

No more “Pronouns 101”: A workshop for transformative gendered language use in the college classroom

Trans people are in a heightened state of vulnerability in the present moment: violence against trans women and transfeminine people continues to escalate – disproportionately impacting communities of color – while legislatures and private industry actors are undermining protections, criminalizing trans health care and nightlife communities, and excluding and erasing trans youth within their educational contexts. In this setting, trans-affirming language becomes not simply a matter of public health, as Ross, Kinitz & Kia (2022) argue, but a site of crisis and state-sanctioned violence.

This workshop explores strategies for addressing misgendering and other forms of transphobic language in the classroom that go beyond standard training in which instructors are urged to ask (all) students for their pronouns. It draws on survey and interview data on the educational experiences of approximately 100 trans, non-binary, and/or gender non-conforming undergraduate and graduate students at a public California university (Zimman et al. 2020) and builds on the analyses of that survey data offered by Zimman and Brown (forthcoming).

Topics explored in this space also include:

- Ways of inviting students to share their pronouns that avoid problematic implications of asking for this information (e.g., the pressure students may feel to disclose identities they do not wish to share on the first day of class) and other strategies for disrupting normative pronoun practices;
- Forms of trans-inclusive language and interactional strategies that go beyond pronouns or overt discussions of trans communities;
- Ways of orienting trans-affirming language in contextual ways that take into account a class's size, membership, content, discipline, modalities, and political orientations;
- Strategies that address learning communities that are not enthusiastic about, or may even be in direct opposition to, efforts to affirm trans identities;
- How the promotion of trans-affirming language can avoid reinforcing other forms of linguistic marginalization and stigmatization, e.g. that imposed on racialized language users.

Participants are encouraged to bring their experiences, questions, and concerns around the implementation of trans-affirming language in their own classroom contexts.

References

- Ross, Lori E., David J. Kinitz, & Hannah Kia (2022). Pronouns are a public health issue. *American Journal of Public Health* 112(3):360–62.
- Zimman, Lal & Cedar Brown (in press). “Beyond Pronouns 101: Linguistic advocacy for trans-inclusive language in the college classroom.” In Anne Charity Hudley, Christina Mallison & Mary Bucholtz (eds.), *Inclusion in Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

Zimman, Lal, Cedar Brown, Julia Leary, Brooke English, Jordan Tudisco, Aris Keshav, Forest Stuart, & Alice Blank (2022). *Trans+ at UCSB: Report on a 2020 Survey*. Santa Barbara, CA: UCSB Trans Research in Linguistics Lab.