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Gender-neutral Pronouns in the English Language

Diplomová práce

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Prohlášení

Místopřísežně prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma: „Gender-neutral Pronouns in the English Language" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí diplomové práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne 21.8.2012   Podpis ………………………

1   Introduction

English grammar has faced the criticism of the absence of a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun for more than hundred years. However, the discussions have been intensified recently, which may be caused, according to Crystal, by the influence of early American feminism and their fight for male and female equality (2006, 313). This social and political situation has brought the linguistic biases into sharp focus and a male-oriented view of the world has become widely criticized.

Most of the debates deal with subjects with an unspecified gender because English speakers usually do not know what third person singular pronoun should follow such subjects and hence this thesis is going to focus just on gender non-specific subjects. To narrow the area of research, only indefinite pronouns in the function of a subject will be considered.

The aim of this master's thesis is to find out what reflexive pronoun is used after indefinite pronouns, as in the sentence: *Everybody has to protect himself*. In this case, the indefinite pronoun is referred to by the generic masculine pronoun, but in the last decades the correctness of this grammatical phenomenon has been challenged. A lot of linguists recommend restructuring the text to avoid a gender-specific pronoun, but in my opinion English speakers cannot avoid certain grammatical features just because they are not sure how to use them. Therefore, the issue of a suitable gender-neutral pronoun needs to be tackled. In the past the generic masculine pronoun was normally used after subjects with an unspecified gender, as it is described by the following rule: "The masculine pronouns and possessives are usually employed for persons without regard to sex wherever the antecedent has a general indefinite meaning" (Curme 1947, 221). Nevertheless, a lot of people do not follow the rule of generic masculine forms, using instead forms of the *he or she* type, singular *they*, indefinite *one*, or even a generic feminine (Meyers 1990, 228).

The theoretical part is, first of all, going to describe the development of generic pronoun throughout the history, including current discussions about this issue. This chapter will be followed by an introduction and description of all the pronouns which can be possibly used after indefinite pronouns, including the rules of their usage. The last chapter of the theoretical part is going to present an overview of ways to avoid gender-specific third person singular pronoun which can be found in grammar books.

The core of the diploma thesis is an analytical part whose aim is to provide us with exact data on individual pronouns referring to indefinite pronouns. The issue will be demonstrated on reflexive pronouns which should reveal what gender indefinite pronouns are referred to the most often. The analytical part is divided into two main parts. The first one will be represented by a research based on the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English, where examples of reflexive pronouns which follow indefinite pronouns will be found. The aim of the corpus based research is to document the number of occurrences of individual pronouns after indefinite pronouns, which basically means that this study will reveal what the most and the least common pronoun used after indefinite pronouns is.

The second part of the analytical section is based on a questionnaire survey. Questionnaires were available online and the link was distributed to English native speakers who subsequently forwarded these questionnaires to their friends and acquaintances. The aim is to address as many respondents as possible with the only condition - it must be a native speaker. The questionnaires contain several extracts with missing reflexive pronouns which should be filled in by respondents. Again, the missing pronouns will be always related to a certain indefinite pronoun, which is the scope of this research. The results of both of these surveys, the corpus one as well as the questionnaire one, are consequently compared and analysed.

It is expected that the research will reveal high number of occurrences of the reflexive pronouns *himself* and *themselves*, with narrow majority of the generic masculine pronoun. In my opinion, despite the political correctness which has penetrated into language, there will be still a lot of people following hand-book prescribed rules. On the contrary, a minimal occurrence of *himself or herself* type is estimated, because of its awkwardness and clumsiness.

2   Definition of Field of Research

The issue of a missing gender-neutral third person singular pronoun in English grammar has recently been discussed not only by linguists but also by common speakers of English and requests for a satisfactory solution is more and more urgent. This master's thesis deals predominantly with gender-neutral language and thus it is necessary to define basic terms before a deeper research will be carried out.

2.1   Definition of English Gender

Hockett defines the term *linguistic gender* as "a system of noun classification reflected in the behaviour of associated words" (quoted in Corbett 1991, 1). In other words, the most important element of linguistic gender is considered to be agreement (concord), "or systematic and predictable covariance between a semantic or formal property of one grammatical form and a formal property of another" (Curzan 2003, 13). This definition completely corresponds with the scope of our research which is, basically, an agreement between an indefinite pronoun referring to a human being and its anaphoric pronoun.

Curzan comments on the role of gender in languages pointing out that gender is not fundamental to language. She based this statement on works by Ibrahim who

> describes gender as a secondary grammatical category (i.e., one that is not vital to the proper functioning of the language), or, less naturally, as an 'unessential category, which serves no useful purpose that cannot be served by some other means'; unlike other secondary grammatical categories such as tense and number, linguistic gender is a category with no 'authentic relation' to conceptual categories (Curzan 2003, 16).

Biber et al. agree with this statement saying that the category of gender is not as important in English as in other languages. They argue that gender is connected with the sex of the referent, which is reflected in coreferential singular personal pronouns and its corresponding possessive and reflexive forms (1999, 311-312).

Corbett argues that in linguistics, two types of gender systems can be classified, grammatical (formal systems) and semantic (strict semantic systems) gender (1991, 7-8). The former distinguishes from the latter by gender assignment of nouns which

depends on formal criteria, such as word-structure (derivation and inflection), or sound-structure and not on the semantic meaning of nouns. Conversely, semantic gender follows semantic assignment rules and thus gender of nouns is determined by their meaning. However, it can be stated that also in formal systems whose gender assignment is influenced by morphology and phonology, there is a semantic core, which means that all gender systems are semantic to some extent, nevertheless, only in some systems gender assignment is principally dependent on meaning (Corbett, quoted in Curzan 2003, 16).

As far as the English language is concerned, its "gender system [is] based on semantic criteria" (Corbett 1991, 12). English distinguishes three classes of gender – masculine (*he)* for male humans, feminine (*she*) for female humans and neuter (*it*) for anything else. Biber et al. distinguish also dual gender which they classify as one of the main gender classes and demonstrate this dual gender on the examples such as *a journalist*, or *the doctor*, where a coreferential pronoun can be either *she* or *he* (1999, 312).

2.2 Gender-neutral Language

Gender-neutral language (or gender-fair language, non-sexist language) can be basically defined as language tending to avoid all words marked for gender, either male or female, when a word with unknown or unspecified gender is meant. The term *gender-neutral* can be taken into consideration only in connection with parts of speech in which gender can be recognised as the grammatical category. Corbett points out that English has a pronominal gender system because gender can be recognised only in personal, reflexive and possessive pronouns (1991, 12).

2.3 Current Question

The usage of gender-neutral language is almost necessary today because the contemporary society perceives men and women to be equal, which has led to many changes in the English language. Crystal argues that "in many countries, there is now an awareness, which was lacking a generation ago, of the way in which language can reflect and help to maintain social attitudes towards men and women" (2006, 313). He goes even further saying that language which uses the male perspective on the world

supports sexual discrimination and makes the role of women in society less important. Discussions of this topic include opinions that nothing concerning gender in the English language should be changed but, in my view, language should be flexible and it should reflect the social and political changes which have arisen during centuries and when writers must look for constructions to avoid a certain grammatical feature, such a change is apparently demanded.

In the past, the masculine gender of nouns and pronouns was used for both sexes, male as well as female. This rule is still supported by one part of the speakers of English; however, another part calls for creation of the gender-neutral language. Regarding a part of public which does not want to replace the generic masculine, they believe that *he* can include *she*. Frank adds that he is tired "of the ignorance of those who insist that the word *man* applies only to males. My dictionary has several definitions [of the word *man*], of which the first two are: 1) human being, person…2) the human race" (quoted in Martyna 1980, 485).

On the other hand Seifert argues that "in simpler days, a genderless noun like *customer* would be referred to by masculine pronouns…. Then someone noticed that this linguistic practice reinforces our stereotype of an all-male world. *He* never has and never will call to mind the picture of a woman…" (1992, 34). This quotation is the clear summary of the gender problem which has arisen in today's linguistics and explains why nouns without the specific gender (e.g. student) can no longer be followed by an exclusively masculine pronoun, which originally included men as well as women. The statements presented above are two basic contradictory opinions occurring in the contemporary society, both of them having support in grammar books, as it will be proved later.

The confusion in a reference to a noun with unspecified or unknown gender and the absence of strict rules have caused that we can find examples resulting in ambiguous texts which are difficult to understand. The following example (1) was published in the *Albuquerque Journal* (February 19, 1976):

(1) *Following a head injury, have **the patient** lie down and remain completely quiet no matter how **she** feels. Have **him** do this even though **he** acts all right and insists that you leave **her** alone. Keep **the patient** flat on **his** back (or face down if **he**'s vomiting) if **her** face is gray, blue, or pale.* (Nilsen 1984, 152)

The author of this statement was probably following the recommendation to be gender-neutral alternating between masculine and feminine pronouns. Consequently, the text is confusing, so readers may have difficulties to understand it and Nilsen accuses the text of being inconsistent (153).

Another interesting phenomenon can be found in example (2) which illustrates treating a genderless noun as feminine and refers to it by a generic feminine.

(2)   *Show me **a person** who isn't concerned (at least a little) with **her** weight, exercise, and 'flab', and I'll show you a man.* (Tavris, C. "Women Who Exercise 'Too Much'", 1987, Vogue, quoted in Meyers 1990, 228)

The reason why example (2) employs the generic feminine can be partly influenced by the topic which is typically, but not solely, female. Meyers argues that this example shows how "inadequate any gender-linked pronoun is as a vehicle for gender-free meaning" (228).

This statement clarifies the point of the requested changes. It is not desirable to add a feminine pronoun to a masculine pronoun and these will together refer to a noun with undetermined gender and make thus men and women on the same level because it is not a war of sexes, as it might have been assumed. The aim from the linguistic point of view is to substitute any gender-specific reference by gender-neutral, being not masculine as well as not feminine, and make the text perfectly understandable and not confusing.

To summarise the two basic attitudes towards the generic pronoun it can be stated that:

> The students' claim: the generic masculine is both ambiguous and discriminatory. The linguists' claim: it is simply a feature of grammar, unrelated to the issue of sex discrimination. The students' response: it is more than a feature of grammar, but a factor which both reflects and maintains societal sexism. (Martyna 1980, 483)

This quotation reveals the core of the problem and it points out an interesting question, whether it is possible to analyse such a grammatical feature only from the linguistic point of view, without considering the social context, as many linguists argue. This

attitude can be therefore the centre of the dispute because the opponents argue that it is not possible to ignore trends in the present-day society.

2.3.1 Changes towards Gender Equality in the English Language

The results of callings for changes in the gender-neutral language can be partly seen in lexicology where some gender-neutral nouns substituted nouns with gender that implies rather masculine connotations, such as *chairman* was substituted by *chairperson*, or *salesman* by *sales assistant*, etc. However, it cannot be said that a new rule which converts the gender-specific nouns into the gender-neutral ones has been made. Conversely, gender stereotyping still occurs in this field which was proved by Newman, a linguist who conducted one of the most comprehensive studies of generic usage, who found out that that for example *doctor* is still treated as predominantly masculine while *nurse* as feminine (quoted in Curzan 2003, 81).

This topic of a personal dual gender of nouns is treated by Quirk et al. who say that when it is desirable to specify the sex of the person a gender marker such as *male student/female student* should be added (1985, 315). However, they immediately add that whether the gender marker will be put in front of a noun or not depends on the fact if the noun is perceived as largely male or female, thus *a nurse*, but *a male nurse* exists as well as *an engineer*, but *a woman engineer* (316). There are no strict rules for such gender distinction and the problem goes back again to the social situation because, as Quirk et al. imply, it is important whether speakers associate the noun with men or women and thus the 'atypical' gender of such a noun should be specified by the gender marker added to the noun. This change became a law in 1975, when the Sex Discrimination Act in Britain was introduced and many job titles and the associated language had to be changed (Crystal 2006, 314).

All these examples illustrate that from the lexicological point of view, language has been undergoing gradual but significant changes from gender-specific to gender-neutral language. Nevertheless, more complicated situation without a clear conclusion and with many conflicting opinions remains in the field of pronouns which is, therefore, the main focus of this thesis.

2.4   Definition of English Gender-neutral Third Person Singular Pronoun

To make discussions about a gender-neutral pronoun clear, it is essential to explain the terminology used in this thesis. The gender-neutral pronoun[1] is a pronoun that does not refer either to women or men, i.e. it is not connected with any gender. As far as all English personal pronouns are concerned, the gender is not marked in the following pronouns: *I, you* (singular and plural), *it, we, they,* so they can be all used with antecedents of any sex. It follows that the only English personal pronouns which are marked for gender are the third person singular pronouns.

This thesis focuses on the third person singular pronouns and it may be objected that one of them, *it,* is not linked with any gender and therefore it meets our requirements for the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun. However, this pronoun has to be excluded from our research because it is a nonpersonal pronoun which means that it refers only to inanimate subjects and inhuman beings, or, its exceptional use is connected with referring to babies (Quirk et al. 1985, 316), but this study is going to focus only on the third person singular pronouns referring to people. Other third person singular pronouns *he* and *she* evidently bear signs of the specific gender.

Therefore, it can be argued that English lacks the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun whose function has been performed by generic *he* in the past centuries, but the problem arose a few decades ago when its correctness started to be doubted.

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[1] The terms *epicene*, *common-gender, sex-fair*, or *gender unmarked* pronoun can be found in literature for the same phenomenon.

3   Generic Pronoun

The chapter on generic pronoun is going to focus on an issue of a pronoun which is generally understood as embodying any gender, or whose use includes also subjects not having their gender either known or determined.

    The first subchapter is going to introduce basic rules of the generic pronoun usage and it should also reveal the progress of opinions on the generic pronoun in the last decades. The second subchapter is going to focus on the development of the generic pronoun in the history of the English language because some of the historical findings can be very important for our further research.

3.1   Grammar Books Guidelines

All the rules introduced in this subchapter have their support in grammar books and they will therefore provide a basis for our research.

3.1.1 Generic He

As it was already mentioned in the previous chapter, English grammar books used to say that "the masculine pronouns and possessives are usually employed for persons without regard to sex wherever the antecedent has a general indefinite meaning" (Curme 1947, 221). Thus, it has usually happened that an indefinite subject was followed by a masculine reference which, however, was not meant to include only men but also women, as in example (3):

(3)   ***Everyone*** *was very polite and kind to her because* **he** *felt sorry for   her.* (Jochnowitz 1982, 198)

This sentence comes from 1940 edition of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and in this case, the third person masculine pronoun *he* refers to the indefinite pronoun *everyone* having the function of the subject. Both of these pronouns, *everyone* as well as *he*, include every person regardless of the sex, namely men as well as women, and thus we can talk about the generic masculine pronoun usage.

    Quirk et al. in their *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* published in 1985 agree with this rule saying that in formal usage the pronoun *he* as the unmarked form should be employed in sentences with unspecified or unknown gender, as shown in example (4).

(4)   ***Everyone*** *thinks* ***he*** *has the answer.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

3.1.2 Singular They

However, Quirk et al. make their statement complete by saying that in informal English it is the pronoun *they* that is used as a third person singular pronoun referring to a subject with an unspecified gender (1985, 770). They explain the choice of this pronoun as "a convenient means of avoiding the dilemma whether to use the *he* or *she* form", and they add that even though such a tendency was used only in informal English in the past, it has appeared also in formal usage recently, particularly in American English (770). Quirk et al. demonstrate this rule on the following examples where the third person plural form of personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns is coreferential with the indefinite pronouns. Example (5) (a) is therefore the counterpart to sentence (4) and is used predominantly in informal language.

(5)   (a) ***Everyone*** *thinks* ***they*** *have the answer.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)
       (b) *Has* ***anybody*** *brought* ***their*** *camera?* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)
       (c) ***No one*** *could have blamed* ***themselves*** *for that.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

While Quirk et al. make differences between formal and informal usage of a suitable gender-neutral third person singular pronoun keeping the masculine generic still as the correct form used in formal English, Hewings in his *Advanced Grammar in Use* published in 2005 does not distinguish between formal and informal English. He illustrates the problem of the missing gender-neutral third person singular pronoun on the example of reflexive pronouns arguing that "some people use *themselves* to refer to the person who is the subject of the sentence, to avoid saying whether the subject is male or female" (2005, 120). He demonstrates this principle on example (6):

(6)   ***Who*** *wants to go through life by* ***themselves***, *without friends?* (2005, 120)

Also Biber et al. comment on dated usage of masculine generic which does not meet the needs of today's society and suggest the use of plural pronoun *they* instead.

(7)   *A: Not everybody uses **their** indicat- indicator.*

       *B: **They** don't use their indicators any more.*

       *A: No **they** don't. (CONV)* (Biber et al. 1999, 316)

Nevertheless, *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2010) argues that "although *they* and *their* have become common in formal usage, neither is considered acceptable in formal writing, so unless you are given guidelines to the contrary, do not use them in a singular sense" (CMS 5.227).

3.1.3 Generic She

The use of generic feminine can be found in English texts very rarely. Speakers usually employ this form if the topic is typically female of when it is intended for solely female audience. Huddleston and Pullum argue that there are writers who alternate between *he* and *she* using "one pronoun as anaphoric to *the speaker* and the other as anaphoric to *the addressee*" (2002, 493). They also add that generic feminine can be used "in a context where the relevance of the general statement is its applicability to some particular female" (493).

3.1.4 Generic One

It can be objected that there already exists a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun that have not been mentioned here yet, which is represented by the pronoun *one*. Its indefiniteness and gender neutrality can be seen in example (8) below.

(8)   ***One** should choose **one's** friends carefully.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

In this case (8), the possessive case of the pronoun *one's* is coreferential with the indefinite pronoun *one* and does not show any signs of gender specification, which would meet all requirements for the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun. However, there is a difference in the use of the pronoun *one* because unlike the third person personal pronouns, *one* "cannot be used as an anaphor to another NP" (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 427), which can be demonstrated on the following example.

(9)   ***A politician** shouldn't take **oneself** too seriously.* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 427)

Example (9) shows the grammatically incorrect sentence where the reflexive pronoun *oneself* cannot be taken as referential to the noun phrase *a politician*.

Besides, Crystal explains the impropriety of the pronoun *one* saying that it is not a "natural-sounding option [because] *one* is considered very formal" (2006, 314). As far as the reference to gender-neutral pronouns is concerned, Quirk et al. (1985, 770) argue that American English would rather employ the masculine reference after indefinite pronouns, as it can be illustrated in example (10) where the pronoun *one* was used for this purpose.

(10)   ***One** should choose **his** friends carefully.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

Therefore, it can be concluded that the indefinite pronoun *one*, even though it is considered the gender-neutral pronoun, does not fill the gap in English grammar made by the missing gender-neutral third person singular pronoun.

3.1.5 Conclusion

It can be noticed that opinions on a correct gender-neutral third person singular pronoun has undergone a significant development and the incongruities between these grammatical guidelines, as seen in examples (3), (5) and (6) above, may be arguably caused by the time when these grammar books were published. Curme's statement was issued in 1947 when society widely accepted a male-oriented attitude to the world, while Hewings' *Advanced Grammar in Use* was published in the period of on-going social fight for male and female equality, which may be the reason why he already employs purely gender-neutral reference expressed by the pronoun *they*.

In the middle of these opinions, Quirk et al. present their 1985 guideline establishing *he* for formal language and *they* for informal. Regarding the point made by Quirk et al. arguing that the usage of the pronoun *they* as the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun has penetrated into formal usage of American English, it could have been expected that the important changes will start to appear in the country where a campaign for men and women equality and against any sexual bias in language began.

One would expect that some progress towards the clearer attitude towards the issue of gender bias has been made during the last 50 years, however, the situation is still without the strict rules or even recommendations. *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2010) avoids the clear solution of this issue saying:

> On the one hand, it is unacceptable to a great many reasonable readers to use the generic masculine pronoun. … On the other hand, it is unacceptable to a great many readers (often different readers) either to resort to non-traditional gimmicks to avoid the generic masculine (by using *he/she* or *s/he*, for example) or to use *they* as a kind of singular pronoun. Either way, credibility is lost with some readers. (CMS 5.222)

It seems that, according to CMS, it is not possible to find a satisfactory solution of the gender bias in the third person singular pronoun that would completely solve the problem.

The opposing rules introduced above which have their support in the English grammar books, provide a basis for our discussion of the choice of the correct gender-neutral third person singular pronoun. The following subchapter is going to focus on the correctness of sentences where the plural pronoun *they* is employed with indefinite antecedents, which is a controversial issue in present-day linguistics.

3.2 Discussion on Grammatical Correctness of Singular *They* Referring to Indefinite Pronouns

3.2.1 Objections to Correctness of Singular They Usage

This subchapter is going to present opinions challenging the use of singular *they* employed with indefinite pronouns. The opinions can be divided into three main groups: prescriptive, grammatical and sociolinguistic arguments.

3.2.1.1 Discussion on Prescriptive Rules

As already suggested in the previous chapters, English grammar books do not take the clear attitude towards the choice of the correct third person singular pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns. The present-day situation is that the usage of singular *they* after

indefinite pronouns is restricted to informal writing and speech, while in formal style the masculine reference persists.

As far as the indefinite pronouns are concerned, Lamberts agrees with the general rule that the indefinite pronouns should be followed by the singular masculine, however he also adds that in the case of "*everyone* or *everybody*, notional plurality rather than the strict singular form is likely to dictate the reference" (quoted in Jochnowitz 1982, 198). Lamberts, in other words, chooses one of the indefinite pronouns using the concept of notional plurality as a distinguishing feature and makes the recommendation saying that even though the indefinite pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* are followed by a singular verb, they refer to more than one person and therefore it is possible to refer to them by plural pronouns (198). This principle is known as notional concord and it is defined as "agreement of verb with subject according to the notion of number rather than with the actual presence of the grammatical marker for that notion" (Quirk et al. 1985, 757). This agreement is further reflected also in the choice of pronouns. Nevertheless, this method cannot be employed with other indefinite pronouns because notional plurality is inapplicable to the indefinites *anyone* and *anybody*, *someone* and *somebody*, or *no one* and *nobody*.

3.2.1.2 Grammatical Discussion

The general rule which appears in almost each textbook says that pronouns and their antecedents must agree in number. The suitability of the pronoun *they* used as the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun is very often attacked by "traditional grammarians [who] will complain that this is incorrect usage" (Doyle quoted in Paterson 2011, 175) arguing that the plural pronoun violates number concord (agreement) between antecedent and pronoun. The indefinite pronouns are considered singular and must be therefore followed by singular verbs to meet the subject-verb concord. In other words, the problem is when such a singular subject is followed by a singular verb but it is referred to by a plural pronoun, as the following example suggests.

(11) ***Has** anyone forgotten **their** briefcase?* (Jochnowitz 1982, 198)
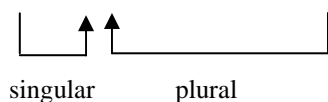
     singular   plural

Example (11) graphically illustrates that one sentence element treats the subject as singular (conjugation of the verb *have*) while another sentence element refers to the same subject by the plural form (the pronoun *their*). Such pronoun was obviously chosen to avoid the gender specification of the subject, however, from the syntactical point of view, this construction is incorrect violating the number concord.

In this case we can speak of the use of singular *they*, as the plural pronoun is treated as semantically singular expressing reference to a single person without the sex specification. However, singular *they* is considered singular only semantically but from the morphological and syntactic point of view it still behaves as the plural form, as it can be seen in example (12) taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (further referred to as COCA).

(12) *If anyone **knows** how to do it, they **don't** know how to do it accurately.* [COCA:2004:NEWS SanFrancisco]

This example shows that while in the first sentence the indefinite pronoun *anyone* is followed by the singular verb, in the second sentence singular *they* standing for the singular indefinite pronoun *anyone* is treated as the plural being followed by the plural form of the verb. In other words, the problem is that the same subject *anyone* is once referred to by the singular verb and later by the plural verb because it is further replaced by singular *they* taken syntactically as the plural. The explanation of this fact given by Huddleston and Pullum is as follows:

> The extension [of the plural pronoun *they*] to a singular sense has not been reflected in subject-verb agreement, just as the historical extension of *you* from plural to singular (replacing *thou*) did not have any effect on the form of the verb (2002, 494).

However, such disharmony between the antecedent and its pronoun gives cause for wide criticism of the theory of singular *they* as the gender-neutral third personal singular pronoun which is therefore considered incorrect and ambiguous.

Going back to example (11), one more remark cannot be ignored. As far as the noun phrase *their briefcase* is concerned, it raises the question of distributive number, which means whether to use the singular or plural noun after the possessive pronoun.

Quirk et al. argue that "while the distributive plural is the norm, the distributive singular may also be used to focus on individual instances. We therefore often have a number choice" (1985, 768). They add the following example to demonstrate this principle:

(13)   *The students raised their **hand(s)**. (768)*

It follows that both of the variants, *their briefcase* as well as *their briefcases*, are possible to use.

3.2.1.3   Sociolinguistic Discussion

The starting point for discussions about the suitable gender-neutral third person singular pronoun was a sociological change. However, even though women have the same rights as men today, some critics argue that it does not have any effect on linguistics and they still support the masculine pronoun in the role of the generic pronoun. In 1971 a theology class of Harvard tried to avoid sexist language in their debates, which was criticized by the linguistics faculty of Harvard by the following words:

> The fact that the masculine is the unmarked gender in English … is simply a feature of grammar. It is unlikely to be an impediment to change in the patterns of the sexual division of labor towards which our society may wish to evolve. There is really no cause for anxiety or pronoun-envy on the part of those seeking such changes. (Martyna 1980, 483)

Many critics strictly refuse the use of singular *they,* as Buckley who even says that "those who issue guidelines for nonsexist language … want us to validate improper usage. Anyone who uses a singular *they* should not be hired as a professional writer" (quoted in Martyna 1980, 487).

3.2.2 Arguments for Correctness of Singular They Usage

On the contrary, many linguists take opposite attitude and defend the use of singular *they* after indefinite pronouns.

3.2.2.1 Discussion on Prescriptive Rules

Huddleston and Pullum argue that singular *they* "fills a gap in the gender system of the core personal pronouns by virtue of being neutral as to sex" (2002, 426) and can be used with indefinite antecedents, as seen in example (14a). They even mention that in some dialects singular *they* has a special reflexive pronoun *themself*, and therefore we can come across similar statements as it can be seen in example (14b).

(14)   (a)   ***Everyone*** *promised to behave* ***themselves***.

     (b)   ***Someone*** *has locked* ***themself*** *in the attic.*

Analysing the reflexive pronoun *themself*, it can be said that it is a mixture of the plural pronoun in objective case *them* and the ending *-self* used for singular number only. It follows that while *themselves* is morphologically plural, its counterpart *themself* is morphologically marked as singular. The morphologically singular *themself* is not used in example (14a) because *everyone* is notionally plural and implies plural number so the morphologically plural *themselves* is employed (426). Examples of the morphologically singular *themself* can be found in the English language from the 1970s and this form can be considered satisfying the number concord, however, as mentioned above, this rather unique reflexive pronoun is used sporadically, only in some dialects. Nevertheless, Huddleston and Pullum suggest that it is probable that the use of the morphologically singular *themself* will expand with the increasing usage of *they* as a singular pronoun (494).

The support of the substitution of the masculine pronoun for the singular *they* did not appear as late as in 2002 when Huddleston and Pullum published their grammar book but the first opinions have arisen as early as in the 2nd half of the 20th century. Mentioning again the definition made by Curme saying that the antecedents with a general indefinite meaning should be followed by the masculine pronouns, it must be added that Watkins, Dillingham and Martin in their *Practical English Handbook* (1978) argue that "the use of a singular pronoun to refer to a singular antecedent is sometimes awkward" (quoted in Jochnowitz 1982, 198). They demonstrate the awkwardness on example (15) below.

(15) ***Everybody*** *cheered. I was pleased to hear* ***him***. (1982, 198)

To avoid such clumsy reference, the handbook provides us with the alternative saying that *pleased to hear them* would be satisfactory in informal usage, but no alternative is suggested to be used in formal language (199). It is untoward that the handbook considers the usage of the grammatical guideline awkward but is not able to offer any acceptable variation how to substitute this feature in formal English.

3.2.2.2   Grammatical Discussion

Jochnowitz examining the correctness of plural pronouns employed with indefinite antecedents found out in his study that the pronoun *they* is not marked for number (1982, 201-2). He established this conclusion on the use of *they* in passive constructions. Jochnowitz investigated agentless passive constructions searching for unspecified arguments which are according to Langacker and Munro underlying subjects of agentless passives. An unspecified argument is a real subject or object that is implied but is semantically presented in the sentence (quoted in Jochnowitz 1982, 201).

Jochnowitz argues that this unspecified argument which is the underlying subject of passive sentences is represented by the word *they* which is the same as the indefinite *they*. Therefore, he came to the following conclusion:

> Although plural at the surface level because it is identical in form with third-person plural pronoun, it is unmarked for number in the deep structure. This very *they* is the correct pronoun with indefinite antecedents. Indefinite *they* and agentless passive *they* are the same word, in both form and meaning (1982, 201-202).

3.2.2.3   Sociolinguistic Discussion

The Chicago Manual of Style argues that "using *he, his,* and *him* as a common-sex pronoun is now widely considered sexist" (CMS 5.34). However, it does not provide us with the clear statement what the alternative is, it only mentions that "a good writer can usually recast the sentence to eliminate the need for any personal pronoun at all" (5.34). Many linguists argue that singular *they* is the best alternative "avoiding the traditional use of *he* as the unmarked form when the sex is not determined" (Quirk 1985, 342).

Even though Jochnowitz introduced the opinion that the pronoun *they* can be freely used after indefinite pronouns, the battle between the use of *he* and *they* after the

indefinite pronouns persists. However, the slight predomination of the plural pronoun can be seen in a survey conducted by Langendoen who focused on the use of referents to indefinite antecedents in tag questions. The group of respondents consisted of forty-six high school and junior high school teachers of English who were asked to complete the given sentences with appropriate tag question, and one of the sentences was *Everyone likes me*. The survey revealed that thirty-four respondents chose as the tag question *Don't they?* while only twelve responded *Doesn't he?* (quoted in Jochnowitz 1982, 199)

This survey suggests that even though some grammar books still argue that the only possible form employed after indefinite pronouns in formal English is the masculine, the teachers themselves who should be aware of this rule prefer singular *they* reference to the singular masculine. The same trend was noticed in media, more specifically Lawson argues that "plural pronouns with singular antecedents can be heard any day of the week on the august BBC" (1980, 129).

3.2.3 Conclusion

The subchapter dealing with the grammatical correctness of the plural pronoun referring to the indefinite antecedents has shown two different views. The syntactic analysis revealed that the plural form violates the number concord and therefore it can be considered incorrect. However, the opposing view divulged that the pronoun *they* is not marked for number and therefore it can occur also in the position of the referential pronoun to all indefinite pronouns.

The use of the plural form with indefinite antecedent can be undoubtedly accepted in the case of the indefinites *everyone* and *everybody* which are notionally plural and can be therefore referred to by the plural pronoun (even though it requires a singular verb). This tendency was consequently proved by the survey made by Langendoen revealing the preference for the plural pronoun.

The perfectly grammatically correct pronoun *he* is nowadays perceived as lacing neutrality and is very often substituted by the plural form. It can be therefore argued that the use of the plural form has increased despite its correctness, which is in dispute, and can be found also in formal English represented by media or teachers of English.

3.3   Historical Background to Generic Pronoun

To analyse the topic of a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun properly, it is essential to present a development of the generic pronoun in the English language from the historical point of view.

As it was already mentioned above, the generic pronoun was in the past centuries exclusively represented by the masculine pronoun *he.* However, this statement can be considered to be true only partially because looking into the distant past, the function of the general pronoun appearing after nouns or pronouns with unspecified gender was performed also by other pronouns than just by the masculine pronoun *he.* Jochnowitz found the first mention (c. 1530) of the word *everybody* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the following example (16):

(16)   ***Everye bodye*** *was in **theyr*** *lodgynges.* (Jochnowitz 1982, 199)

In this example it can be noticed that in the 16th century, the plural possessive pronoun *their* was used as the reference to the indefinite pronoun *everybody.* Another definition from the *OED* comments on the historical shift by saying that "the plural pronouns *their, them, themselves,* were formerly in general use on account of their indefiniteness of gender, but now this is considered ungrammatical" (quoted in Jochnowitz 1982, 199). This evidence is the basis of statements of many linguists who argue that singular *they* is the only correct possibility how to solve the lack of the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun in English, but this 'solution' violates grammatical rules (see chapter 2.1.1).

The singular *they* had been considered the widely approved grammatical feature until 1794, when Lindley Murray published his *English Grammar* which was the first grammar book challenging the correctness of the singular *they*. Murray argued that the pronoun *they* violates the concord in number because it refers to a singular noun or pronoun; he classified it as incorrect and suggested that the pronoun *he* should be used instead (Curzan 2003, 59). This suggestion was made a rule in the half of the 19th century when an Act of Parliament passed a law establishing *he* instead of *he or she* in order to make the language used in Acts of Parliament shorter (59).

Conversely, Newman (quoted in Curzan 2003, 57) does not agree that Murray established the generic masculine and he points out that epicene *he* is not the invention of the 18th century and while explaining the origin of the generic masculine, he goes

even more into the past arguing that the pronoun *he* in the function of the gender-unmarked reference arose earlier than in the 18th century and he sets the usage of generic *he* in the times of Chaucer. This is followed by Curzan who even argues that the evidence of the masculine generic should be dated back to the era when Beowulf was written (2003, 59).

Curzan carried out an extensive research based on Helsinki Corpus focusing on the generic pronouns from the historical point of view and she found out that in Middle English, there are discrepancies in the generic pronoun usage because the generally used masculine pronoun sometimes altered with the feminine one, as it is illustrated on the following examples from *Ancrene Wisse*, a 13th century guide for anchoresses (67). The examples describe two different genders of reference following the masculine antecedent *hwa se* (whoever). The first one is the following:

(17) *iheren ich segge. for **hwa se** spekeð ham; nis **ha** nawt ancre* (quoted in Curzan 2003, 67)

    *'I say "heard," for **whoever** speaks them, **she** is not an anchoress.'*

In example (17) it can be noticed that the gender unmarked antecedent *whoever* is followed by the generic feminine reference *she* which is then in concord with the feminine noun *anchoress*. The author thus decided to use rather feminine generic instead of masculine generic (…, ***he** is not an anchorite*). This is arguably caused by the nature of audience which is expected to be rather feminine, namely the sisters. However, this statement is challenged by the following example (18) where the same author addresses the same audience but in this case he uses the masculine generic to follow the same gender unmarked pronoun *whoever* (67).

(18) ***Hwa se** is siker of sucurs þt **him** schal cume sone. & ʒet tah up **his** castel to **his** wiðeriwines; swiðe **he** is to edwiten* (Curzan 2003, 67).

    *'**Whoever** is certain of help that will come to **him** soon, and yet brought up **his** castle to **his** enemies, much is **he** to be reproached.'*

To make the demonstration of the generic pronoun usage in the 13th century complete, one more example must follow. It is again an extract from *Ancrene Wisse* illustrating a usage of masculine as well as feminine anaphoric pronouns which refer to an unspecified, i.e. generic person. In the following example (19), the speaker talks about backbiting (Curzan 2003, 68).

(19)   *weila he seið wa is me þt* **he oðer heo** *habbeð swuch word icaht ... þt is   muchel sorhe. for i feole oðer þing* **he oðer heo** *is swiðe to herien...* (Curzan 2003, 68).

'"*Oh dear," he [the backbiter] says, "Woe is to the one that* **he or she** *has caught such talk...that is a great sorrow, for in many other ways* **he or she** *is greatly to be praised."'*

In this example (19) it can be noticed that the backbiter is referred to by the masculine pronoun *he* even though it can be also a woman, while the victim of backbiting is referred to by both masculine and feminine pronouns being in the juxtaposition. Curzan concludes that the masculine pronouns were not considered as inevitably generic at this period, and that authors sometimes used such a long construction to make clear that either sex is referred to (68).

3.3.1 Conclusion

It can be argued that in early Middle English a generic person (a person of unspecified gender) is usually referred to by masculine pronouns (Curzan 2003, 67). However, the deeper analysis of the 13th century text reveals that in Middle English there were no clear rules establishing the masculine *he* as the generic pronoun and consequently many exceptional situations arose. Such situations were demonstrated on the text called *Ancrene Wisse*. In one of the situations, the choice of a suitable anaphoric reference is influenced by an expected audience, as in example (17) where the author uses purely feminine anaphoric pronouns. In some parts of the same text highly masculine language is used to include both genders as in example (18), and even the third different form of the generic pronoun can be noticed in the same text when the author feels the need to express explicitly that his speech is intended for either sex and thus he uses the expression *he or she* (19).

Based on these findings it can be concluded that the status of the generic masculine being a gender-neutral pronoun was not strictly followed in Middle English however the generic usage of such a pronoun prevailed over pronouns of other genders. Such finding coming from the survey into historical English serves as our basis because it is necessary to stress the fact that the construction *he or she*, or the generic feminine is not a product of the 21st century society but it has its origin in a deep history of the English language.

4 Guidelines to Use Gender-neutral Language

As the preceding chapters suggest, the choice between feminine and masculine gender is sometimes disputable, hence many linguists recommend various ways how to behave in situations requiring the gender-neutral language. This chapter is going to introduce such suggestions and present specific examples including various opinions on the usage. The principle is to find a desirable solution avoiding or substituting the problematic parts, specifically the generic masculine which is not considered purely unmarked nowadays, for gender non-specific constructions.

4.1 Rephrasing the sentences

One of the methods suggested for avoiding the gender specific language is to rewrite the sentences. The point of the recommendation is to avoid all the gender marked pronouns, masculine as well as feminine, and substitute them for any words not marked for gender and, when necessary, rephrase the sentence.

As far as words not marked for gender are concerned, the basic way how to avoid such words is to employ genderless determiners, as the following example suggests:

(20) (a) *The speaker must constantly monitor **his** listener to check that assumptions **he** is making are shared assumptions.*

(b) *The speaker must constantly monitor **the** listener and check that the assumptions **the speaker** is making are shared.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 343)

In example (20) it can be noticed that the gender marked possessive pronoun *his* was substituted by the definite article *the*. In the case of personal pronouns, it is advisable to use a noun phrase instead of the gender marked pronoun and, consequently, to rephrase the sentence if required.

Another recommendation points out that only third person singular pronouns are marked for gender and, therefore, there is a wide range of other pronouns that can refer to antecedents of both sexes, such as *I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours, you, your, yours, it, its, they, them, their,* and *theirs*. Some of them can be used instead of the third person singular pronoun, as example (21) illustrates.

(21) (a) *We will regard each other as individuals.* ***Everyone*** *will plan **his** own lessons,*
     *select **his** own text, and teach **his** own course.*

   (b) *We will regard each other as individuals as **we** plan our **own** lessons, select*
   ***our** own texts, and teach **our** own courses.* (Nilsen 1984, 154)

Nilsen points out that restructuring the sentence from the third person singular into first
person plural pronoun point of view makes the text "not only sex-fair but also more
consistent" (154). On the other hand it cannot be argued that sentences (21) (a) and (b)
are totally synonymous because the change of pronouns caused the shift in style and
thus sentence (b) can be considered to be closer to the style of spoken language, which
is the result of using first person pronouns (154).

   Another method dealing with substitution of gender marked pronouns is the use of
relative pronouns, as in example (22).

(22) *(a) You can't help a kid if **he** isn't there to hear you.*
    *(b) You can't help a kid **who** isn't there to hear you.* (Nilsen 1984, 154)

Another technique avoiding gender-specific third person singular pronoun recommends
using the imperative mood as in the following example:

(23) (a) *A lifeguard must keep a close watch over children while **he** is monitoring the*
      pool.
   (b) *A lifeguard must keep a close watch over children while **monitoring** the pool.*
      (CMS 5.225)

All the methods mentioned above have a common feature, they aim to omit any gender-
specific pronoun, not only to substitute it by a gender-neutral pronoun, as it will be
shown in the following subchapters.

4.2   Singular *They*

Another recommendation for the gender neutral language says to use the singular
pronoun *they.* The correctness of the singular they in the role of gender-neutral third
person singular pronoun has been discussed in detail in chapter 3.2. Regardless the

matter of correctness of the singular *they,* it must be mentioned that the usage of this pronoun is a suitable method how to avoid the specification of the gender and does not require any changes in the structure of a sentence. Huddleston and Pullum demonstrate the usage on example (24).

(24) *A **friend of mine** has asked me to go over and help **them** with an assignment.*
      (2002, 493)

The question of the sex of the friend remains unanswered even though the speaker definitely knows whether the friend is male or female but he avoids this information. Huddleston and Pullum discuss the possibility to use a composite form *he or she* in this case but they refuse this construction saying that "*he or she* and *he/she* would generally be avoided as too formal in style and as making the intention to conceal the sex to obvious" (494).

       However, this method still challenges the grammatical correctness so Huddleston and Pullum push the avoidance strategy even further and with the intention to make the sentences grammatically perfect they recommend using a plural antecedent as shown in example (25).

(25) (a) *But **a journalist** should not be forced to reveal **their** sources.*
      (b) *But **journalists** should not be forced to reveal **their** sources.* (2002, 495)

       As far as indefinite pronouns, which are the main focus of this thesis, are concerned, the similar strategy is very often employed as demonstrated on examples (26) and (27).

(26) *(a) **Everyone** thinks **they** have the answer.*
      *(b) **All of them** think **they** have the answer.* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

(27) *(a) Has **anybody** brought **their** camera?*
      *(b) Have **any of you** brought **your** camera?* (Quirk et al. 1985, 770)

This solution seems to be the best alternative to the gender specific pronouns. Nilsen argues that "in most cases if the referent could be either male or female, then in the deep

structure of the sentence the referent is plural" (1984, 155). So the surface structure matches the deep structure and therefore changing a whole sentence structure from singular to plural without any changes in word order is definitely very comfortable solution.

4.3   Dual Pronouns

The use of disjunctive coordination *he or she* or other coordinated pronoun forms, such as *he/she*, *(s)he*, or *s/he* is another device how to meet requirements for sex-fair language. These constructions are very common in formal language but it cannot be argued that they do not appear in informal English at all (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, 493). However, all the authors of the grammar books quoted in this thesis regard the dual pronouns as clumsy or cumbersome, especially when these constructions are repeated and when speaking about reflexive pronouns. Huddleston and Pullum demonstrate this device on example (28) and they point out that it is of questionable grammaticality.

(28)   ***Everyone*** *agreed that **he or she** should apply **him- or herself** without delay to the task which **he or she** had been assigned.* (2002, 493)

Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written Language introduces the corpus research on occurrence of dual gender reference. This research reveals that the dual pronouns are used rather sporadically and they appear predominantly in academic style (see Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of dual pronouns (occurrences per million words)

	CONV	*FIC*	*NEWS*	*ACAD*
he or she	0-5	0-5	0-5	30
him or her	0-5	0-5	0-5	10
his or her	0-5	0-5	10	40
he/she	0-5	0-5	0-5	10

Source: Biber et al. 1999, 317.

It can be argued that academic style should be the one that is politically correct and strictly follows recommendations to avoid gender bias. Its awareness of the need of

gender-neutral language is proved by the highest occurrence of the sex-fair dual pronouns. Biber et al. add that the dual pronouns form has the exactness which is closely connected with academic style and even coordination in general is very usual in these writings. On the other hand what excludes this device from news and other styles is its length and clumsiness (317).

As far as the coordinated pronoun forms (he/she, (s)he, s/he) are concerned, it must be mentioned that this solution is restricted only to written texts as the spoken language is not able to distinguish these forms. Furthermore, these forms do not have any corresponding spoken objective or possessive forms (Quirk et al. 1985, 343).

Nilsen argues that the dual pronouns should be used as the last option or only when they emphasise something or contribute to better understanding. According to Nilsen's words, the use of dual pronouns "goes against natural leanings towards efficiency" because English tends to use short instead of long forms of words, which can be seen on the examples such as *bus* instead of *omnibus*, *taxi* or *cab* instead of *taximeter cabriolet* (1984, 155). To conclude, the dual pronouns usage makes the text more precise and sex-fair, on the other hand it disturbs the systematic approach to shortening of long words, which makes the text more dynamic and speeds up the flow of communication so typical for English. However, "stylistically, this device is usually awkward or even stilted, but if used sparingly it can be functional" (CMS 5.46).

4.4   Gender-neutral *One*

The indefinite pronoun one should not be omitted from this list because it satisfies all the requirements for the gender-neutral pronoun and it has also the corresponding reflexive, possessive and objective forms. The example of generic *one* is the following:

(29)   *One does not wish to repeat **oneself** unduly and the reader is referred to other parts of this book.* (Biber et al. 1999, 354)

The case of the gender-neutral indefinite pronoun *one* has been discussed in chapter 3.1.4. Biber et al. add that generic *one* appears mainly in the written register, especially in fiction and academic style and the reason why it is not used in spoken form is that it is perceived as non-casual and an impersonal option which does not have the personal overtones associated with the personal pronouns (1999, 331, 353-355).

4.5   Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the main suggestions how to respect the principle of gender-neutral language. Besides the recommendations mentioned above, there exist many minor opinions, like a suggestion to alternate between generic *he* and generic *she*, or to use non-personal *it* suggested by Rutherford arguing that "maybe 'everyone…it' is the best logical choice, considering that the subject and pronoun ought to agree in number and gender" (quoted in Baron 1981, 86), or to create a new gender-neutral third person singular pronoun which will meet all the requirements. The first suggestion for the new gender-neutral pronoun appeared in literature as early as in 1884 and since then various forms have been created, for example *hiser*, *en*, *thon*, *hi* and many others (87 – 96).

5   Research Introduction

The research on the issue of the missing gender-neutral third person singular pronoun in the English language will be demonstrated on the case of reflexive pronouns which refer, and thus reveal their gender, to indefinite pronouns. I decided to use this method of research because other pronouns (e.g. personal or possessive) which appear after indefinite pronouns occur in both corpora in very high numbers, and such extensive research would go beyond this study (e.g. the total number of occurrences of personal pronouns appearing after all eight indefinite pronouns in the COCA is 38,689).

As far as the indefinite pronouns are concerned, it is necessary to specify this term in more detail. The study will focus on compound pronouns, i.e. the pronouns that are "composed of two morphemes, viz a determiner morpheme *every-*, *some-*, *any-*, or *no-*, and a nominal morpheme *–one, -body,* or *–thing* (Quirk et al. 1985, 376). Quirk et al. divide the compound indefinite pronouns into the following table:

Table 2 Compound Pronouns

	PERSONAL REFERENCE		NONPERSONAL REFERENCE
UNIVERSAL	everybody	everyone	everything
ASSERTIVE	somebody	someone	something
NON-ASSERTIVE	anybody	anyone	anything
NEGATIVE	nobody	no one	nothing

Source: Quirk et al. 1985, 377.

The research will deal with compound pronouns with personal reference, and the variants with both nominal morphemes, *-one* and *–body*, will be concerned, which means that for each of the eight compound pronouns an independent corpus query will be made.

5.1   Hypothesis

Before stating a hypothesis, the aim of the thesis should be summarised. The thesis tries to find out what the most frequent reflexive pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns is.

It is expected that there will be a competition between the masculine reflexive pronoun *himself* and the morphologically plural reflexive pronoun *themselves*,

with the slight predominance of the generic masculine. On the contrary, despite the fact of the present-day equality of men and women the lowest number of occurrences is expected in dual pronouns *himself or herself* because of its clumsiness.

It is also possible that the choice of the referential reflexive pronoun will be influenced by registers, the generic masculine and the dual pronoun is expected in formal English while informal English will arguably use the singular *they* reference.

6   Methodology

As mentioned above, the results were obtained by two different methods – the corpus research and the questionnaire research. This division is reflected in the structure of this chapter.

6.1   Corpus Research

6.1.1 Presentation of Corpora Used

The research will be based on data obtained from British and American corpora, more specifically from *The British National Corpus* (BNC) and *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA).

To introduce the corpora, "*The British National Corpus* is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written"[2]. The written part comprises 90%, while the spoken part 10% of the BNC.

As far as *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* is concerned, it is "the largest freely-available corpus of English, and the only large and balanced corpus of American English. The corpus was created by Mark Davies of Brigham Young University… [and it] contains more than 450 million words" with 90 million words of spoken and 335 million words of written English[3].

6.1.2 Collecting Data

For access to corpus data I used the BYU interface which enables us to search for any query in the BNC as well as in the COCA.

6.1.2.1   BNC

To make the query in the BNC via the BYU interface, I put the specific indefinite pronoun into the search line and asked for any reflexive pronoun [pnx*] (in the BNC basic (C5) tagset) to follow this indefinite pronoun, as you can see in Figure 1.

---

[2] http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/index.xml
[2] http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/

Figure 1 Screenshot of the search string in the BNC
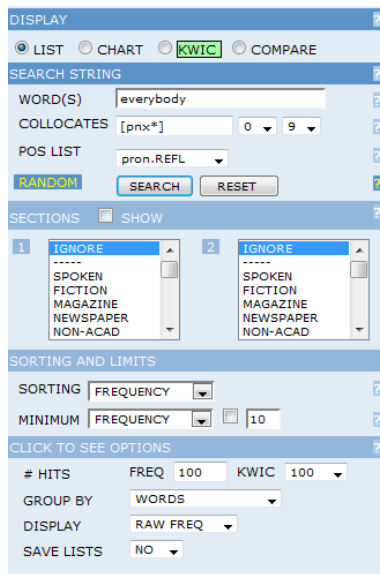
This method was used for all indefinite pronouns analysed, specifically *everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody.* All the pronouns can be found in the corpora also in the form with hyphen (i.e. *no-one*, *some-body*), which was also searched and the results can be found in tables below. However, the search revealed all reflexive pronouns so it was necessary for our further research to choose only those which were in the third person, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Selection of the relevant reflexive pronouns (BNC)

Finishing this procedure, I started to sort the examples manually because the corpus is not able to provide us solely with examples where a reflexive pronoun is coreferential with an indefinite pronoun.

6.1.2.2   COCA

The same process was made in the COCA with the difference in the tag for reflexive pronouns because the COCA uses different tagset (UCREL CLAWS7 Tagset) and thus the tag [ppx*] was used instead, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Screenshot of the search string in the COCA

The tag [ppx*] includes all singular and plural reflexive pronouns, however the reflexive indefinite pronoun *oneself* was not included so I made the new query searching exclusively for this pronoun. The tag [pnx1] was used in this case, as you can see in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Screenshot of the individual search for reflexive *oneself* (COCA)

6.2   Questionnaire Research

The second part of the research will be based on questionnaires distributed to native speakers of English. The aim of the questionnaire research is to describe up-to-date changes in the use of the gender neutral third person singular pronoun and to find out if there is a difference in its usage by various sociological groups (men vs. women, educated vs. uneducated, young vs. old people). This type of research was chosen to complete the corpus research with sociological data which undoubtedly influence the choice of the pronoun. It is also possible to do the sociolinguistic research in corpora, e.g. in Xaira, the software used for searching in the British National Corpus, however this corpus does not include data from the 21st century essential for our research.

6.2.1 Creation of Questionnaires

The questionnaire focuses on the use of the gender neutral reflexive pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns but it also compares differences between individual indefinite pronouns (everybody vs. nobody) as well as between the pairs of indefinite pronouns themselves (e.g. someone vs. somebody). The questionnaire itself consists of two types of questions, open ended questions (part A) where respondents insert their own answers, and scaled questions (part B) where they arrange the given answers according to their preference.

As far as the part A is concerned, it does not provide respondents with any option in order to make them answer the questions spontaneously, without thinking about the

given possibilities. Conversely, the aim of the part B is to compare the options to each other and to choose the best one or ones, as a respondent can put more options on the same level. Therefore, the results will also reveal which option is the least preferred.

Figure 5 Example of the open ended questions in section A of the questionnaire

Figure 6 Example of the scale question in section B of the questionnaire

As Figure 6 shows, every example was followed by seven options and respondents were asked to assign the number of preference to each option. As mentioned above, it was possible to assign the same preference to two or more options.

The next section in the scale questions part contains sets of two sentences of the same context differing only in the indefinite pronoun (i.e. contrastive pairs). The aim of this part is to find out whether there is a difference in e.g. *–one* and *–body* compounds. The last section of the questionnaire tries to find out the difference in formal and informal language (the questionnaire is attached in Appendix 1).

For the purposes of the questionnaire research, the BNC and the COCA provided me with example sentences tested in the questionnaire. All examples were used with the context to eliminate possible misunderstanding of the situation.

6.2.2 Distribution of Questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed to native speakers of English. A special website was created for this purpose, which means that I sent the website address to potential respondents to fill in the questionnaire. For the purposes of this research, my contacts and the contacts of people from my surroundings who visited the United Kingdom were used. It is expected that the largest group of respondents addressed will come from the University of Durham, where I studied under the Erasmus programme.

The target group is restricted to native speakers; any other restrictions on respondents' knowledge or qualities are not imposed because it is necessary to address wide range of native speakers of various age groups, sex and education.

6.2.3 Evaluation of Questionnaires

The questionnaire was filled in by 16 respondents, whose characteristics can be seen in Appendix 2. Their responses were collected online and their results are analysed in Chapter 8.2. Each section of the questionnaire focuses on some issue and the questionnaire analysis in Chapter 8.2 reflects this division.

7   Corpus Results

This technical chapter is going to present data obtained from the corpus research whose procedure is described in detail in Chapter 6.1. The results will be structured according to the corpora used for the research into two separate subchapters.

Before providing any detailed data from the individual corpora, it must be mentioned that I went through 3,606 examples, specifically 615 tokens in the BNC and 2,991 in the COCA. It can be noticed that the COCA contains more examples than the BNC, which can be influenced by volume of the corpus, as the COCA is bigger than the BNC (450 million words in the COCA compared to 100 million words in the BNC). Unlike the BNC, the COCA is updated regularly so more present-date data can be found in this corpus, which means that it is more suitable for our research than the BNC. The last update of the COCA was completed in June 2012 but the data were collected before this update.

7.1   BNC

The data derived from the BNC for individual indefinite pronouns can be seen in tables 3 – 6 below. All the tables provide us with the list of all reflexive pronouns which follow the indefinite pronouns, the number of their occurrence and the number of relevant examples. The relevant examples meet the requirement of reference of the reflexive pronoun to the indefinite pronoun. The selection of relevant examples was the most time-consuming process of the research, As far as the tokens in the BNC are concerned, only 263 out of 615 tokens were referential (43%) and used for the further research. The following tables 3 - 6 provide a general overview of the indefinite pronouns and their referential pronouns.

Table 3 *Everyone* vs. *everybody* (list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the BNC)

Everyone			Everybody		
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**
themselves	**67**	**47**	**themselves**	**36**	**28**
himself	45	12	himself	11	4
herself	10	0	herself	4	0
himself or	0	0	himself or	1	1

herself			herself		
TOTAL[4]	59				33
	92				

It follows from Table 3 that both from the pair of universal indefinite pronouns (*everyone* and *everybody*) are the most often referred to by the same reflexive pronoun – the third person plural *themselves*. Example (30) presents the use of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* referring to indefinite pronouns.

(30) *I think this is something which everybody has to work out for **themselves***. [BNC: KRG: S_brdcast_discussn]

The next of the most often references is the masculine *himself*, however the dominance of *themselves* is evident. Example of *himself* reference can be seen below.

(31) *Everyone has to learn to defend **himself**.* [BNC: B28: W_non_ac_polit_law_edu]

It was found out the feminine pronoun *herself* does not refer to indefinite pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* in the BNC at all. One occurrence was found for the dual pronoun *himself or herself*, which cannot be regarded as the representative sample. The example of this dual pronoun can be seen below.

(32) *"Everybody who calls **himself or herself** a Christian must now rally to the side of Christ and defend Him, not only with their rosaries and prayers but by protesting in a public and persistent manner against this film."* [BNC: A6C: W_misc]

Table 4 *Someone* vs. *somebody* (list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the BNC)

Someone			Somebody		
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**
themselves	36	19	**themselves**	**23**	**18**
himself	**87**	**41**	himself	6	1

---

[4] Total of relevant examples

herself	37	7	herself	3	0
himself or herself	2	2	himself or herself	1	1
oneself	6	4	oneself	0	0
themself	4	2[5]	themself	1	1
TOTAL	75				21
	96				

Table 4 suggests, there is a difference in the referential pronoun of the indefinite pronoun *someone* and *somebody*. While *someone* prefers generic masculine, *somebody* takes more often singular *they* as its coreferential pronoun. The following examples demonstrate the use of minority reflexive pronouns (i.e. *herself, himself or herself, oneself, themself*) employed with indefinite pronouns.

(33) *The cake I had eaten (thoughtfully, and in the true spirit) had been meant for someone no longer able to make cake for **herself**.* [BNC:AC7: W_fict_prose]

The choice of the feminine reference could have been influenced by the fact that a narrator is a woman, and also by the stereotype that women usually make cakes.

(34) *For example, someone who has a problem with alcohol may find **himself or herself** thinking progressively more during the day about the opportunity to drink in the evening.* [BNC: G3D: W_non_ac_soc_science]

(35) *It's only a thought, but is it possible that the person who threw the carton of orange juice and 50p piece at Morrissey at the Madness (Madness, not Morrissey) gig was not some National Front yob but someone who felt that draping **oneself** in a Union Jack -- still, like it or not, a symbol of racism -- is itself racist?* [BNC:CHB: W_pop_lore]

(36) *She said Paula asked her " how could someone hang **themself**?* [BNC:K41: W_newsp_other_report]

---

[5] Both examples come from the same source.

Table 5 *Anyone* **vs.** *anybody* **(list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the BNC)**

Anyone			Anybody		
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**
themselves	**47**	**29**	**themselves**	**15**	**9**
himself	64	20	himself	15	2
herself	30	2	herself	7	0
himself or herself	1	1	himself or herself	0	0
oneself	1	0	oneself	0	0
TOTAL		52			11
	63				

Table 5 reveals that both indefinite pronouns prefer *themselves* to masculine reference which, however, appears also in relatively high values (total of 22 occurrences compared to 38 occurrences of *themselves*). The feminine reference as well as the dual reference is rarely used, not speaking of the referential *oneself* which is not used at all.

It should be also noticed that no other reflexive pronouns than *themselves* and *himself* refer to indefinite pronoun *anybody*. Again, the minority examples of the reflexive pronouns *himself or herself* and *herself* can be found below.

(37) *Unfortunately, anyone can describe **himself or herself** as a homoeopath.* [BNC: FT2: W_ac_medicine]

(38) *Grants may also be made to retired members of the College administrative staff where appropriate. Anyone wishing to apply for a grant for **herself** or anyone else should write to the Treasurer, All requests will be considered by the Committee in confidence.* [BNC: J2B: W_misc]

Table 6 *No one* vs. *nobody* **(list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the BNC)**

No one (no-one)[6]			Nobody		
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**
themselves	2 (1)	0 (0)	**themselves**	**16**	**9**
himself	**2 (5)**	**1 (0)**	himself	12	2
herself	0 (3)	0	herself	13	0
theirselves	0	0	theirselves	1	0
TOTAL		1			11
	12				

Table 6 shows the minimal usage of the negative indefinite pronouns with slight preference of masculine reference in *–one* and singular *they* preference in *– body*. However, the low numbers of occurrence do not allow us to make responsible conclusions. The examples below show some of the sentences suitable for our analysis.

(39) *Good diction can still be heard occasionally, particularly on Radio 3, so that no one who wishes to improve* **himself** *need lack exemplars; yet many people are content to mumble and fumble their words.* [BNC:FRA: W_non_ac_polit_law_edu]

(40) *Nobody put* **themselves** *out to help me in any way at all, but I made it.* [BNC: AT4: W_fict_prose]

7.1.1 Conclusion

The tables above reveal that the main competition is between the masculine and singular *they* reference. Other references (feminine, dual pronouns, *themself*, *oneself*, etc.) do not play a significant role, which can be caused also by the corpus itself because it can be argued that the corpus is dated for the purpose of describing the current development of the gender-neutral pronoun. This is the reason why we will use also the up-to-date COCA to prove the hypothesis.

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[6] 9 tokens were found for different spelling of the indefinite pronoun (with the hyphen, i.e. *no-one*). The number of occurrences of reflexive pronouns referring to *no-one* is presented in brackets.

As far as the differences between compounds in – *one* and –*body* are concerned, the conclusion is that the former is used mainly with the masculine pronouns while the latter with the singular *they* reference. Such contrast can be caused by different registers these compounds are used in (for detailed analysis of registers see Chapter 8.1). This phenomenon will be examined also in the COCA and later in the text also the registers will be tested.

7.2 COCA

It is expected that the research in the COCA will be more extensive, as it contains more words and it includes up-to-date data.

As mentioned in Chapter 7, the total amount of tokens in the COCA was 2,991 but only 1,197 examples (40%) were relevant for our research. The following tables 7 - 10 present the results of the corpus research.

Table 7 *Everyone* **vs.** *everybody* **(list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the COCA)**

Everyone				Everybody			
Referential pronoun	Number of tokens	Relevant tokens	%	Referential pronoun	Number of tokens	Relevant tokens	%
himself	190	43	19.55	himself	85	19	13.97
themselves	**236**	**159**	**72.27**	**themselves**	**137**	**111**	**81.62**
herself	97	4	1.82	herself	23	0	0.00
himself or herself	6	6	2.73	himself or herself	1	1	0.74
him or herself	3	3	1.36	him or herself	0	0	0.00
oneself	2	2	0.91	oneself	2	0	0.00
themself	1	1	0.45	themself	2	2	1.47
them-selves	1	1	0.45	them-selves	0	0	0.00
theirself	1	1	0.45	theirself	1	1	0.74
hisself	1	0	0.00	hisself	1	0	0.00
theyself	0	0	0.00	theyself	2	2	1.47
TOTAL		220	100.0			136	100.0
	356						

Table 7 shows that both *every-* compounds prefer the singular *they* reference to the masculine reference. The same finding was discovered also in the BNC which confirms

the statement made in the theoretical part of this thesis saying that the indefinite pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* are perceived as notionally plural and therefore they take the singular *they* reference.

Although the singular *they* reference dominates the table, the masculine reference is not insignificant, nevertheless other reflexive pronouns appear in very low values. The following examples show the use of two frequent reflexive pronouns – *themselves* and *himself*.

(41) *And it's the chance for everybody to practice how to protect* **themselves** *during an earthquake.* [COCA: 2011: SPOK: NPR_TalkNation]

(42) *Everybody asks* **himself,** *"What will happen to us?"* [COCA: 2008: ACAD: GeorgiaHisQ]

Table 8 *Someone* **vs.** *somebody* **(list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the COCA)**

Someone (Some-one)				Somebody			
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**
himself	**374 (1)[7]**	**193 (1)**	**53.02**	himself	96	43	44.79
themselves	169	108	29.67	**themselves**	**62**	**46**	**47.92**
herself	151	37	10.16	herself	24	3	3.13
himself or herself	12	12	3.30	himself or herself	2	2	2.08
him or herself	5	5	1.37	hisself	1	0	0.00
oneself	16	7	1.92	oneself	0	0	0.00
themself	2	2	0.56	themself	3	2	2.08
TOTAL		365	100.0			96	100.0
	461						

It follows from Table 8 that while the compound in –*one* has the masculine referent, the compound in -*body* prefers the singular *they*, although the difference between *himself* and *themselves* is minimal. This finding corresponds to the data obtained from the BNC.

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[7] One occurrence of the generic masculine was found in the indefinite pronoun written with the hyphen, i.e. *some-one*.

In the case of *someone*, it can be noticed that a relatively high number (17 occurrences) of dual pronouns appeared in the COCA. Example (43) shows the use of this dual pronoun.

(43) *I suppose it might matter, maybe not, as how much blood was there, a speck of blood, if someone simply cuts **himself or herself** and it's a minor injury, as opposed to, you know, a more substantial amount of blood?* [COCA: 2008: SPOK: Fox_Susteren]

The following examples present the usage of minority reflexive pronouns *herself, oneself, themself.*

(44) *This was nothing put-on or showy. It wasn't someone saying to **herself**, "Let's devise a lesson in prayer far these kids."* [COCA: 2000: MAG: USCatholic]

(45) *In a fighting situation, someone has to get hurt, either **oneself** or the other guy.* [COCA: 2007: FIC: KenyonRev]

(46) *Is it possible that someone could inject **themself** in the femoral artery in the groin?* [COCA: 2008: SPOK: NBC_Dateline]

Table 9 *Anyone* vs. *anybody* (list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the COCA)

Anyone				Anybody			
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**
himself	**241**	**80**	**48.19**	himself	83	19	25.68
themselves	149	65	39.16	**themselves**	**79**	**50**	**67.57**
herself	99	8	4.82	herself	22	2	2.70
himself or herself	4	4	2.41	himself or herself	1	1	1.35
him or herself	7	7	4.22	him or herself	0	0	0.00
oneself	3	0	0.00	oneself	0	0	0.00
themself	2	2	1.20	themself	0	0	0.00
theirself	0	0	0.00	theirself	1	1	1.35

hisself	1	0	0.00	hisself	1	0	0.00
theirselves	0	0	0.00	theirselves	1	1	1.35
TOTAL		166	100.0			74	100.0
	240						

Table 9 reveals again the dominance of the masculine referent in the pronoun –*one* and the singular *they* dominance in –*body*. It can be also noticed that various ungrammatical compounds appeared in the results (*theirself, theirselves, hisself*) however their occurrence is so marginal that we cannot make any conclusions.

Again, the examples of minority reflexive pronouns can be found below.

(47) *"I've never seen anyone so adapt **herself** to city life."* [COCA: 1994: FIC: BkJuv: MillersCrossing]

(48) *A core tenet of our mission is that anyone who calls **him or herself** a Muslim is a Muslim.* [COCA: 2006: NEWS: CSMonitor]

(49) *He stipulated in his will that anyone able to prove **themself** to be his widow or child would be entitled to fifty dollars.* [COCA: 1998: MAG: AmHeritage]

Table 10 *No one* vs. *nobody* (list and occurrences of reflexive pronouns in the COCA)

No one (No- one)				Nobody			
Referential pronoun	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**	**Referential pronoun**	**Number of tokens**	**Relevant tokens**	**%**
himself	199 (1)	32 (1)	36.36	himself	70	17	33.34
themselves	**123**	**49**	**55.68**	**themselves**	**51**	**26**	**50.98**
herself	100	1	1.14	herself	22	3	5.88
himself or herself	1	1	1.14	himself or herself	0	0	0.00
him or herself	4	4	4.54	him or herself	0	0	0.00
oneself	2	0	0.00	oneself	0	0	0.00
themself	0	0	0.00	themself	3	2	3.92
theirself	0	0	0.00	theirself	3	2	3.92
theyself	0	0	0.00	theyself	1	1	1.96
theirselves	0	0	0.00	theirselves	1	0	0.00
him-self	1	1	1.14	him-self	0	0	0.00

TOTAL	89	100.0		51	100.0
	140				

Table 10 provides us with the conclusion that both compounds take the singular *they* as their reference. Even though the masculine pronoun exceeds the singular *they* occurrence, most of the examples were not referential with the given indefinite pronoun. This is also the case of the feminine reference which is, despite the number of examples found, very low.

(50) *No one has permitted **him- or herself** to be taken in by rumors.* [COCA: 2007: FIC: VirginiaQRev]

(51) *"Nobody would willingly let **herself** be beaten the way she has."* [COCA: 2010: FIC: Bk: VenomElemental]

In this case, the choice of the feminine reflexive pronoun is influenced by context because the narrator is speaking about a woman. Moreover, also the stereotype might be important in this sentence because it is a women who is usually beaten, not a man.

(52) *You know, I don't think nobody would call **themself** a hero, being in the house.* [COCA: 1993: SPOK: ABC_20/20]

One occurrence was found for the indefinite pronoun *no- one* (written with the hyphen followed by a gap). This sentence is demonstrated in example (53). As far as the reflexive pronouns *no-one* and *no-body* (written with the hyphen) are concerned, these forms exist in the COCA, however they are not followed by any reflexive pronoun.

(53) ***No- one** who called **himself** a falconer would die quietly until he had hunted with a Gyrfalcon!* [COCA:2011:FIC: Framework]

7.2.1 Conclusion

Tables 7 - 10 based on the COCA data bring us to the conclusion that the compounds in *every-* and *no-* prefer the singular *they* reference. In the case of *some-* and *any-*, the

preferred reference differs with respect to the morpheme *–one* and *–body*. The former takes the masculine reference while the latter the singular *they*.

We can also notice the higher occurrence of the dual pronouns than in the BNC (47 dual pronouns in the COCA in comparison with 5 dual pronouns in the BNC), which is probably caused by datedness of the BNC because the dual pronouns are features of present-day English.

As far as the reflexive pronoun *oneself* is concerned, it can be argued that its occurrence is very rare. In the COCA 12 examples of this pronoun were found all appearing in compounds with *–one*, while pronouns in *–body* did not show any reference with the reflexive *oneself*.

It can be also noticed that there is a difference between the numbers of occurrences of the pairs of indefinite pronouns themselves. Compounds in *– one* appear generally in higher numbers than compounds in *–body* in both corpora. Quirk et al. comment on the pairs of pronouns with personal reference saying that they "are equivalent in function and meaning but the pronouns in *–one* are regarded as more elegant than those in *–body*" (1985, 376-378). They also deal with the frequency of compound pronouns *any-*, *every-*, and *some-* based on data from the LOB and Brown corpora of printed BrE and AmE and the results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11 Frequencies of compound pronouns with *any-*, *every-*, and *some-*

	BrE	AmE
anybody	32	42
anyone	141	140
everybody	33	72
everyone	106	94
somebody	27	57
someone	117	94

Source: Quirk et al. 1985, 378.

 The table reveals that in British as well as in American English, the compounds in *–one* are preferred to their counterparts ending in *–body*. This fact was proved also in this research.

8   Data Analysis

8.1   Corpus Research

This chapter is going to provide us with an analysis of the examples obtained from the research in the BNC and the COCA. The structure of this chapter reflects the structure of the theoretical part of this thesis so it will be divided into several sections according to the gender of the reflexive pronoun.

8.1.1 Generic Masculine (himself)

As it was noticed in the previous chapter, the generic masculine was one of two frequent reflexive pronouns referring to indefinite pronouns (together with singular *they*). For my research I chose only examples which contain the reflexive pronoun *himself* referring to indefinite pronoun. The following table shows the occurrence of the generic masculine in the BNC as well as in the COCA. Both corpora contain also the indefinite pronouns written with the hyphen (e.g. *every-body, no-one*), and two tokens with the generic masculine from the COCA were suitable for the research so the following table includes also the results of these indefinite pronouns.

Table 12 Number of tokens of the reflexive pronoun *himself* in the corpora

HIMSELF	BNC		COCA	
	-one	**-body**	**-one**	**-body**
every	12	4	43	19
every-[8]	0	0	0	0
some	41	1	193	43
some-	0	0	1	0
any	20	2	80	19
any-	0	0	0	0
no	1	2	32	17
no-	0	0	1	0
Total	83		448	

---

[8] Indefinite pronouns in the form with the hyphen (i.e. every-one, every-body, some-one, some-body, any-one, any-body, no-one, no-body).

Table 12 reveals that the reflexive pronoun *himself* appears more often as the referent to indefinite pronouns ending in *–one* than in pronouns ending in *-body.* As far as the determiner morphemes are concerned, the highest value of occurrences was found in *some* (in both corpora). Comparing British and American English, it can be argued that the generic masculine referring to indefinite pronouns occurs more often in American English (frequency of 100 tokens per 100 million words in the COCA and 83 tokens per 100 million words in the BNC).

The following examples (54) - (61) demonstrate the use of the generic masculine *himself* referring to all eight indefinite pronouns.

(54) *This is the question which **everyone** ought to ask **himself**, and the only question -- are we as a nation in a better position to prosecute the war as a consequence of it than we would have been by any other arrangement?* [BNC: EW1: W_ac_humanities_arts]

(55) *All these are caused by the too-rapid change of society and **everybody**'s caring about **himself**.* [COCA: 2000: ACAD: Asian Affairs]

(56) *In the final analysis, if **someone** wishes to injure **himself** it's almost impossible to prevent.* [BNC: KRM: S_brdcast_news]

(57) *If you are of such limited ability that all you can do is dress yourself, then there's **somebody** out there who can't dress **himself** and can use your help.* [COCA: 1994: NEWS Denver]

(58) *This is an entirely unregulated industry. **Anyone** can call **himself** an agent and poof, he is an agent.* [COCA: 2009: ACAD: Writer]

(59) *If **anybody** kills **himself**, he will get attention, I will kill myself, therefore I will get attention.* [BNC: CEE: W_biography]

In this example it can be seen that a speaker chose the masculine reference, even though the speaker was a woman.

(60) *This is not a choice that I ever made. **No one** would ever choose this for **himself.***
    [COCA: 2005: SPOK: NPR_Science]

On the other hand, this speech was given by a male speaker who preferred the masculine reference.

(61) *Another amputee says: "**Nobody** can prepare **himself** for that."* [COCA: 2005: MAG: MotherJones]

All the examples above show that the context is gender-neutral which means that no specific gender is implied or meant. In these cases the masculine pronoun was used in general reference for a person of any gender.

Table 13 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the generic masculine in a sample of all 531 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)

HIMSELF	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	**Written**	**Spoken**	**Written**
-one	3 tokens	71 tokens	59 tokens	291 tokens
	0.3[9] per 1 mil. words	**0.79**[10] per 1 mil. words	**0.65**[11] per 1 mil. words	**0.86**[12] per 1 mil. words
-body	2 tokens	7 tokens	32 tokens	66 tokens
	0.2 per 1 mil. words	**0.08** per 1 mil. words	**0.36** per 1 mil. words	**0.20** per 1 mil. words
TOTAL	5 tokens	78 tokens	91 tokens	357 tokens
	0.5 per 1 mil. words	0.87 per 1 mil. words	1.01 per 1 mil. words	1.07 per 1 mil. words

---

[9] To get the frequency of the spoken form per 1 million words, the number was divided by 10 in the BNC

[10] To get the frequency of the written form per 1 million words, the number was divided by 90 in the BNC

[11] To get the frequency of the spoken form per 1 million words, the number was divided by 90 in the COCA

[12] To get the frequency of the written form per 1 million words, the number was divided by 335 in the COCA

Table 13 shows that the generic masculine is used predominantly in the written form in both corpora. It can be also noticed that it appears mainly in American English than in British English (the frequency of 1.01 in spoken and 1.07 in written American English compared to the frequency of 0.5 in spoken and 0.87 in written British English). The table also suggests that both registers are dominated by the compounds in –one.

8.1.2 Singular They (themselves, themself)

As mentioned in the theoretical part, singular *they* is semantically gender-neutral pronoun very often used as the third person singular pronoun despite its grammatical plural features. Two forms of this pronoun can be found in the corpora so this subchapter will be divided into two sections according to the forms of the reflexive pronoun – *themselves* and *themself*.

8.1.2.1 Themselves

This subchapter provides a detailed overview of the referential pronoun *themselves*. The process of searching has been already described in the Chapter 6.1, however, it is necessary to add that all the indefinite pronouns were analysed also in the form with the hyphen (e.g. no-one, every-body) because all of these forms can be found in the corpora. Nevertheless, none of the examples found could be used in this research because the examples did not contain any referential reflexive pronouns so these results are not included in the following table. Table 14 presents the occurrences of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* obtained from the corpora.

Table 14 Number of tokens of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* in the corpora

THEMSELVES	BNC		COCA	
	-one	**-body**	**-one**	**-body**
every	47	28	159	111
some	19	18	108	46
any	29	9	65	50
no	0	9	49	26
Total	159		614	

Table 14 shows the relatively high numbers of occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* which refers to indefinite pronouns. In comparison with the generic masculine, it can be argued that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* is used more often than the generic masculine (the pronoun *themselves* exceeds the pronoun *himself* by 37% in the COCA and by 92% in the BNC[13]).

As far as the difference between American and British English is concerned, the difference in the size of the corpora must be taken into consideration so it can be concluded that the BNC contains more examples of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* referring to the indefinite pronouns than the COCA (frequency of 159 tokens per 100 million words in the BNC compared to 137 tokens per 100 million words in the COCA).

The table also reveals that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* is preferred with the indefinite pronoun ending in *–one* than in *–body* in both corpora. The highest number of occurrences of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* can be noticed with the indefinite pronoun beginning in *every-*, while very low values appear in *no-* compounds, however this result can be influenced by total number of occurrences of the particular indefinite pronouns (e.g. the indefinite pronoun *everyone* appears in both corpora more frequently).

Examples (62) - (69) represent the sentences suitable for the research, having the reflexive pronoun *themselves* referring to the antecedent (indefinite pronoun). For each indefinite pronoun one example was chosen to illustrate the use of the reflexive pronoun.

plural

singular
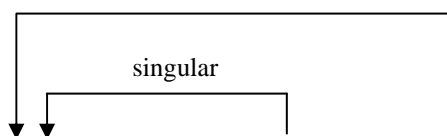
(62) *And while almost **everyone** in America thinks of **themselves** as middle class, income disparities are wide and getting wider.* [COCA: 2010: SPOK: NPR_TalkNation]

---

[13] In the COCA, 448 occurrences of *himself* and 614 occurrences of *themselves* can be found (614/448 = 1.37 = 37%).

In the BNC, 83 occurrences of *himself* and 159 occurrences of *themselves* can be found (159/83 = 1.92 = 92%).

This example shows the relationship between the subject and the verb on the one hand (treated as singular), and the subject and its referential pronoun on the other hand (treated as plural). This disharmony has been already discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis and can be seen in all the following examples.

(63) *Meals are different, **everybody** cooks for **themselves** and keeps their own cupboard with the universal staples -- potatoes, beans, bread, eggs, cornflakes, tea and sugar.* [BNC: EG0: W_non_ac_soc_science]

(64) *We talk casually of **someone** drowning in work or drinking **themselves** to death long before a terminal illness shows itself or their suicidal drive is detected.* [BNC: G0T: W_non_ac_soc_science]

(65) *Usually, when **somebody** recuses **themselves**, it's because they think they're in a position of a conflict or they're a witness.* [COCA: 2006: SPOK: CNN_Grace]

(66) ***Anyone** opening a computer magazine will find **themselves** confronted with a bewildering array of advertisements, all of them promising the greatest deals known to mankind.* [BNC: CTX: W_pop_lore]

(67) *I personally think **anybody** has a right to redeem **themselves**, but redeeming yourself doesn't mean that you just say: "OK, I've been off four months, I'm sorry."* [COCA: 2007: SPOK: Fox_HC challenge]

(68) *"**No one** knows how to protect **themselves** anymore," he says.* [COCA: 2006: SPOK: CNN_YourWorld]

(69) *"**Nobody** throws **themselves** through the air without my permission," muttered the Headmaster turning to Endill.* [BNC: AMB: W_fict_prose]

All the examples above demonstrate the gender-neutral meaning of the reflexive pronoun not indicating either male or female context. Even though Table 14 revealed that the singular *they* reference is used more often than the generic masculine, the question is whether it is not preferred rather in informal than in formal English. For this

purpose, I examined the registers of the examples and the results can be seen in Table 15.

Table 15 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* **in a sample of all 773 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)**

THEMSELVES	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	**Written**	**Spoken**	**Written**
-one	4 tokens	91 tokens	117 tokens	264 tokens
	0.4 per 1 mil. words	**1.01** per 1 mil. words	**1.30** per 1 mil. words	**0.79** per 1 mil. words
-body	30 tokens	34 tokens	141 tokens	92 tokens
	3.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.38** per 1 mil. words	**1.57** per 1 mil. words	**0.28** per 1 mil. words
TOTAL	34 tokens	125 tokens	258 tokens	356 tokens
	3.4 per 1 mil. words	1.39 per 1 mil. words	2.87 per 1 mil. words	1.07 per 1 mil. words

It follows from Table 15 that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* dominates the spoken register in both corpora. As far as spoken English is concerned, indefinite pronouns referred to by *themselves* are used predominantly with the compound in *–body* than with the compound in *–one,* even though the difference between *–one* and *–body* in spoken form in the COCA is almost balanced. It can be also noticed that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* appears mainly in British than in American English in both, spoken and written, forms.

As we know from the theoretical part of this thesis the main competition will be between *himself* and *themselves* so these two reflexive pronouns will be compared. In comparison with the generic masculine, it can be concluded that the singular *they* reference is preferred in speech, but it is necessary to compare the reflexive pronouns *themselves* and *himself* in the written form. The results of this comparison are presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1 Comparison of the reflexive pronouns *himself* and *themselves* in written English (frequency per 1 million words)
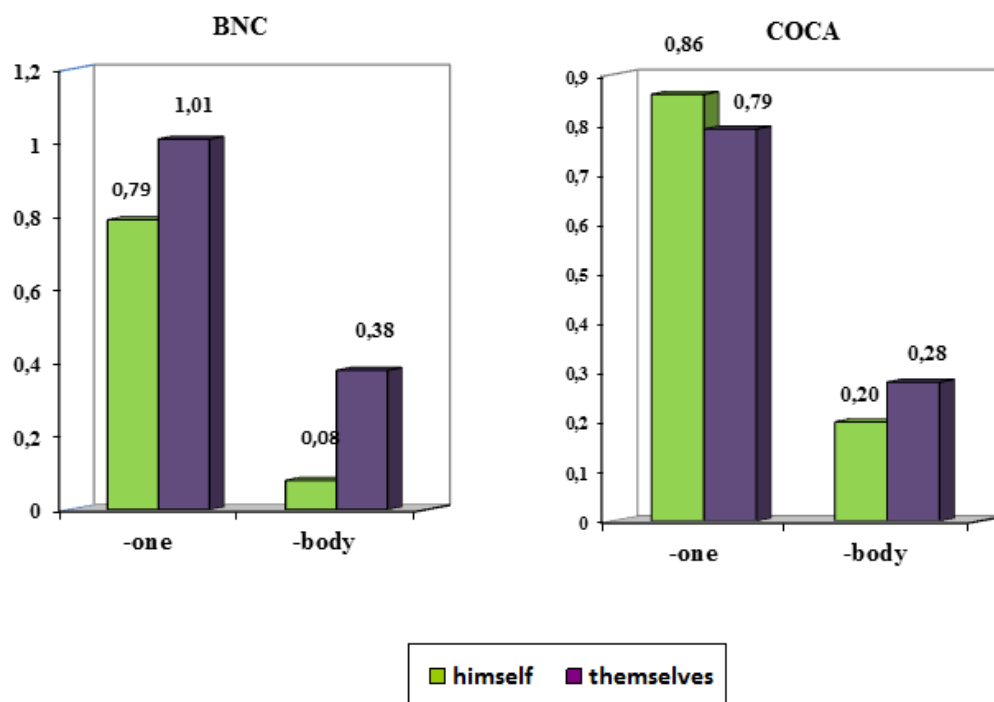
It follows from Chart 1 that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* is employed with indefinite pronouns in the written language more often than the pronoun *himself*. In the BNC its frequency per 1 million words prevails in both compounds (*–one*, and *–body*), while in the COCA it is used with indefinite pronouns ending in *–body* than in *–one* which prefers rather *himself* reference. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that indefinite pronouns prefer using *themselves* reference to the reflexive pronoun *himself*.

8.1.2.2 Themself

Grammatical discussion about the reflexive pronoun *themself* can be found in the theoretical part of this thesis (see Chapter 3.2.2.1) and it was concluded that the morphological structure of this pronoun suggests that it can be classified as singular. This subchapter is going to focus on practical usage of this pronoun. Table 16 below presents an overview of the occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *themself* in the BNC and in the COCA.

Table 16 Number of tokens of the reflexive pronoun *themself* in the corpora

THEMSELF	BNC		COCA	
	-one	**-body**	**-one**	**-body**
every	0	0	1	2
some	2[14]	1	2	2
any	0	0	2	0
no	0	0	0	2
Total	3		11	

In comparison with the reflexive pronoun *themselves*, its singular counterpart creates only a minority group. In both corpora, only 14 examples were found, the majority of these examples (11 tokens) were used in American English, while only 3 tokens appeared in British English. However, the difference in size of both corpora must be taken into consideration, as the COCA is 4.5 times bigger than the BNC. To compare tokens in these corpora, it is necessary to recalculate the occurrences, after doing this, in the COCA 2.4 tokens per 100 mil. words occur, while in the BNC 3 tokens per 100 mil. words can be found, so there only a slight difference in the use of *themself* in American and British English.

The number of tokens is too low to make any conclusions between the differences in *–one* and *–body*, nevertheless, our results suggest that the occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *themself* in compounds in *–one* and *–body* is balanced.

It can be noticed that this pronoun is used also with the indefinite pronouns *everyone* and *everybody*, which are considered notionally plural and rather plural reference is expected.

In the following part the examples of the reflexive pronoun *themself* usage are presented.

(70) *It's really important that they're aware that not **everyone** that presents*

singular   singular

***themself** as a child is always a child.*

[COCA: 1994: SPOK: Ind_Geraldo]

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[14] Both examples come from the same source.

From the grammatical point of view, example (70) shows the grammatical agreement in number of the subject and the predicate, and the subject and its referential pronoun. From the semantics point of view, it can be argued that the subject *everyone* is plural and should be therefore followed by plural referent. However, it can be concluded that the reflexive pronoun serves its purpose because it avoids the sex of the indefinite pronoun.

(71) *If you take it serious, well, here's door number two and what he also did was he enabled **everybody** to feel good about **themself**.* [COCA: 1994: SPOK: Ind_Geraldo]

(72) *She said Paula asked her "how could **someone** hang **themself**?"*
[BNC: K41: W_newsp_other_report]

(73) ***Somebody** out there lost control of **themself**.* [COCA: 1996: SPOK: ABC_20/20]

(74) *My recommendation to **anyone** who considers **themself** sic in the patriot movement or the militia movement, to stay away from Jordan, Montana.* [COCA: 1996: SPOK: ABC_SatNews]

(75) *You know, I don't think **nobody** would call **themself** a hero, being in the house.* [COCA: 1993: SPOK: ABC_20/20]

Examples (70) - (75) illustrate the use of the reflexive pronoun *themself* in British and American English. These examples were chosen at random, but it can be noticed that most of them were used in speech. The following Table 17 presents the proportion of spoken and written sentences this pronoun was used in.

Table 17 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the reflexive pronoun *themself* in a sample of all 14 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)

THEMSELF	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	Written	Spoken	Written

	0 tokens	2 tokens	3 tokens	2 tokens
-one	**0.0** per 1 mil. words	**0.02** per 1 mil. words	**0.03** per 1 mil. words	**0.01** per 1 mil. words
	1 token	0 tokens	6 tokens	0 tokens
-body	**0.1** per 1 mil. words	**0.0** per 1 mil. words	**0.07** per 1 mil. words	**0.00** per 1 mil. words
	1 token	2 tokens	9 tokens	2 tokens
TOTAL	0.1 per 1 mil. words	0.02 per 1 mil. words	0.1 per 1 mil. words	0.01 per 1 mil. words

Even though the reflexive pronoun *themself* appears in very low numbers, it follows from Table 17 that it is employed predominantly in spoken than in written English. The proportion between its usage in compounds in *–one* and *–body* is perfectly balanced (7 tokens: 7 tokens).

8.1.3 Generic Feminine (*herself*)

Before results of the corpus research will be presented, it is necessary to define the term generic feminine and to explain which examples were accepted for the research.

For the purposes of this research, I chose sentences containing an indefinite pronoun referred to by the feminine reflexive pronoun *herself* on condition that no female subject that could be potential antecedent of this pronoun was mentioned earlier in the sentence or in the previous sentence.

The number of relevant examples can be seen in Table 18.

Table 18 Number of tokens of the reflexive pronoun *herself* in the corpora

HERSELF	BNC		COCA	
	-one	**-body**	**-one**	**-body**
every	0	0	4	0
some	7	0	37	3
any	2	0	8	2
no	0	0	1	3
Total	9		58	

It follows from Table 18 that the reflexive pronoun *herself* appears mainly in compounds in *–one* and *some–* in both corpora. As far as the difference between American and British English is concerned, the results revealed almost the same number of occurrences with the slight dominance of this pronoun in American English, as in the BNC 9 tokens per 100 mil. words, while in the COCA 13 tokens per 100 mil. words were found.

Representatives of the examples considered in the research are as follows:

(76) *Is it cheap chic or just cheap?* ***Everyone*** *has asked* ***herself*** *this question, usually while holding up some unbelievably low-priced dress, scrutinizing it and trying to figure out if it's too good to be true.* [COCA: 2008: MAG: HarpersBazaar]

In the case of example (76), the feminine reflexive pronoun was arguably used due to the audience this article was meant for. It was published in Harper's Bazaar, the fashion magazine for women, so the indefinite pronoun *everyone* stands probably for every woman and thus the feminine referent was chosen.

(77) ***Someone*** *who has a perspiration problem owes it to* ***herself*** *not to get overly agitated.* [COCA: 1990: FIC: HarpersMag]

(78) *HE'D FALL FOR: "****Somebody*** *who stands up for* ***herself***. *That's sexy.* [COCA: 2009: MAG: Cosmopolitan]

Example (78) shows the reflexive pronoun *herself* referring to the antecedent *somebody*, however, even though there is no woman mentioned in this or previous sentence, it is expected from the context that *somebody* will be a woman despite the present-day sexual tolerance.

(79) *Jeff continued, then bent down, lifted a cardboard box onto the counter, and began unloading scones into a glass display case. "But -- I don't really think* ***anyone*** *can work just for* ***herself***. *You always have to answer to somebody -- don't you?"* [COCA: 2001: FIC: Ploughshares]

(80) *I said,' Starla, if there's **anybody** can take care of **herself**, I think it's you.* [COCA: 2006: FIC: Mov:SliTHER]

(81) *It was a question **no one** else would have allowed **herself** to ask, for Cara hadn't indicated that she wanted to be asked it.* [COCA: 1993: FIC: Bk:AreYouMine?]

(82) ***Nobody** who thought of **herself** as a democrat would be happy with the offer of a society in which governments were chosen by a scrupulously conducted election every five years,...* [COCA: 1998: ACAD: SocialResrch]

Example (82) appeared in academic writing whose main feature should be gender neutrality. Moreover, this article was written by the male author, Alan Ryan, and neither any previous female context nor female audience is included in this article so it was not found out why the author chose this reflexive pronoun.

To summarize the examples, it can be argued that the choice of the feminine reflexive pronoun was based mainly on the sex of the audience, the speaker, or the stereotype suggesting rather female context.

Table 19 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the reflexive pronoun *herself* in a sample of all 67 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)

HERSELF	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	Written	Spoken	Written
-one	0 tokens	9 tokens	5 tokens	45 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.1** per 1 mil. words	**0.06** per 1 mil. words	**0.13** per 1 mil. words
-body	0 tokens	0 tokens	1 token	7 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.0** per 1 mil. words	**0.01** per 1 mil. words	**0.02** per 1 mil. words
TOTAL	0 tokens	9 tokens	6 tokens	52 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	0.1 per 1 mil. words	0.07 per 1 mil. words	0.15 per 1 mil. words

Table 19 shows that the reflexive pronoun *herself* is used predominantly in written English, its usage in the spoken form is very low. The majority of tokens appeared in compound in –*one* and as far as American and British English is considered, most of the examples were used in American English (11 examples per 100 mil. words in comparison with 9 examples per 100 mil. words in the BNC).

8.1.4 Dual Pronouns (himself or herself)

The hypothesis from the theoretical part is that dual pronouns will be used mainly in the formal writing because of the political correctness and will not appear in speech because of their length and clumsiness.

Dual pronouns can be found in the corpora with different spellings. The basic form I was looking for was *himself or herself*. However, the results also showed *him or herself* and *him- or herself*.

Table 20 Number of tokens of the dual reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* in the corpora

HIMSELF OR HERSELF	himself or herself				him or herself[15]			
	BNC		COCA		BNC		COCA	
	-one	-body	-one	-body	-one	-body	-one	-body
every	0	1	6	1	0	0	3	0
some	2	1	12	2	0	0	5	0
any	1	0	4	1	0	0	7	0
no	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0
Total	5		27		0		19	

It follows from Table 20 that the form *himself or herself* appears more often than *him or herself*, or *him- or herself*. In the BNC only the basic form *himself or herself* can be found. This reflexive dual pronoun occurs mainly in the compound in –*one* and as far as the proportion between American and British English is concerned, the dual pronoun

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[15] This reflexive pronoun includes also the spelling with the hyphen, i.e. him- or herself.

referring to indefinite pronouns occurs mainly in American English (10 tokens per 100 mil. words in the COCA and 5 tokens per 100 min. words in the BNC[16]).

The following examples demonstrate the use of the dual pronouns referring to the indefinite pronouns.

(83) *I think that **everyone** has to judge for **himself or herself** if there is an immediate danger involved.* [COCA: 2003: SPOK: NPR_TalkNation]

(84) *But I think the University of California is creating an incentive for **everybody** to classify **himself or herself** as a victim.* [COCA: 1996: NEWS: SanFranChron]

(85) *If we accept, with Aristotle, that a citizen by true definition is **someone** who involves **himself or herself** in public or community affairs, then that person is "active".* [BNC: APE: W_ac_polit_law_edu]

(86) *It's dangerous to society when **somebody** will place **himself or herself** on the outside of "we."* [COCA: 2011: SPOK: PBS_NewsHour]

(87) *It's a biblical word; **anyone** who refers to **him or herself** as a disciple is making a serious commitment to growth.* [COCA: 2001: MAG: USCatholic]

(88) *And you weren't that young anymore (does **anybody** ever notice **himself or herself** getting older, or is it more just a matter of realizing at the most unexpected of moments-shaving or putting down a book...* [COCA: 2001: FIC: NewEnglandRev]

(89) ***No one** has permitted **him- or herself** to be taken in by rumors.* [COCA: 2007: FIC: VirginiaQRev]

It can be noticed that some of the examples above were used in the spoken language despite their clumsiness. The following Table 21 will examine the use of this pronoun in the spoken and written language.

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[16] All the spellings of the dual pronoun are counted together.

Table 21 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the reflexive pronoun *himself or herself*[17] **in a sample of all 51 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)**

HIMSELF OR HERSELF	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	**Written**	**Spoken**	**Written**
-one	0 tokens	3 tokens	7 tokens	35 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.03** per 1 mil. words	**0.08** per 1 mil. words	**0.10** per 1 mil. words
-body	0 tokens	2 tokens	2 tokens	2 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.02** per 1 mil. words	**0.02** per 1 mil. words	**0.01** per 1 mil. words
TOTAL	0 tokens	5 tokens	9 tokens	37 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	0.05 per 1 mil. words	0.1 per 1 mil. words	0.11 per 1 mil. words

The table shows that the dual reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* is used predominantly in written English, even though its use in speech cannot be completely excluded (9 tokens in the COCA). However, the majority of occurrences come from the COCA (10 occurrences per 100 mil. words, which is twice as much as in the BNC). This can be explained by the fact that the BNC was created in 1980s and contains data which can be considered dated nowadays. The majority of examples appeared in the compound in – *one*.

8.1.5 Generic One (oneself)

As it was already mentioned in the theoretical part, the reflexive pronoun *oneself* completely satisfies all the conditions for the gender-neutral pronoun. However, it is not used frequently as it can be seen in the following table.

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[17] All forms of the dual reflexive pronoun are included (i.e. himself or herself, him or herself, him- or herself).

Table 22 Number of tokens of the reflexive pronoun *oneself* in the corpora

ONESELF	BNC		COCA	
	-one	**-body**	**-one**	**-body**
every	0	0	2	0
some	4	0	7	0
any	0	0	0	0
no	0	0	0	0
Total	4		9	

Table 22 reveals that the reflexive pronoun *oneself* is used very rarely, and it can be found only in the indefinite pronouns *someone* and *everyone*. No occurrence appeared in compound in *–body*. As far as the proportion of the use of the reflexive pronoun *oneself* in American and British English is concerned, its occurrence in British English prevails (2 examples per 100 mil. words in the COCA, 4 examples per 100 mil. words in the BNC).

The following examples illustrate the use of the reflexive pronoun *oneself* in the compounds *everyone* and *someone*.

(90) *Although she believes that spiritual authorities should promote salvation, she also insists that **everyone** must decide for **oneself** to follow the path to salvation.* [COCA: 1998: ACAD: Church&State]

(91) *In a fighting situation, **someone** has to get hurt, either **oneself** or the other guy.* [COCA: 2007: FIC: KenyonRev]

Table 23 introduces the proportion of the written and spoken form of the examples of the reflexive *oneself*.

Table 23 Proportion of the spoken and written form of the reflexive pronoun *oneself* **in a sample of all 13 tokens from both corpora (frequency per 1 million words)**

ONESELF	BNC		COCA	
	Spoken	Written	Spoken	Written
-one	0 tokens	4 tokens	1 token	8 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.4** per 1 mil. words	**0.01** per 1 mil. words	**0.02** per 1 mil. words
-body	0 tokens	0 tokens	0 tokens	0 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	**0.0** per 1 mil. words	**0.0** per 1 mil. words	**0.0** per 1 mil. words
TOTAL	0 tokens	4 tokens	1 token	8 tokens
	0.0 per 1 mil. words	0.04 per 1 mil. words	0.01 per 1 mil. words	0.02 per 1 mil. words

As far as the difference in spoken and written usage is concerned, only one example was used in speech (in the COCA), co it can be concluded that this pronoun is used exclusively in the written form.

Conclusion

The corpus research has revealed that indefinite pronouns are the most frequently referred to by the reflexive pronoun *themselves*. This has been completely proved in the spoken form, where it appears mainly with indefinite pronouns ending in *–body.* As far as written English is concerned, the use of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* generally prevails, only with indefinite pronouns ending in *–one* in American English the reflexive pronoun *himself* is used more often.

It was expected that relatively high values of occurrences of the reflexive pronoun *themself* will appear, however it was found out that this pronoun is used sporadically (11 tokens in the COCA, 3 tokens in the BNC), with the majority of the examples used in speech.

As far as the generic feminine is concerned, it must be mentioned that the choice of the reflexive pronoun *herself* depends on the audience of an article or utterance. The research revealed 67 tokens of this pronoun in both corpora, but most of them were

published in women's magazines and were therefore influenced by female context or stereotype.

The dual reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* appeared in the corpora in free different forms, i.e. *himself or herself, him or herself, him- or herself.*
In all these forms 51 tokens were found in both corpora so it is not used very often and it was found out that this pronoun is used predominantly in written English, however even its use in the spoken form cannot be ignored. It was found out that the dual pronoun is preferred in American English.

The results of the gender-neutral reflexive pronoun *oneself* were not surprising, because it was stated in the theoretical part that the use of this pronoun is not frequent and the research has shown only 13 tokens in both corpora so its usage is really rare, typical rather for British English. It was also found out that this pronoun is never used with indefinite pronouns ending in *–body* and appears mainly in the written register.

8.2   Questionnaire Research

I chose the questionnaire research to find out what the present-day reference to indefinite pronouns is. As it was already said, for our purposes, data in the BNC can be regarded as dated as the corpus was completed in 1993. As far as the COCA is concerned, even though the corpus is more up-to-date and it is updated regularly, it contains data from 1990s whose amount can misrepresent the present-day situation of the gender-neutral language. The questionnaire research is meant to be the additional research to the corpus research. This chapter is going to analyse four sections of the questionnaire thus it is divided into four subchapters.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were supposed to fill in some information about themselves. The summary of these data can be found in Appendix 2
.

8.2.1 Open Ended Questions Section

The first part of the questionnaire itself consists of open ended questions, which means that respondents were given four sentences (with four different indefinite pronouns *everyone*, *someone*, *no one*, *anybody*) and were supposed to complete them with a suitable reflexive pronoun (see the open ended section in Appendix 1). No options were suggested in order to let respondents to choose the reflexive pronoun intuitively. The

following section presents example sentences followed by tables summarising the number of responses.

1) A couple was already seated at table twenty-one when Mac and Sam reached it. **Everyone** introduced _____ with first names as Mac seated Sam.

Table 24

	themselves	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
Number of responses	13	2	0	1	0	0

It can be seen that 13 out of 16 respondents chose the reflexive pronoun *themselves* to refer to the indefinite pronoun *everyone*. However, it can be presumed that the respondents chose this pronoun not because of its gender neutrality but because they feel that the plural pronoun is needed, as the pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* are perceived as plural.

2) It is terrible that **someone** who is acquitted must then pay to defend _____ again in a civil suit.

Table 25

	themselves	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
Number of responses	8	5	0	3	0	0

In the case of example 2) it cannot be talked about the notional plurality and despite this fact the respondents prefer the plural referential pronoun *themselves*, although its dominance is not as emphatic as in the previous example.

3) I believe the banking system has been stabilized. **No one** is asking _____ anymore whether there is some major institution that might fail.

Table 26

	themselves	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
Number of responses	10	4	0	2	0	0

4) Lots of people bought two new cars, put additions on their houses and traded up to new homes. **Anybody** with a hammer could call _____ a carpenter and find a job.

Table 27

	themselves	himself	herself	themself	himself or herself	oneself
Number of responses	8	5	0	3	0	0

In all the examples above, the respondents preferred the reflexive pronoun *themselves* to the masculine reference *himself*. Another option that was chosen was the reflexive *themself* but any other reflexive pronoun was not suggested. Thus, this section of the questionnaire completely proved the dominance of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* employed with indefinite pronouns.

Most of the respondents systematically used just one kind of reflexive pronoun, only a few respondents (5) changed their answers according to the given indefinite pronoun.

8.2.2 Scaled Questions Section

In this section respondents were supposed to arrange the options according to their preference from 1 – 4 (4 being the most acceptable option). The respondents were allowed to put the same preference for more options. The following tables summarize the responses.

1) When the ceremony was over, the big blanket was hung at the doorway and all the family belongings were moved inside. Food was brought in and **everyone** ate and enjoyed _____.

Table 28

Number of responses	themselves	himself	herself	themself	himself or herself	oneself

preference 4[18]	12	1	0	4	0	0
preference 3	3	5	0	10	4	0
preference 2	1	2	0	2	10	0
preference 1	0	8	16	0	2	16

It can be noticed that majority of respondent chose *themselves* as the most suitable option. Those who did not vote for this option chose *themself* as the most acceptable option. One respondent put *themselves* and *himself* on the same, the most preferred, position. On the contrary, *oneself* and *herself* was regarded as unacceptable.

2) Opponents of the film carried pamphlets which they distributed. These stated: "**Everybody** who calls _____ a Christian must now rally to the side of Christ and defend Him."

Table 29

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	12	0	0	6	0	0
preference 3	4	6	0	9	5	0
preference 2	0	2	0	1	8	0
preference 1	0	8	16	0	3	16

This table shows that there is a competition between *themselves* and *themself*. Two respondents put these options on the same level (preference 4). No one chose *himself* as the most preferred reflexive pronoun referring to *everybody*, on the contrary 8 respondents regard this option as unacceptable.

3) In 2006, the Lords blocked Lord Joffe's bill on assisted dying for the terminally ill; while last month the prime minister spoke of his objection to any relaxation of the laws. So we are in a situation where assisting **someone** to kill _____ is illegal but prosecutions don't take place, which leaves both sides of the debate deeply dissatisfied.

---

[18] 4 is the most preferred option, while 1 is the unacceptable option

Table 30

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	11	2	0	3	0	0
preference 3	5	5	0	6	2	0
preference 2	0	1	0	7	10	0
preference 1	0	8	16	0	4	16

It follows from Table 30 that *themselves* is the most preferred option. Compared to indefinite pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* above, it must be mentioned that preference of *themself* has decreased. Two people put *themselves* and *himself* on the same level (preference 4).

4) I know that when you get there, there always seem to be a lot of people who make the effort to welcome people to the Holiday park and they have always seemed friendly and if anything was wrong i.e. you lose something or **somebody** accidentally falls and hurts _____or indeed somebody else the staff are always quick to help.

Table 31

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	10	4	0	2	0	0
preference 3	6	2	0	9	2	0
preference 2	0	1	0	5	10	0
preference 1	0	9	16	0	4	16

The table above shows the increase of the preference of *himself* and simultaneously the decrease of *themself* preference. The most preferred reflexive pronoun employed with *somebody* is *themselves*. Reflexive pronouns *oneself* and *herself* are again unacceptable.

5) Losing a fight is a very traumatic experience. **No one** wants to start pointing fingers at _____. You start thinking it's everybody's fault but yourself.

Table 32

Number of	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or*	*oneself*

responses					*herself*	
preference 4	15	2	0	4	0	0
preference 3	1	3	0	7	2	0
preference 2	0	4	0	5	12	0
preference 1	0	7	16	0	2	16

In the case of indefinite pronoun *no one*, the preference of reflexive pronoun *themselves* has increased (preference 4). The same tendency can be noticed also in the pronoun *themself*. As far as *himself* is concerned, its position seems to be stable in majority of indefinite pronouns.

6) There had been an attempt at a revolution in Russia, but then **nobody** concerned _____ much with the eccentricities of the world south of Cathcart or east of Camlachie.

Table 33

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	15	2	0	0	0	0
preference 3	1	4	0	10	1	0
preference 2	0	1	0	6	10	0
preference 1	0	9	16	0	5	16

Compared to indefinite pronoun *no one*, the referential pronoun of *nobody* seems to be the same with the exception of the decrease of preference 4 of *themself* and increase in unacceptability of the pronoun *himself*.

7) Homoeopathy can be safe and effective and was established long before most of our present allopathic treatments. Unfortunately, **anyone** can describe _____ as a homoeopath. There are, however, proper training agencies and reputable bodies.

Table 34

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	10	2	0	3	0	0
preference 3	5	5	0	8	0	0

preference 2	1	0	0	5	15	0
preference 1	0	9	16	0	1	16

Table 34 reveals that 5 respondents chose preference 3 for themselves and their most preferred reflexive pronoun is *himself* (2 respondents) and *themself* (3 respondents). The reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* is, as usually, ranked as preference 2.

8) "At least 50 tanks are on their way to this building," he said at one point after hearing a whispered report from an aide. "**Anybody** who wants to save _____can do so. We are continuing to work."

Table 35

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	12	1	0	0	0	0
preference 3	4	6	0	9	3	0
preference 2	0	0	1	7	11	0
preference 1	0	9	15	0	2	16

In this section of the questionnaire it has been proved that native speakers of English prefer using the reflexive pronoun *themselves* to the generic masculine to refer to indefinite pronouns. Surprising results were found about the reflexive pronoun *themself*, which was chosen more frequently than I expected because the corpus research revealed very low usage of this pronoun. It must be also mentioned that the reflexive pronoun *himself* was very often ranked as unacceptable referential pronoun.

As far as the dual reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* is concerned, it can be concluded that it is rather not preferred option. The usage of other reflexive pronouns is very rare and some of them, *oneself* and *herself*, were regarded as unacceptable.

The tables above also show that there is almost no difference in choice of the reflexive pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns ending in *–one* and *–body*.

8.2.3 Contrastive Pairs Section

The third part of the questionnaire focused on differences between individual pairs of pronouns (e.g. *somebody* and so*meone*) and on difference between nationally plural *everybody* (*everyone*) and other indefinite pronouns. Respondents were given pairs of

the same sentences differing only in the indefinite pronoun. The aim of this part was to find out if the choice of the reflexive pronoun is influenced by the nominal morpheme.

A. 1) We're in Waikiki and **everybody** is enjoying _____.

Table 36

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	12	0	0	5	0	0
preference 3	3	5	0	10	6	0
preference 2	1	3	0	1	6	0
preference 1	0	8	16	0	4	16

2) We're in Waikiki and **nobody** is enjoying _____.

Table 37

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	10	5	0	1	0	0
preference 3	6	6	0	6	3	0
preference 2	0	1	0	6	10	0
preference 1	0	4	16	3	3	16

The first pair (A) has revealed that there is a slight difference in the choice of the pronoun referring to the indefinite pronouns *everybody* and *nobody*. The former is predominantly referred to by the reflexive pronoun *themselves* (12 respondents), while none of the 16 respondents chose the generic masculine as the most preferred option. On the contrary, half of the respondents (8) regard the generic masculine reference as unacceptable.

As far as the indefinite pronoun *nobody* is concerned, the number of *themselves* reference decreased (10) while the generic masculine reference increased (5). However, it must be stated that *themselves* still dominates the number of occurrences. Therefore, it has been proved that the indefinite pronoun *everybody* is regarded as notionally plural and prefers the use of the plural reference.

B. 1) We are in a situation where assisting **someone** to kill _____ is illegal.

Table 38

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	9	4	0	3	0	0
preference 3	6	6	0	7	4	0
preference 2	1	0	0	6	8	0
preference 1	0	6	16	0	4	16

2) We are in a situation where assisting **somebody** to kill _____ is illegal.

Table 39

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	9	4	0	3	0	0
preference 3	5	7	0	7	4	0
preference 2	2	0	1	6	7	0
preference 1	0	5	15	0	5	16

C. 1) I think **no one** likes to see _____ criticized in print.

Table 40

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	14	3	0	2	0	0
preference 3	2	5	0	10	2	0
preference 2	0	4	0	4	10	0
preference 1	0	4	16	0	4	16

2) I think **nobody** likes to see _____ criticized in print.

Table 41

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	13	3	0	2	0	0
preference 3	3	5	0	10	1	0
preference 2	0	4	0	4	11	0
preference 1	0	4	16	0	4	16

D. 1) In many states almost **anyone** can call _____ a financial planner.

Table 42

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	12	4	0	0	0	0
preference 3	4	3	0	9	2	0
preference 2	0	0	0	6	13	0
preference 1	0	9	16	1	1	16

2) In many states almost **anybody** can call _____ a financial planner.

Table 43

Number of responses	*themselves*	*himself*	*herself*	*themself*	*himself or herself*	*oneself*
preference 4	12	3	0	0	0	0
preference 3	4	4	0	9	2	0
preference 2	0	0	0	6	13	0
preference 1	0	9	16	1	1	16

Tables 38 - 43 present the difference between the indefinite pronouns ending in *–one* and *–body*. It can be seen that the results usually differ only in one or two responses, which cannot be regarded as the ample proof for creating some rule assigning a certain reflexive pronoun to one indefinite pronoun of the pair. It follows from the tables that native speakers do not make any significant difference in the use of reflexive pronouns referring either to indefinite pronouns in *–one* or to *–body*.

8.2.4 Formal vs. Informal English Section

The last part of the questionnaire focuses on referential pronouns of the indefinite pronouns in formal and informal language. Respondents were given two extracts which they were asked to complete by personal pronouns. This part does not focus only on reflexive pronouns because all referential pronouns in sentences were omitted in order not to suggest the gender of the indefinite pronoun so the aim of this part was to reveal the gender of indefinite pronouns. Formal English was represented by an extract taken from Meyers (1990, 231) and modified to serve our purposes. Respondents should have imagined that they read this article in an academic journal. Conversely, informal

English was represented by a speech taken from the COCA (COCA: 2007: SPOK: Fox_Gibson), and respondents were supposed to fill in this conversation by personal pronouns. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

The results of this survey are the following:
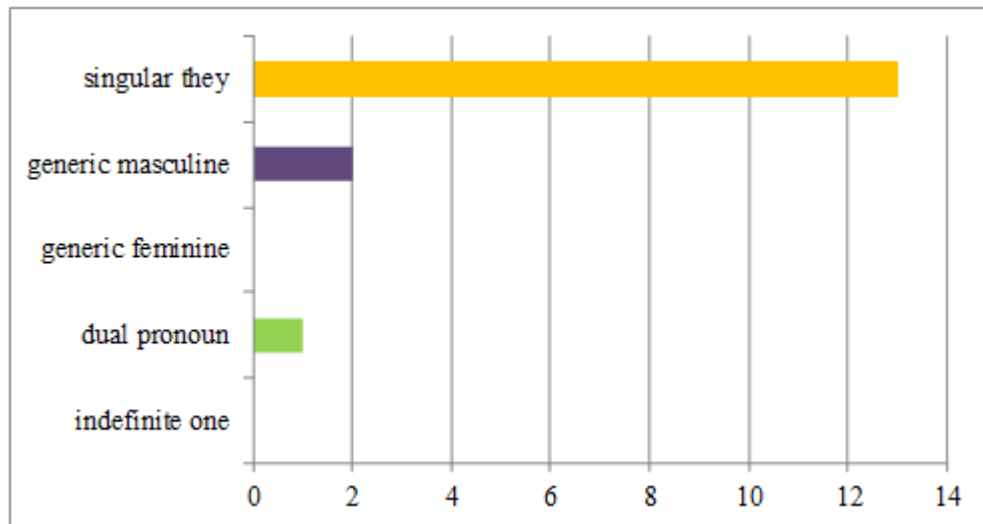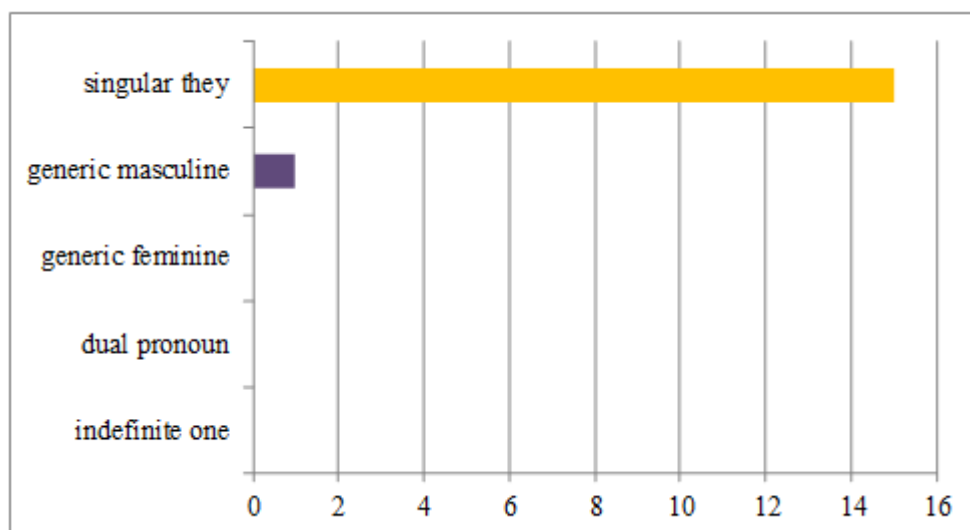
Chart 2 Referential pronouns in formal language

Chart 2 shows that the respondents prefer singular *they* reference in formal language. Two responses were chosen for the generic masculine and only one response for dual pronoun *him or her*, no other options were chosen.

Chart 3 Referential pronouns in informal language

As far as the spoken form is concerned, Chart 3 reveals the total dominance of the singular *they* reference. Only one respondent chose the generic masculine to refer to indefinite pronouns *somebody* and *everybody* in the text.

The research on differences in the choice of a pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns in formal and informal English has revealed that both registers are dominated by the singular *they* reference. In the theoretical part it was argued that the standard generic masculine should appear in the formal language nowadays, however, the converse has been proved. It was also expected that the dual pronoun will be used in formal texts whose main feature is political correctness, however, only 6% of respondents chose the dual pronoun, or more specifically all forms of the dual pronoun (i.e. *he or her, him or her, his or her, himself or herself*) to refer to the indefinite pronoun in formal English.

As far as informal English is concerned, it can be concluded that the same referential pronoun (i.e. singular *they*) as in the formal form was chosen as the preferred option. The use of singular *they* in informal English was expected as this phenomenon has its support also in grammar books (Quirk et al., Huddleston and Pullum, Biber et al.) quoted in the theoretical part.

Conversely, the generic masculine appeared in the responses with very low frequency. Comparing the low number of occurrences of the generic masculine in this part of the questionnaire with its other sections, it must be realised that this part enabled respondents to choose only one option, while in other sections, respondents could put more reflexive pronouns on the same level, which means that the preference of *himself* could have increased by this system. However, when only one reflexive pronoun is needed, the most preferred one (in this case the reflexive pronoun *themselves*) is chosen.

The aim of this thesis is to find out what the most frequent gender-neutral pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns is, but I wanted to push the research into more qualitative way trying to find out why native speakers of English use the certain reflexive pronoun. It is not possible to make this qualitative research in corpora so I focused my attention on respondents of the questionnaire and asked them why they used the certain pronoun because I was in contact with them, however, the respondents usually replied that their choice was predominantly intuitive not following any rule. They said that they predominantly excluded the generic masculine and thought about *themselves* and *themself* choosing finally the former. In my opinion the masculine pronoun is not felt as gender-neutral anymore and thus English native speakers

unintentionally prefer rather non-gender specific pronoun. This tendency is probably closely related to present-day social changes. The reflexive pronoun *themselves* is usual in informal language (as it is stated in grammar books quoted in the theoretical part and which has been proved in the questionnaire research above) and we are arguably witnessing its penetration into formal usage.

9   Conclusions

The research has revealed that indefinite pronouns which lack gender specification are the most frequently followed by the singular *they* reference. This phenomenon was demonstrated on the use of reflexive pronouns employed after compound pronouns (i.e. *everyone, everybody, someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody*). The research consists of two parts – the corpus research which is the main part of the research providing the basic data, and the questionnaire research whose aim was to describe the present-day situation of the use of the third person gender neutral pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns.

The corpus research has proved that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* is the preferred referential pronoun employed with indefinite pronouns. This reflexive pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns prevails in the spoken form of British as well as American English where such a result was expected because this phenomenon was mentioned also in grammar books (e.g. Quirk et. al., Biber et al., Huddleston and Pullum). It was also found out that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* appears the most often with indefinite pronouns ending in *–one*.

As far as the written form of British and American English is concerned, it was found out that, unexpectedly, the reflexive pronoun *themselves* prevails also in written English. The occurrences per 1 mil. words are the following: the pronoun *themselves* in the BNC - 1.39, compared to *himself* in the BNC - 0.87. It can be seen that the difference in values is noticeable and thus the reflexive pronoun *themselves* can be regarded as a dominant referential pronoun employed with indefinite pronouns in the written form of British English. In American English the difference is not so big: *themselves* – the frequency of 1.07 per 1 mil. words compared to the pronoun *himself* – 1.06 (for details see Chart 1 in Chapter 8.1.2). It can be noticed that the values of reflexive pronouns *themselves* and *himself* are almost balanced in the COCA, with the slight majority of *themselves*. Therefore, it can be concluded that also in written English the reflexive pronoun *themselves* prevails in both corpora.

The questionnaire research only confirmed the findings of the corpus research. 16 respondents took part in the survey with the result that the reflexive pronoun *themselves* was chosen as the most preferred option to refer to indefinite pronouns. On the contrary, the reflexive pronoun *himself* was in 50% chosen as unacceptable option, while only 10% of responses ranked it as the most preferred option. It was found out

that approximately two or three respondents put *himself* and *themselves* on the same level of preference 4 in almost every question. Surprising results were found out about the reflexive pronoun *themself* which was frequently used as preference 3 (out of 4), which means that this pronoun even exceeds the preference of *himself*. To summarise the results of the questionnaire research, the most preferred reflexive pronoun referring to indefinite pronouns is *themselves*, followed by its singular counterpart *themself*, then *himself*, *himself or herself* and the last two options, *oneself* and *herself*, were ranked as unacceptable.

Both types of the research have proved the rare use of other reflexive pronouns referring to indefinite pronouns. The generic feminine was not used in the questionnaire research at all, while the corpus research has shown that most of the examples used the generic feminine to refer to indefinite pronouns only when addressing female audience or in typical situations connected with women.

It was expected that the dual reflexive pronoun *himself or herself* will appear in the role of the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun very often, especially in the written form, but the results have shown that the converse is true. The dual pronoun was found in the corpora in three different spellings, i.e. *himself or herself*, *him or herself*, and *him- or herself*. The corpora have revealed 5 tokens in the BNC and 46 tokens in the COCA (5 tokens per 100 min. words in the BNC, and 10 tokens per 100 mil. words in the COCA) so it can be concluded that the frequency of the dual pronoun is very low appearing more often in American English in the written form, even though its occurrence in spoken English cannot be regarded as insignificant (9 tokens in the COCA).

The morphologically singular reflexive pronoun *themself* is a good solution of the missing third person singular gender-neutral pronoun, however the corpus research has proved that it is used very sporadically (11 tokens in the COCA, 3 tokens in the BNC). The majority of examples (9 out of 14) were used in spoken American English. On the contrary, the questionnaire survey has shown that many responses (68 out of 128 possible votes in the scaled questions section) ranked this pronoun as rather preferred (preference 3 out of 4) so this result differs from the corpus research.

The last reflexive pronoun taken into account as the gender-neutral third person singular reflexive pronoun is *oneself*, nevertheless, this pronoun appeared in the corpora in very low numbers (4 tokens in the BNC, 9 tokens in the COCA) and the surprising fact is that it never occurs with indefinite pronouns ending in –*body* and only one token

was used in speech, so this pronoun is typical for written English. In the questionnaire research the reflexive *oneself* was ranked as unacceptable by all respondents in all examples.

As far as the differences between individual indefinite pronouns are concerned, it must be mentioned that the pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* show the higher values of the occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *themselves* referring to them than to other indefinite pronouns. For example when we compare reflexive pronouns referring to *everyone* with reflexive pronouns referring to *someone*, it can be argued that in the COCA 72% of relevant examples of all reflexive pronouns referring to *everyone* is represented by *themselves* (see Table 7), while only 30% of all reflexive pronouns is the *themselves* reference connected with the antecedent *someone* (see Table 8). This agrees with the theoretical part arguing that the pronouns *everyone* and *everybody* are perceived as notionally plural and therefore they prefer the singular *they* reference.

The research focused also on the difference between the use of reflexive pronouns referring to indefinite pronouns ending in *–body* and *–one*. The corpus research has proved the reflexive pronoun *themselves* prevails in both types of compounds (*–body* as well as *–one*). It was found out that the indefinite pronouns ending in *–body* are used predominantly in the spoken form and highly prefer the singular *they* reference (with the frequency of 3.0 per 1 mil. words in the BNC, and 1.57 in the COCA in comparison with the generic masculine reference with the frequency of 0.2 in the BNC and 0.36 in the COCA). This issue was included also into the questionnaire research, nevertheless no significant differences in the choice of the reflexive pronouns employed with indefinite pronouns ending either in *–one* or *–body* were proved because respondents chose the singular *they* reference for both types of compounds.

One part of the questionnaire dealt with the differences between formal and informal English, but almost no difference was noticed because most of the respondents chose the singular *they* reference as the most preferred one in both registers. In formal English only one occurrence of the dual pronoun was found which did not appear in informal English.

To conclude the thesis it must be mentioned that the research does not correspond with the findings of the theoretical part arguing that formal English is dominated by the generic masculine reference which is still perceived as gender-neutral, while in informal English singular *they* reference can be found. This hypothesis was proved only partly. It was found out that in informal English indefinite pronouns are referred to by the

reflexive pronoun *themselves*, but, surprisingly, formal English prefers the singular *they* reference as well. Therefore, to answer the research question posed at the beginning of this thesis, it can be said that the gender-neutral third person singular pronoun employed with indefinite pronouns is singular *they*, used not only in spoken but also in written language.

RESUMÉ

Tato práce pojednává o nepříznakových zájmenech v anglickém jazyce. Konkrétně se zaměřuje na zájmena, která postrádají specifikaci rodu a odhaluje, jakého rodu je jejich referenční zájmeno. Toto problematika je demonstrována na příkladu neurčitých zájmen, která pro naše účely vystupují v roli antecedentů a jako jejich referenční zájmeno bylo zkoumáno zvratné zájmeno.

Toto téma jsem si vybrala proto, že se v odborných textech čím dál častěji vyskytují diskuze o chybějícím zájmenu 3. osoby jednotného čísla, které by nevykazovalo znaky určitého rodu (mužského či ženského) a mohlo by být všeobecně použito jako referent v případě antecedentů neupřesněného nebo nespecifikovaného rodu (např. *student*, *friend*, *someone*). V minulosti bylo zvykem, že se k takovémuto zájmenu odkazovalo referenčním zájmenem mužského rodu, avšak s postupem času, kdy můžeme díky nejrůznějším hnutím za rovnoprávnost a celkové změně společnosti pozorovat změny také v lingvistice, především v její lexikální složce, tento trend upadá a mužské referenční zájmeno je čím dál tím méně vnímáno jako genderově neutrální.

Cílem této práce je tedy zjistit, která zvratná zájmena 3. osoby jednotného čísla jsou nejčastěji používána při odkazování na zájmeno neurčité. K tomuto účelu byl proveden výzkum složený ze dvou částí. Tou hlavní, nosnou složkou studie byl korpusový výzkum, k němuž jsem použila Britský národní korpus (BNC) a Korpus současné americké angličtiny (COCA). Druhá část výzkumu byla založena na dotazníkovém šetření.

Teoretická část diplomové práce nabízí souhrnný pohled na toto téma založen na odborné literatuře. První kapitola nám představuje předmět studia, uvádí nás do problematiky a seznamuje nás se základními pojmy. V této části také zmiňuji již probíhající změny založené na genderové rovnosti, konkrétně změny v lexikologii, kdy byla podstatná jména s nespecifikovaným rodem vyvolávající spíše maskulinní konotace nahrazena genderově neutrálními podstatnými jmény (např. podstatné jméno *chairman* bylo změněno na *chairperson*, atd.). Další kapitola nabízí přehled pravidel a názorů týkajících se genderově neutrálního zájmena 3. osoby jednotného čísla, pro náš účel mohou být brány v úvahu následující zájmena rodu: mužského, ženského, singulární *they*, *one* a duální zájmena (např. *he or she*). Quirk et al. tvrdí, že referenční zájmeno odkazující na antecedenty s nespecifikovaným rodem je maskulinního rodu. Připouští také použití singulárního *they*, ovšem pouze v neformálním stylu. Podobný

názor můžeme najít také ve stylistické příručce *Chicago Manual of Style* a v gramatice Huddlestona a Pulluma. Modernější gramatika Hewingsova už nerozlišuje mezi formálním a neformálním stylem, ale tvrdí, že pro oba styly může být shodně použito singulárního *they*. Podobný názor je podporován i dalšími lingvisty a právě tento rozpor byl podnětem pro můj výzkum. Co se týče použití singulárního *they* odkazujícího k antecedentu nespecifikovaného rodu, můžeme se často setkat s názorem, že toto použití je gramaticky nesprávné, protože není dodržována shoda (tzv. concord). Gramatickou správností singulárního *they* se zabývá celá jedna kapitola.

Poslední kapitola teoretické části práce představuje doporučení lingvistů, jak dodržovat politicky korektní a genderově neutrální jazyk, tolik vyžadovaný dnešní společností, hlavně v některých stylech (např. v akademickém stylu). Často se jedná o rady, jak se vyhnout právě problematice pojednávané v této práci, tedy jak vynechat použití reference specifického rodu u podstatných jmen, u kterých rod neznáme. Tato doporučení ovšem neřeší náš problém a proto následuje výzkumná část.

Praktická část se skládá z korpusového výzkumu provedeného v Britském národním korpusu (BNC) a v Korpusu současné americké angličtiny (COCA), a dotazníkového šetření. Úvodní kapitola praktické části je věnována metodologii obou druhů výzkumu. Při hledání v korpusech byl postup následující: zadala jsem si do korpusového manažera vždy jednotlivé neurčité zájmeno (obou jeho typů, např. *anyone* a *anybody*) a bylo vyžadováno, aby bylo toto neurčité zájmeno následováno zájmenem zvratným označeným tímto „tagem": [ppx*]. Celkem bylo nalezeno 3 606 příkladů, konkrétně 615 tokenů v BNC a 2 991 v COCA, které bylo potřeba manuálně projít a vybrat příklady použitelné pro výzkum. Kritériem pro selekci bylo to, aby dané zvratné zájmeno odkazovalo k neurčitému zájmenu jako k svému antecedentu. Po selektování tokenů z BNC mi zbylo 263 z původních 615 tokenů (43 %) a v COCA 1 197 z původních 2 991 příkladů (40 %), které mohly být použity pro další výzkum.

V další kapitole se dostáváme k samotné analýze vybraných příkladů. Tato část je rozdělena do několika podkapitol podle konkrétního referenčního zájmena. Jak jsem očekávala, největší „souboj" se odehrál mezi referentem maskulinním a singulárním *they*. Korpusový výzkum prokázal, že nejčastějším referentem neurčitých zájmen je zvratné zájmeno *themselves* (773 výskytů, z toho 159 v BNC a 614 v COCA). Tento výsledek byl jednoznačně prokázán v mluveném projevu, co se týče psané formy jazyka, dvě zájmena s nejvyšším počtem nalezených tokenů (*himself* a *themselves*) byla podrobněji srovnána a bylo zjištěno, že i v této formě jazyka převládá v roli referenta

singulární *they*. Tento závěr se tedy rozchází s doporučením některých příruček gramatiky citovaných v teoretické části (např. Quirk et al., Huddleston a Pullum), které ve formálním jazyce upřednostňují použití maskulinního referenčního zájmena *himself* (korpusový výzkum odhalil 531 výskytů, z toho 83 v BNC a 448 v COCA). Dalším zkoumaným zájmenem bylo duální zvratné zájmeno (*himself or herself*) vyskytující se v různých psaných podobách. Na základě zjištění v odborné literatuře se očekával vysoký výskyt tohoto zájmena především v akademických textech, které jsou typické svým genderově korektním jazykem, ovšem korpusový výzkum prokázal velice nízký výskyt tohoto referenčního zájmena odkazujícího k neurčitým zájmenům (51 výskytů, z toho 5 tokenů v BNC a 46 v COCA). Za další minoritní zájmeno můžeme považovat zájmeno *themself*, tedy morfologicky singulární variantu zájmena *themselves*, které by neporušovalo tzv. concord, ovšem korpusový výzkum odhalil, že je jeho použití velice sporadické (14 výskytů, z toho 3 v BNC a 11 v COCA). Co se týče zvratného zájmena ženského rodu (*herself*) vyskytujícího se v roli referenta neurčitého zájmena, můžeme shrnout, že i když se toto zájmeno vyskytuje v poměrně vysokých počtech (67 výskytů, z toho 9 v BNC a 58 v COCA), jeho použití je často ovlivněno kontextem nebo stereotypem a nemůže tak být považováno za čistě genderově neutrální. Posledním vztažným zájmenem 3. osoby jednotného čísla, které by přicházelo v úvahu jako referent neurčitého zájmena je *oneself*, jehož použití ovšem nebylo podporováno ani literaturou a také korpusový výzkum prokázal jeho minoritní používání (13 výskytů, z toho 4 v BNC a 9 v COCA).

Korpusový výzkum zahrnuje rovněž detailní zpracování použití jednotlivých zvratných zájmen odkazujících k neurčitým zájmenům v různých registrech (psané a mluvené angličtině). Zkoumán byl i rozdíl v užívání jednotlivých zvratných zájmen v britské a americké angličtině.

Druhá polovina praktické části této diplomové práce je založena na výzkumu formou dotazníků. Cílem tohoto šetření bylo zjistit skutečnou současnou situaci v používání referenčních zájmen odkazujících k neurčitým zájmenům. Tento druh výzkumu by měl doplnit hlavní, korpusový, výzkum, který není pro naše účely úplně vyhovující z důvodu širokého časového rozsahu korpusů (BNC zahrnuje data v rozsahu let 1980 – 1993, COCA z období 1990 do současnosti), kdy starší data mohou citelně ovlivnit výsledky. Protože je zkoumané téma velice aktuální, jak lze vidět na citované odborné literatuře, jejíž doporučení se liší v 80. letech 20. století od doporučení z počátků 21. století, zvolila jsem jako doplňkový výzkum právě dotazníkové šetření.

Dotazník byl zveřejněn na internetu. Jedinou podmínkou účasti bylo, aby byl respondent rodilým mluvčím. Celkem jsem nashromáždila 16 odpovědí.

Úkolem respondentů bylo doplnit do vět chybějící zvratné zájmeno odkazující k zájmenu neurčitému. Respondentům bylo nabídnuto 7 možností, z toho 6 možných zvratných zájmen 3. osoby jednotného čísla a možnost jiné volby. U každého zvratného zájmena pak měli určit na stupnici 1-4, jak moc je daná možnost přijatelná. Výsledky dotazníkového šetření potvrdily závěry korpusového výzkumu, kdy bylo jako nejpřijatelnější referenční zvratné zájmeno vybráno zájmeno *themselves*. Co se týče zájmena *himself*, polovina respondentů dokonce označila možnost referenčního maskulinního zájmena jako neakceptovatelnou, pouze 10% respondentů ji vybralo jako možnost nejpřijatelnější. Zajímavý výsledek byl odhalen u zájmena *themself*, které v preferenci dokonce předčilo zájmeno *himself*. Výsledek dotazníkového šetření tedy je, že nejpreferovanějším zvratným zájmenem odkazujícím k neurčitému zájmenu je *themselves*, následováno jeho morfologicky singulárním tvarem *themself*, poté *himself*, duálním zájmenem *himself or herself* a poslední dvě možnosti *herself* a *oneself* byly označeny jako neakceptovatelné.

Další kapitola dotazníkového šetření se zabývá rozdíly v referentech mezi jednotlivými neurčitými zájmeny. Bylo zjištěno, že neurčitá zájmena *everybody* a *everyone* preferují jako referenta raději zájmeno *themselves*, protože vyvolávají spíše plurální konotace, což bylo dokázáno také v korpusovém výzkumu. Dotazník se zaměřoval také na rozdíly v použití referentů u neurčitých zájmen končících na *–one* a *–body* (např. *someone* a *somebody*), ale žádné významné rozdíly nebyly zaznamenány, protože respondenti většinou volili referenta *themselves* pro oba typy neurčitých zájmen.

Poslední kapitola dotazníkového průzkumu se soustřeďuje na rozdíly mezi formálním a neformálním stylem jazyka. Bylo zjištěno, že oběma stylům dominuje referent *themselves*. Nepotvrdila se tedy hypotéza, že formální jazyk bude používat spíše maskulinního referenta, zatímco neformální jazyk bude upřednostňovat singulární *they*.

Poslední část práce shrnuje veškeré výsledky z obou druhů výzkumů a formuluje závěry. Oba výzkumy tedy došly ke stejným výsledkům, a sice že nejpreferovanější referenční zvratné zájmeno odkazující k neurčitému zájmenu jako k antecedentu je *themselves*. Tento hlavní závěr je pak rozdělen do několika podskupin zkoumání, jako jsou rozdíly v referentovi v závislosti na jednotlivých registrech nebo neurčitých

zájmenech. Tento závěr je ovšem v rozporu s některými gramatickými příručkami a odbornými lingvistickými texty citovanými v teoretické části této práce.

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a student of English Philology and I would like to ask you to fill in this questionnaire which will be used as a source for my Master's thesis entitled "*Gender-Neutral Pronoun sin the English Language*". It focuses on usage of reflexive pronouns after indefinite pronouns which lack sex specification and tries to find out which reflexive pronoun is used as a generic pronoun nowadays.

Please, complete the following sentences using any **third person reflexive pronoun** (himself, herself, themselves, themself, himself or herself, oneself, etc.). You will be asked either to complete a sentence with your own option or to arrange the given options according to your preference.

The questionnaire is anonymous and is meant only for native speakers of English. To fill in the questionnaire will not take you more than 10 minutes. Thank you, Veronika Teglová

Information about a respondent (choose the right option)

Age: 0-15, 15-30, 30-45, 45-60, 60-75, more than 75

Sex: Male, Female

Education: primary, secondary, university

Region (where you spent most of your life): _____

Questionnaire

A. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Complete the sentences with your own reflexive pronoun. Choose only one (the most preferred) option.

1) A couple was already seated at table twenty-one when Mac and Sam reached it. **Everyone** introduced _____ with first names as Mac seated Sam.

2) It is terrible that **someone** who is acquitted must then pay to defend _____ again in a civil suit.

3) I believe the banking system has been stabilized. **No one** is asking _____ anymore whether there is some major institution that might fail.

4) Lots of people bought two new cars, put additions on their houses and traded up to new homes. **Anybody** with a hammer could call _____ a carpenter and find a job.

B. SCALED QUESTIONS

For each sentence, arrange the given reflexive pronouns according to your preference from 1 – 4, 1 for an unacceptable option, 4 for the most acceptable option. You can put two or more options on the same level, which means to use the same number (e.g. 3) for more options.

1) When the ceremony was over, the big blanket was hung at the doorway and all the family belongings were moved inside. Food was brought in and **everyone** ate and enjoyed _____.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option) _____ ☐

2) Opponents of the film carried pamphlets which they distributed. These stated: "**Everybody** who calls _____ a Christian must now rally to the side of Christ and defend Him."

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option) _____ ☐

3) In 2006, the Lords blocked Lord Joffe's bill on assisted dying for the terminally ill; while last month the prime minister spoke of his objection to any relaxation of the laws. So we are in a situation where assisting **someone** to kill _____ is illegal but prosecutions don't take place, which leaves both sides of the debate deeply dissatisfied.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

4) I know that when you get there, there always seem to be a lot of people who make the effort to welcome people to the Holiday park and they have always seemed friendly

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and if anything was wrong i.e. you lose something or **somebody** accidentally falls and hurts _____ or indeed somebody else the staff are always quick to help.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option) _____ ☐

5) Losing a fight is a very traumatic experience. **No one** wants to start pointing fingers at _____. You start thinking it's everybody's fault but yourself.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

6) There had been an attempt at a revolution in Russia, but then **nobody** concerned _____ much with the eccentricities of the world south of Cathcart or east of Camlachie.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

7) Homoeopathy can be safe and effective and was established long before most of our present allopathic treatments. Unfortunately, **anyone** can describe _____ as a homoeopath. There are, however, proper training agencies and reputable bodies.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

8) "At least 50 tanks are on their way to this building," he said at one point after hearing a whispered report from an aide. "**Anybody** who wants to save _____can do so. We are continuing to work."

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

I.   **CONTRASTIVE PAIRS**

1) We're in Waikiki and **everybody** is enjoying _____.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

We're in Waikiki and **nobody** is enjoying _____.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

2) We are in a situation where assisting **someone** to kill _____ is illegal.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

We are in a situation where assisting **somebody** to kill _____ is illegal.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

3) I think **no one** likes to see _____ criticized in print.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

I think **nobody** likes to see _____ criticized in print.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

4) In many states almost **anyone** can call _____ a financial planner.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option)_____ ☐

In many states almost **anybody** can call _____ a financial planner.

a) himself ☐   b) themselves ☐   c) herself ☐

d) oneself ☐   e) himself or herself ☐   f) themself ☐

g) other (suggest your own option) _____

II.   FORMAL vs. INFORMAL ENGLISH

1) FORMAL ENGLISH – Complete the sentences with the preferred pronoun you would use in **formal writing**. Imagine that the following example is taken from an academic journal.

Anyone who is educated is aware of who a) _____ is (are) and what b)_____ place in the world is. c) _____ is (are) comfortable with d)_____ and unafraid to present that self to others around e)_____. f)_____ feel(s) that g) _____ has (have) a purpose in h)_____ life, and i)_____ understand(s) the environment in which j)_____ is (are) living.

a) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

b) his, her, their, his or her, one's, none of the above

c) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

d) himself, herself, themselves, themself, himself or herself, oneself, none of the above

e) him, her, them, him or her, one, other

f) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

g) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

h) his, her, their, his or her, one's, none of the above

i) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

j) he, she, they, he or she, one, none of the above

2) INFORMAL ENGLISH – Choose the preferred option you would use in the following **conversation** (informal style).

GIBSON: Judge, you know you must, in your judicial career, you see this case all the time where **somebody** kills somebody and then kills a)_____ before

b)_____ can face you, the judge. Because c)_____ know(s) d)_____ is (are) guilty, e)_____ know(s) f)_____ will be convicted.

NAPOLITANO: Yes, **everybody** also knows that this is the end of the line for g)_____.

a) himself, herself, themselves, themself, himself or herself, oneself, other
b) he, she, they, he or she, one, other
c) he, she, they, he or she, one, other
d) he, she, they, he or she, one, other
e) he, she, they, he or she, one, other
f) he, she, they, he or she, one, other
g) him, her, them, him or her, one, other

Appendix 2

Information about respondents

The following tables and charts provide a general overview of respondents of the questionnaire used in this thesis. All the respondents are native speakers of English who were asked to fill in the online questionnaire. Information they should have filled in about themselves includes age, sex, education and region where they spent the most of their lives.

The questionnaire was filled in by 16 respondents, 10 men and 6 women. Most of respondents were 16 to 30 years old. Most of the respondents come from Durham because I studied at Durham University. Respondents who belong to the age category 46 – 60 are university teachers, the rest of the respondents are predominantly university students.
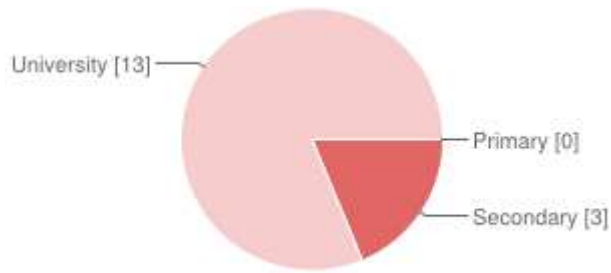
Chart 4 Age of respondents
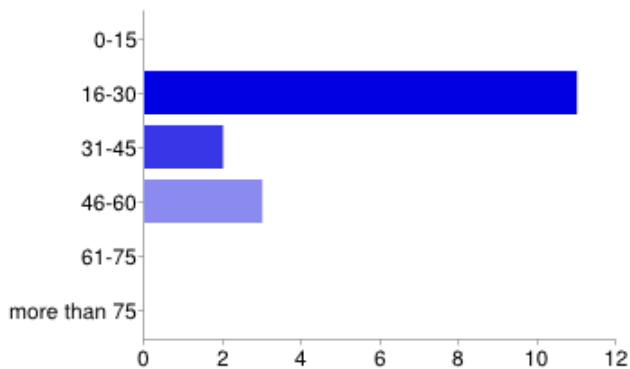
Percentage	Age
0%	**0-15**
69%	**16-30**
12%	**31-45**
19%	**46-60**
0%	**61-75**
0%	**more than 75**

Chart 5 Sex of respondents
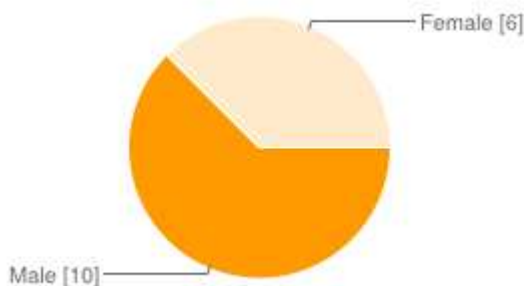
Percentage	Sex
63%	**Male**
37%	**Female**

Chart 6 Education of respondents

Percentage	Education
0%	**Primary**
19%	**Secondary**
81%	**University**

Table 44 Region in which respondents have spent most of their lives

Answers	Number of responses	Percentage
Essex	1	6%
Yorkshire	1	6%
Newcastle	1	6%
USA, Florida	1	6%
Durham	6	38%
Scotland	2	13%
USA, California	1	6%
North East Midland	2	13%
Midlands	1	6%
TOTAL	**16**	**100%**

Anotace

Příjmení a jméno autora:	Teglová Veronika, Bc.
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Vedoucí diplomové práce:	Mgr. Markéta Janebová, Ph.D.
Počet znaků:	140 228 (včetně mezer)
Počet příloh:	2

Název práce:	Gender-neutral Pronouns in the English Language
Název práce v češtině:	Nepříznaková zájmena v angličtině

Klíčová slova: gender, politicky korektní jazyk, neurčitá zájmena, zvratná zájmena, genderově neutrální zájmeno

Anotace: Tato diplomová práce se zabývá nepříznakovými zájmeny v anglickém jazyce. Jejím cílem je zjistit, která zvratná zájmena 3. osoby jednotného čísla jsou nejčastěji používána při odkazování na zájmeno neurčité, které postrádá specifikaci rodu. Výzkum je proveden za pomocí korpusů a dotazníkového šetření. Práce také zkoumá použití zvratného zájmena v roli referenta odkazujícího k neurčitému zájmenu v rámci různých registrů, rozdíly mezi britskou a americkou angličtinou a mezi neurčitými zájmeny samotnými.

Klíčová slova v angličtině: gender, political correctness, indefinite pronouns, reflexive pronouns, gender-neutral pronoun

Anotace v angličtině: The thesis deals with gender-neutral pronouns in the English language. The aim of this study is to found out what the most frequent third person singular reflexive pronoun employed with indefinite pronouns lacking gender specification is. The study is based on corpus research and questionnaire research. The thesis focuses also on differences in the usage of reflexive pronouns referring to indefinite pronouns between various registers, British and American English and even between indefinite pronouns themselves.