Acceptability of nonbinary and gender-neutral constructions in Maltese
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Use of singular *they* as a component of gender-fair language in English continues to grow (Bjorkman, 2017; Konnelly & Cowper, 2020), and similar movements toward gender-fair/neutral/nonbinary language are underway in other languages (Sendén et al., 2015, *inter alia*). Acceptance of such changes often correlates with nonlinguistic attitudes about gender (Bradley, 2020). Malta has been a global leader in policy toward transgender, nonbinary, and intersex rights, but is Maltese changing accordingly regarding how gender is expressed? Discussion of such issues is largely confined to activist circles, with little consensus, and lower awareness among the Maltese-using community as a whole. This is the first part of an investigation to explore what kinds of “nonbinary” Maltese are accepted by users, and to what degree English trends and nonlinguistic social attitudes drive (or inhibit) gender-related changes in Maltese. Participants rated a variety of sentence types and completed the Transgender Attitudes and Beliefs Scale. Singular indefinites with plurals (4, “neutral plurals”) were rated above the scale midpoint of the scale, but lower than controls. Nonbinary plurals (1–2) and name mismatches (3) diverged depending on participants’ beliefs about gender; those with strong binary gender ideology rated them lower; other rated them at or above the midpoint. Implications for change in Maltese, individual differences, and correlations of English ratings by the same sample will be discussed.

![Acceptability ratings of Maltese sentences](image)

1. **Names + plural**
   - Joseph jaraw it-televixin waqt l-ikel.
   - Joseph watch-3pl. the-television during the-lunch
   - “Joseph watches television during lunch.”

2. **Specific + plural**
   - Dawk l-impjegat tawna skont.
   - that-pl. the-employee gave.3pl.-pron.2pl. discount
   - “That employee gave us a discount.”

3. **Names + “mismatched” morphology**
   - Anna huwa infurmaw dawr l-istorja ta’ din il-belt.
   - Anna be-3sg.masc wise-masc about the-history of this the-city
   - “Anna is wise about the history of this city.”

4. **Indefinites + plural**
   - Xi hadd kielu il-kejk!
   - somebody-m.sg. ate-3pl. the-cake
   - “Someone ate the cake!”

**References**


