, English NSs and Arabic NSs were not different in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun and the pronominal *he or she* with the gender neutral antecedents. In sum, While English NSs were gender inclusive in 83% of their pronominal choices with gender neutral antecedents; Arabic NSs were gender inclusive in only 21% of their pronominal choices.

Second, with typically male antecedents, Arabic NSs were different from English NSs in terms of their use of the masculine pronoun, the pronominal *he or she*, and singular *they*. Arabic NSs used the masculine pronoun with these antecedents more than English NSs did (91% and 50%, respectively) whereas English NSs used the pronominal *he or she* and singular *they* more than Arabic NSs did (10% vs. 2%, 36% vs. 4%, respectively). There was no difference between the two language groups in terms of their use of the feminine pronoun with typically male antecedents; for both language groups, the pronoun *she* was rarely if ever provided. Overall, while English NSs were gender exclusive in only 54% of their pronominal choices with stereotypically male antecedents; Arabic NSs were gender exclusive in 94% of their pronominal choices with these antecedents.

Third, with typically female antecedents, English NSs and Arabic NSs were different in terms of their use of the four pronouns. On the one hand, Arabic NSs used the exclusive pronouns (*she, he*) more than English NSs did (68% and 53%, 24% and 2%, respectively). On the other hand, English NSs used the inclusive pronouns (*he or she, singular they*) more than Arabic NSs did (12% vs. 4%, 33% vs. 4%, respectively). Overall, while English NSs were gender exclusive in only 55% of their pronominal choices with stereotypically female antecedents; Arabic NSs were gender exclusive in 92% of their pronominal choices with these antecedents.

As predicted, these results indicate that Arabic NSs were much more gender exclusive in their pronominal choices than English NSs. That was true across all gender categories regardless of the gender of the speaker. In L2 data, the predominant use of the masculine pronoun with both stereotypically male nouns and gender neutral nouns on the one hand and the overuse of the feminine pronoun with the typically female nouns on the other hand is typical of sexist language

and mirrors the dichotomy in the roles or positions assigned to men and women both socially and linguistically. MacKinnon (1987:55) explains that in many speech communities women are assigned “the marked, the gendered, the different, the forever-female position,” whereas men are assigned “both the neutral and the male position.”

The question that remains unanswered for the time being concerns the role of linguistic ideology in the use of English generic pronouns by both English NSs and Arabic NSs. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, linguistic ideology mediates between sociocultural systems (including our social beliefs) and our linguistic practices (Kroskrity, 2004). Therefore, an assessment of the role of ideology in the use of English generic pronouns comes from an examination of the relation between the speakers’ social beliefs (i.e., assigned gender roles) and their actual linguistic practices (i.e., pronominal choices).

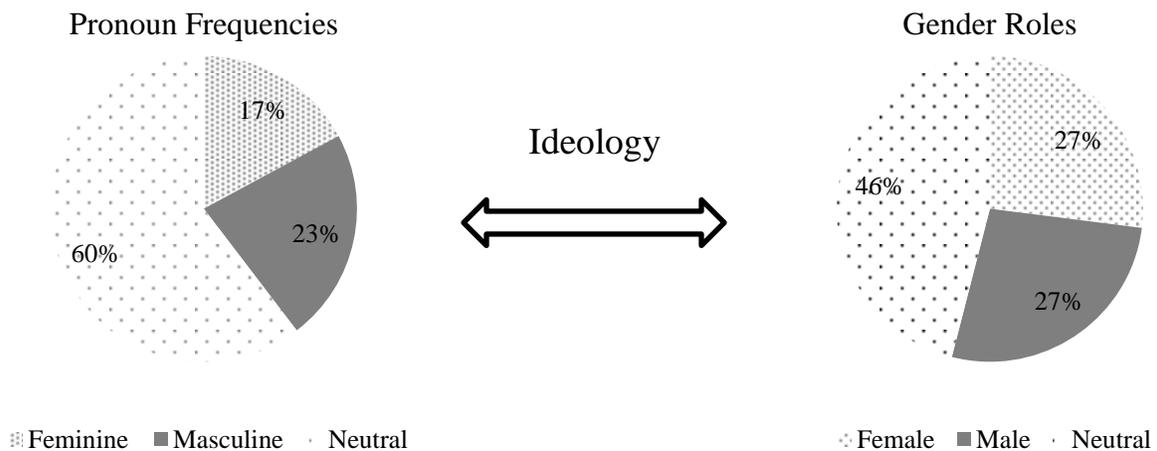
The examination of the relationship between English NSs’ assigned gender roles and their generic pronominal choices suggests that a gender inclusive ideology is mediating between the two. As Figure 46 below<sup>7</sup> shows, While 54% of the assigned gender roles by English NSs were gender exclusive (either stereotypically male or female), exclusive pronouns represented only 40% of the total number of pronouns provided. Moreover, English NSs rated 46% of the nouns as gender neutral but used inclusive pronouns in 60% of the times overall. A one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a main effect of TASK (Task1, Task 2) on female/feminine responses (‘typically female’ vs. ‘*she*’) and neutral responses (‘typically male’ vs. ‘singular *they/he or she*’). The decrease in indexing femaleness (from 27% in gender role assignment to 17% in pronoun use) was significant for English NSs [ $F(1, 98) = 14.37, p = .000$ ]. Also, the increase in indexing neutral gender (from 46% in gender role assignment to 60% in pronoun use)

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<sup>7</sup> In Figures 46 and 47, the pronoun frequencies are presented in terms of Feminine (*she*), Masculine (*he*), and Neutral (*he or she* + singular *they*). The two inclusive pronouns are combined for better correspondence between the Pronoun Frequencies pie chart and the Gender Roles pie chart.

was significant [ $F(1, 98) = 6.68, p = .012$ ]. However, there was no significant difference between the percentage of ‘typically male’ ratings and the percentage of use of the masculine pronoun [ $F(1, 98) = 2.34, p = .131$ ]. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this ideology was projected through two corrective strategies: neutralization (the use of singular *they*) and splitting (the use of the pronominal *he or she*), though the latter was less utilized than the former.

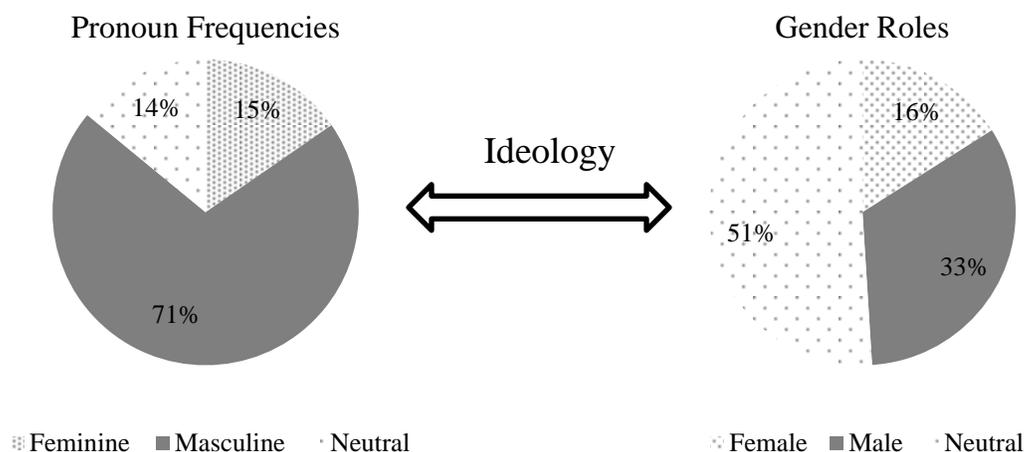
**Figure 46: Relationship between gender roles and pronominal choices – EN NSs**



The comparison between Arabic NSs’ assigned gender roles and their generic pronominal choices shows a stronger mismatch between the two, suggesting that a strong linguistic gender ideology is mediating between the two. There was a main effect of TASK on English L2 learners’ male/masculine responses (‘typically male’ vs. ‘*he*’) and neutral responses (‘gender neutral’ vs. ‘singular *they/he or she*’). As Figure 47 below shows, While 49% of the assigned gender roles by Arabic NSs were gender exclusive (either stereotypically male or female), exclusive pronouns represented 86% of the total number of pronouns provided. This increase was significant [ $F(1, 194) = 199.89, p = .000$ ]. Moreover, while Arabic NSs rated 51% of the nouns as gender neutral, they used inclusive pronouns in only 14% of the times. This decrease was significant [ $F(1, 194) = 147.82, p = .000$ ]. There was no main effect of TASK on the English

L2 learners' female/feminine responses ('typically female' vs. 'she') [ $F(1, 194) = 00.22, p = .637$ ].

**Figure 47: Relationship between gender roles and pronominal choices – AR NSs**



The extent to which this ideology can be classified as a general exclusive ideology or as a particularly male-biased ideology is revealed by three findings of this study. First, Arabic NSs used the male generic pronoun not only with typically male nouns but also with gender neutral antecedents. The feminine pronoun was rarely if ever used with either type of antecedent. Second, although the feminine pronoun was used with a majority of typically female antecedents, the male generic pronoun was still provided for almost one fourth of the nouns in this category. Finally, Arabic NSs used the masculine pronoun with typically male antecedents significantly more than they used the feminine pronoun with typically female antecedents. That said, I argue that Arabic NSs' use of English generic pronouns is driven by a prevailing male-biased ideology rather than a simply gender exclusive ideology.

The argument for an Arabic male-biased ideology may be supported by several sociolinguistic observations. Arabic language is claimed to be androcentric in terms of structure (Sadiqi, 2003 and 2006) and is found to be heavily male biased in terms of use. Therefore, Arab

culture and societies are often described as patriarchal (Saadawi, 1980 and Mernissi, 1994). These claims are manifested through a variety of sociolinguistic practices.

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the use of Arabic language as a first language is characterized by disproportional distribution of social power, public/private spheres (Abu-Lughod, 1987; Sadiqi, 2003; and Bassiouney, 2009), and linguistic visibility and agency between men and women. The results of this study suggest a carryover (i.e., transfer) effect of a male-biased ideology from L1 Arabic into L2 English.

Gender languages such as Arabic “offer the larger potential for the avoidance of male-biased language – simply because female visibility is more easily achieved on the level of expression” (Hellinger and Bubmann, 2002:19-20). Therefore, I argue that Arabic NSs transfer a linguistic gender ideology rather than micro grammatical elements to their use of English as a second language. This type of ideology is expected to carryover to other means of communication of gender-related messages in English or other languages. The extent to which this male bias can be seen as linguistic or environmental (i.e., social) in origin is a Whorfianism question (linguistic relativity) that will not be pursued in this study; hardly any conclusions can be drawn about this issue in the current study.

This study took an ideology approach to account for the patterns of use of English generic pronouns by Arabic NSs. However, the patterns exhibited by Arabic NSs may be attributed to other linguistic factors, including L1 interference. While this study controlled for the transfer of grammatical gender and proficiency, the methodology of the current study cannot rule out the possibility of avoidance of singular *they* for linguistic reasons (violating number agreement). However, even in this case, the results would point to the limitation of foreign classroom input for triggering the socialization process. Through comprehensible and

appropriate intake, learners are socialized by means of language and are socialized to use language (Ochs and Schieffelin, 2006).

Future studies may investigate the role of this Arab male-biased ideology in spoken language as well as the dynamic aspect of ideology in L2 social interactions such as in conversations. In this area, the Speech Accommodation Theory may provide directions to new research such as the extent to which Arabic NSs are willing to switch into more 'sociolinguistically correct' (i.e., gender inclusive) norms of the use of English generic pronouns as a function of speech accommodation.

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## Appendix 1: Results of Arabic corpus search

### arabiCorpus: Arabic corpus search tool - Brigham Young University

The corpora include one year of Al-Ahram (1999), two years of Al-Hayat in separate corpora (1996, 1997), and a half year each of At-Tajdid (Moroccan) and Al-Watan (Kuwait), the Quran, 1001 Nights, several medieval medical and philosophical texts, 8 Egyptian novels, one Egyptian Arabic play, and some EgyptChat data from the internet, as well as the Penn Treebank news data. The total number of words of the whole corpus is 68,943,447.

\*Top number represents instances per 100,000 words

\*\*Bottom number represents total number of occurrences per 100,000 words

no	Term	Masculine	Feminine
1	Nurse	0.56 579	1.37 1,413
2	Homemaker	0 0	0.42 428
3	Doctor	85.73 88,238	5.34 5,499
4	Manager	57.76 59,448	1.97 2,031
5	Maid	0.01 14	0.12 119
6	Seamstress	0.31 311	0.46 477
7	Tailor	0.05 48	0 0
8	Babysitter	0 0	0.01 13
9	Secretary	0.24 249	3.72 3,826
10	Sheikh	46.46 47,813	0.85 875
11	Clerk	0.27 277	0.01 9
12	Imam	105.58 108,666	0.37 383
13	Preacher	13,649 13.26	0.34 348
14	Politician	60.69 62,463	79.16 81,477
15	Minister	135.55 139,514	8.78 9,041
16	member of the parliament	50.72 52,206	1.47 1,509

17	Judge	8.33 8,574	1.17 1,202
18	Lawyer	6.77 6,970	0.7 720
19	Police officer	2.07 2,128	0.24 244
20	Professor	0.79 818	0.02 20
21	Scientist	131.88 135,737	0.31 317
22	Writer	3.8 3,906	0.51 526
23	Poet	16.65 17,134	1.11 1,139
24	Intellectual	6.24 6,427	0.45 460
25	Pilot	3.48 3,579	0.36 370

## Appendix 2: Complete results of the rating assignment

	Term	Typically-female	Typically-male	Gender-neutral
1	Librarian	43	1	6
2	Nurse	44	0	6
3	Private detective	0	40	10
4	Human being	0	1	49
5	Child	0	1	49
6	Hairdresser	41	1	8
7	Professor	2	18	30
8	Beautician	46	0	4
9	Trainer	0	21	29
10	Shopper	38	1	11
11	Politician	0	36	14
12	Scientist	0	25	25
13	Manager	0	21	29
14	Resident	0	3	47
15	Journalist	5	5	40
16	Attorney	0	20	30
17	Neighbor	0	5	45
18	Doctor	1	22	27
19	Someone	0	0	50
20	Adult	1	1	48
21	Restaurateur	2	17	31
22	Waitress	44	1	5
23	Teenager	3	3	44
24	Citizen	0	3	47
25	Anyone	0	1	49
26	Homemaker	43	2	5
27	Firefighter	0	48	2
28	Teacher	31	0	19
29	Secretary	45	1	4
30	Graduate student	3	3	44
31	Lumberjack	0	48	2
32	Babysitter	45	1	4
33	Surgeon	0	32	18
34	Mechanic	0	45	5
35	Maid	48	1	1
36	Engineer	1	36	13
37	Educator	6	2	42
38	Student	2	0	48
39	Researcher	0	7	43
40	Carpenter	0	46	4
41	Everyone	0	0	50
42	Police officer/captain	0	41	9

43	Legislator	1	26	23
44	Judge	1	22	27
45	Social worker	33	3	14
46	Burglar	0	45	5
47	Member of the congress	0	25	25
48	Person	0	1	49
49	Dentist	2	22	26

### **Appendix 3: Sentence completion task\***

\*quoted or adapted from previous studies

1. When people hear very sad news,
2. If a babysitter accepts too many tasks,
3. If a surgeon is called for an operation,
4. My watch does not show the time because
5. Before a girl can drive a car,
6. If a burglar hears noise coming from outside,
7. If a boy wants to organize a party,
8. When a person wins a big prize,
9. If a mother does not have a job,
10. When a human being feels old age approaching,
11. When a librarian thinks the library has become noisy,
12. You should wash an apple very well before
13. After a nurse completes all hospital training,
14. Because this table is very heavy,
15. When a detective starts searching for evidence,
16. If a mechanic is paid on time,
17. If a hairdresser is not given any tip,
18. If a child is left alone at home,
19. If a son does not follow the rules,
20. If a carpenter does not have the right tools,
21. If a daughter stays out late every night,
22. After a lumberjack cuts down a big tree,
23. If a beautician uses the wrong hair colors,
24. Everyone can drive a car if
25. When a citizen wants to get a passport,
26. When a train runs out of gas,
27. An adult may go to prison if
28. When a woman is in the last month of pregnancy,

29. If a resident loses the apartment key,
30. If a maid cleans the house quickly,
31. A chair does not move unless
32. If anyone wants to make more money,
33. When a firefighter arrives at the fire scene,
34. When my car is very dirty,
35. When a police officer is called for an emergency,
36. If a student is not prepared for the exams,
37. When human beings get too sick,
38. If a homemaker wants to make more money,
39. When parents are called to school,
40. If a social worker has a lot of commitments,
41. If a father wants to buy a new house,
42. When a shopper tries to decide between two brands,
43. If a politician wants to become popular,
44. If you hit the door very hard,
45. You sharpen a pencil for the first time after
46. If someone wants to get a job,
47. If a man has a very big family,
48. When a secretary first arrives at the office,
49. If students want to keep the university clean,
50. If an engineer wants to make more money,

#### Appendix 4: Gender role questionnaire

I. Rate the following terms as **typically female**, **typically male**, or **gender neutral**

	Term	Typically-female	Typically-male	Gender-neutral
1	Child			
2	Nurse			
3	Detective			
4	Human being			
5	Mechanic			
6	Anyone			
7	Beautician			
8	Son			
9	Shopper			
10	Politician			
11	Sister			
12	Resident			
13	Girl			
14	Adult			
15	Brother			
16	Aunt			
17	Citizen			
18	Hairdresser			
19	Person			
20	Firefighter			
21	Secretary			
22	Lumberjack			
23	Babysitter			
24	Surgeon			
25	Librarian			
26	Boy			
27	Engineer			
28	Everyone			
29	Student			
30	Daughter			
31	Carpenter			
32	Maid			
33	Police officer			
34	Uncle			
35	Social worker			
36	Burglar			
37	Someone			
38	Homemaker			