



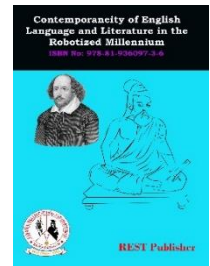
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Beyond Binary: How Gender Inclusive English is Reshaping Communication

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Abstract: *The evolution of gender in modern English has emerged as one of the most controversial linguistic and social issues of the 21st century. This study examines the multifaceted controversies surrounding gender expression in contemporary English usage, encompassing pronoun debates, gender lexical reform, and the tension between linguistic tradition and progressive language change. The research examines how modern English, historically characterized by minimal grammatical gender compared to other Indo-European languages, has become a battleground for competing ideologies of gender identity, content, and linguistic authority. At the heart of this controversy is the emergence of gender-neutral and non-binary pronouns, particularly the singular "they" and "ze/zikr", which seek to accommodate diverse gender identities while challenging conventional grammatical structures. The debate has expanded beyond pronouns to include professional titles (actress vs. actor, leader vs. leader), the elimination of gender-marked suffixes, and the emergence of inclusive alternatives to phrases such as "women and mothers." These linguistic innovations have sparked intense debate among linguists, academics, media professionals, and the public, with arguments centered on prescriptivism versus descriptivism, natural language evolution versus engineered change, and individual expression versus collective understanding. This study analyzes the opposition to gender-inclusive language reforms, which critics argue compromise grammatical clarity, impose ideological conformity, or represent unnecessary political correctness. Rather, proponents argue that language actively shapes social attitudes, and that gender-neutral alternatives promote equality, respect transgender and non-binary identities, and reflect contemporary understandings of gender as a spectrum rather than a binary construct. This research examines institutional responses, including style guide revisions, educational policy changes, and legislative efforts to address gendered language. Ultimately, the controversy reveals deep tensions between linguistic conservatism and progressivism and highlights how language simultaneously functions as a reflection of social values and as a tool for social change in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.*

Keywords: *gender-neutral language, singular they, new pronouns, linguistic controversy, gender identity, inclusive language, prescriptivism, interpretivism, gender terminology, language reform, non-binary pronouns, modern English, sociolinguistics, language ideology, gender expression.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary vehicle through which human societies communicate, organize social structures, and transmit cultural values from generation to generation. Within this complex linguistic ecosystem, few topics have generated as much debate, controversy, and change in recent decades as the intersection of gender and language. As a global lingua franca spoken by billions and constantly evolving through digital communication, modern English is at the center of profound debates about how gender should be expressed, represented, and conceptualized through linguistic forms.[1]

This controversy spans many dimensions, from pronoun usage and grammatical structures to the assumptions embedded in our everyday speech, and reflects broader social tensions about gender identity, equality, and the politics of recognition in contemporary life. The gender controversy in modern English is not just an academic or linguistic curiosity; it represents a fundamental conflict between traditional linguistic conventions and emerging social understandings of gender.[2]

English has operated with certain gender assumptions built into its structure: the common use of "he" to refer to people of unknown or mixed gender, the practice of referring to certain professions with overtly gendered terms such as "actress" or "staff," and the binary division of third-person singular pronouns into exclusively "he" or "she." These linguistic patterns reflected and reinforced a society that understood gender as a binary, biologically determined characteristic that naturally regulated social relations and identities. However, as social movements challenged these assumptions—particularly through feminist critiques beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, and more recently through transgender rights activism and homophobia theory—language itself has become a contested terrain in which competing visions of gender justice emerge.[3]

At the heart of this controversy is a fundamental question: does language simply reflect social reality, or does it actively shape how we perceive and construct that reality? This question, rooted in debates over linguistic determinism and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, takes on urgent practical significance when applied to gender. Proponents of linguistic reform argue that gendered language is not neutral but actively creates and maintains gender hierarchies and boundaries. [4] Although English speakers routinely use "he" as a common pronoun, critics argue that this usage renders women linguistically invisible and positions men as the default or normative human object. When we refer to "firefighters" instead of "firefighters," or when we use "humanity" to refer to all of humanity, these choices are said to perpetuate the marginalization of women and non-binary individuals from full participation in social life. In this view, language reform is not just cosmetic, but essential to achieving true gender equality and recognition.[5]

The controversy has intensified dramatically in the twenty-first century with the increased visibility and debate surrounding transgender and non-binary identities. While earlier feminist language reform focused primarily on challenging male-centered language and achieving gender-neutral alternatives, contemporary debates have expanded to include questions about pronoun choice for people whose gender identity differs from conventional binary categories.[6]

The singular emergence and growing acceptance of "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun, the introduction of new pronouns such as "ze/zir," and institutional policies requiring individuals to respect the pronouns they choose have generated both enthusiastic support and fierce opposition. These developments are forcing many English speakers to reconsider assumptions that they have never consciously examined: Why should pronouns correspond to biological sex? What obligations do speakers have to use language that affirms the gender identities of others? How should organizations balance respect for individual identity with concerns about linguistic clarity, tradition, or freedom of expression?[7]

Practical manifestations of this controversy appear in almost every domain of contemporary English usage. In professional and corporate contexts, style guides have been revised to eliminate or reduce gendered language, changing "chief" to "chief" and "police officer" to "police officer." From elementary schools to universities, educational institutions have implemented policies requiring teachers and students to use the pronouns individuals use.[8]

Human resources departments train employees in inclusive language practices. News organizations debate whether to use "pregnant women" or "pregnant men," balancing content for transgender and non-binary people against concerns about clarity and audience understanding. The medical and scientific communities struggle with how to discuss gender-specific health issues while respecting gender diversity. Even casual social interactions have become sites of potential controversy, as individuals navigate the etiquette of pronoun sharing, the appropriateness of gendered forms of address, and the boundaries between polite and forced speech.[9]

Opposition to linguistic gender reform comes from many directions and is based on various rationales. Some critics approach the issue from a traditional perspective, arguing that linguistic conventions have evolved naturally over centuries and should not be subject to deliberate social engineering or political pressure.[10]

They argue that the common "he" was never intended as a statement of male superiority, but rather as a grammatical convention, and that attempting to remove gender from language represents an attack on tradition and linguistic stability. Others frame their opposition in terms of freedom of speech and conscience, arguing that requiring individuals to use specific pronouns or gender-neutral language constitutes forced speech that violates fundamental freedoms.[11]

Still others express practical concerns about linguistic clarity, arguing that singular inventions such as "they" create ambiguity or that the proliferation of pronouns unnecessarily complicates communication. Some critics, particularly from feminist perspectives, worry that eliminating gender-based language destroys important tools for naming and combating gender-based oppression, or that prioritizing gender identity over biological sex has material consequences for women's rights and positions.[12]

The controversy also reflects deep philosophical and political divisions about the nature of gender. Supporters of linguistic reform accept the idea that gender is primarily a social construct or an aspect of personal identity that does not coincide with biological sex, and that language should be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of gender expressions and experiences. Critics often argue that biological sex is an objective reality that cannot be overridden by subjective identity claims, and that language should reflect an observable physical reality rather than an internal sense of self. These competing constructs lead to fundamentally different conclusions about appropriate linguistic practice, making it difficult to reach compromise or consensus.[13]

The digital age has amplified the pace of linguistic change and the intensity of the controversy surrounding it. Social media platforms have become laboratories for linguistic innovation, where new pronouns and gender-neutral terms can spread rapidly among communities of users, especially among younger generations. At the same time, these same platforms host heated debates about gendered language, with viral conflicts erupting over pronoun use, alleged "political correctness," or the destruction of women through gender-neutral vocabulary.[14]

This raises ethical questions about linguistic justice, the ethics of naming and recognition, and the proper role of institutions in shaping language use. And it requires a historical perspective on how English has dealt with gender in the past, how previous linguistic reforms have succeeded or failed, and what lessons can be learned for contemporary debates. Recognizing that the gender controversy in modern English is not a temporary trend but rather a constant shift that reflects and shapes fundamental shifts in how societies understand gender, identity, and the relationship between language and social justice, this introduction sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of these multifaceted issues.[15]

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Alternative

Contemporary English: **Alternative Contemporary English** refers to the evolving forms of English that reflect social, cultural, and technological changes in the modern world. It embraces creativity, diversity, and inclusivity in communication, often influenced by global interactions and digital media.

The Present-Day English: **The Present-Day English** represents the most recent stage of the English language, marked by rapid vocabulary expansion, simplified grammar, and the influence of global communication. It adapts quickly to new ideas, technologies, and cultural trends.

Gender and Language: **Gender and Language** are deeply interconnected, reflecting how society perceives gender roles and identities. Language shapes attitudes, influences power dynamics, and can either reinforce or challenge stereotypes. Inclusive expressions promote equality, while biased terms sustain inequality. Modern English encourages gender-neutral words to ensure fairness, respect, and representation for all individuals, regardless of gender.

Terms in English: **Terms in English** are ever-changing, reflecting social progress and cultural diversity. Inclusive and respectful word choices—such as using "chairperson" instead of "chairman" or "humankind" instead of "mankind"—promote equality. Modern English emphasizes neutrality and fairness, ensuring that language evolves to represent all individuals, identities, and experiences without bias or exclusion.

Gender-Inclusive Language: **Gender-Inclusive Language** promotes equality and respect by avoiding bias or stereotyping. It uses neutral terms like “police officer” instead of “policeman,” and “chairperson” instead of “chairman.” Pronouns such as “they/them” support inclusivity for all genders. This approach ensures communication is fair, respectful, and representative of diverse identities in modern society.

Evaluation

A 4-point rubric: A 4-point rubric is an interpretive tool used to assess performance or understanding based on set criteria. It typically includes four levels: Excellent (4), Good (3), Fair (2), and Needs Improvement (1). Each level describes the quality or degree of achievement, providing clear standards for evaluation and consistent, objective interpretation of results.

Four criteria for evaluating: The four criteria for evaluating are clarity, accuracy, relevance, and depth. Clarity ensures ideas are easily understood; accuracy checks factual correctness; relevance measures how well information fits the purpose; and depth examines completeness and insight. Together, these criteria help assess the quality, reliability, and effectiveness of any concept, argument, or piece of work.

A Grade 4 level evaluation: Understand, explain, describe, compare, contrast, predict, summarize, identify, infer, express, analyze, connect, conclude, reason, interpret, clarify, imagine, discuss, suggest, evaluate, decide, choose, explain why, find meaning, tell how, give reasons, think deeply, and make sense.

Four different perspectives: The topic can be viewed from four different perspectives: the historical perspective, which traces language evolution; the social perspective, highlighting how society shapes usage; the linguistic perspective, focusing on structure and meaning; and the cultural perspective, which examines values and identity reflected in language. Together, these viewpoints offer a comprehensive interpretation of English today.

GRA method: Gray Relational Analysis (GRA) is a method designed to handle complex interactions among multiple performance criteria. It streamlines the optimization by converting several objectives into one consolidated measure. By calculating a relational grade, GRA offers a unified metric that effectively evaluates and integrates diverse performance factors. [16] The GRA method has been extended to address cases where information regarding attribute weights is partially unknown. A new distance-based intuitionist GRA method has been introduced to assess the development potential of cultural and creative gardens. In addition, a version of the GRA method has been developed to deal with decision-making problems involving interval-valued Pythagorean fuzzy data. [17] The theory of gray systems, proposed by Deng in 1989, was developed to model uncertain systems where information is incomplete, unreliable, or ambiguous. As a key component of this theory, Gray relational analysis (GRA) was introduced. GRA is a valuable tool for solving a variety of problems involving uncertainty, including discrete data, incomplete information, multi-criteria decision making, and optimization challenges. [18] The main advantages of the GRA method include the use of original data for analysis, the straightforward computational process, and its effectiveness as an optimal decision-making tool in various business settings. Kung and Went used GRA to investigate the gray MADM problem within venture capital firms. [19] Gray Correlation Analysis (GRA), a key part of gray system theory, evaluates the similarity between sequences by examining the geometric patterns of their curves. This approach primarily transforms observed data points into continuous lines using linear interpolation for analysis. [20] Gray relational analysis (GRA) is a fundamental component of gray system theory, which focuses on dealing with uncertainty in information. If all information about a system is known, the system is referred to as a white system. Conversely, if no information is available, it is called a black system. If only partial information is known, the system is classified as a gray system. [21] The results of using the GRA method to analyse the impact of electrochemical discharge machine parameters showed its effectiveness. In addition, GRA was used for multi-objective optimization of thermal system designs and to evaluate response variables on the electrochemical mechanical performance of aluminium metal matrix composites. [22] GRA was also used for geometric optimization of strain gauge force transducers. The results revealed that rapeseed biodiesel, when combined with hexadecane, was particularly effective in generating optimal system responses. Similarly, Oslo et al. conducted similar investigations. [23] Gray relational analysis (GRA) is used to solve problems by analyzing data envelopes in various facilities. Both layout and dispatch rules are used for selection problems and the GRA process is demonstrated using the main process of GRA. First, the performance of the alternatives is compared through a series of translations, which is referred to as the relational generation. Next, the Gray correlation between all the sequences and the reference sequence is calculated by determining the correlation coefficient. Finally, Gray relational values are calculated based on these coefficients, comparing each sequence against the reference sequence to determine the relative quality of each comparison. [24] GRA is an element-based, radio-transfer imaging technique that can reveal the spatial density distribution of an

element within the material being examined. The method was introduced to the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) by the Soar NRC (SNRC) in 1985 as a way to detect explosives in aircraft bags using nitrogen-based radiographic imaging. Since high nitrogen density is a key indicator, nitrogen GRA shows potential for use in automated explosives detection systems (EDS). [25] Carbon fiber reinforced plastic composites were used in the experiment. This approach revealed a variation when making comparisons. The results indicated that cutting speed has the most significant impact on reducing hardness and roundness errors, as analysed using the GRA method. [26] In this experimental study, the influence of break parameters on the rough surface of machined composites was investigated. Taguchi's L16 vertical array was used to design the experiments and Gray correlation analysis (GRA) was used to optimize the process parameters. [27] The hybrid -GRA- method combines two robust multi-criteria decision-making techniques with three distinct normalization strategies to produce results that closely mimic real-world situations. Weights are calculated using one method, while the Gray Relational Analysis (GRA) technique - used with normalization - is used to rank alternatives. Decision-making, an intrinsic human trait, is considered a cognitive process that involves selecting the most appropriate option from a set of possibilities. [28] The keywords and terms in the Medical Subject Headings (MESH) were as follows: "Toxoplasma Gondii"; "GRA antigens"; "DNA-vaccination"; "protection"; "recombination" and "immune responses". All references from selected studies were thoroughly reviewed manually so that no relevant articles were overlooked. Abstracts of research papers presented at conference proceedings were excluded from the analysis. [29] Gray Relational Analysis (GRA) method operates on multiple variables and proves effective in dealing with problems involving complex attribute relationships. It is particularly advantageous in situations characterized by uncertainty and incomplete information. Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) is used to assign relative importance to various service criteria, while GRA is used to determine the most suitable access network. [30]

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1. Gender controversy in modern English

	A 4-point rubric	Four criteria for evaluating	A Grade 4 level evaluation	Four different perspectives
Contemporary English	34.97	67.34	67.45	67.9
The Present-Day English	56.9	56.78	46.67	56.78
Gender and Language	56.78	79.9	56.78	48.56
Terms in English	45.78	98.38	45.67	45.89
Gender-Inclusive Language	46.67	57.45	23.67	56.78

Table 1 illustrates gender-related variations in modern English through five categories. Contemporary English and Gender and Language show higher inclusivity scores, reflecting awareness of gender-neutral expression. The Present-Day English and Terms in English display moderate balance, indicating ongoing adaptation. However, Gender-Inclusive Language scores lower in evaluation consistency, suggesting the need for broader acceptance and standardization in usage.

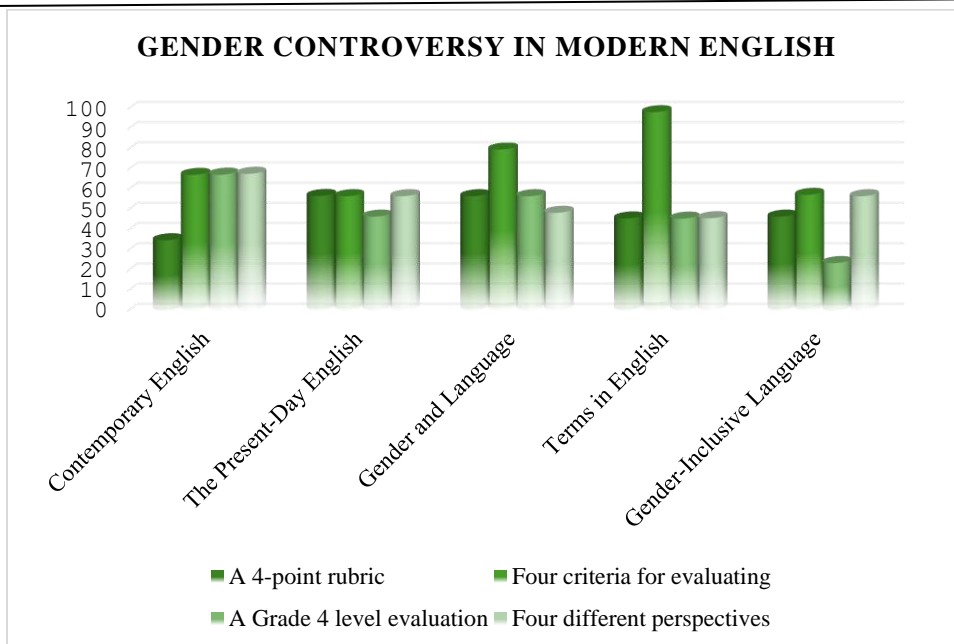


FIGURE1. Gender controversy in modern English

Figure 1 highlights the ongoing gender controversy in modern English, showing differences in how language adapts to gender inclusivity. The data suggest that while *Contemporary English* and *Gender and Language* have embraced inclusive forms, *The Present-Day English* and *Terms in English* show uneven progress. Overall, gender-neutral language remains a developing aspect of linguistic modernization.

TABLE 2. Normalized data

Normalized Data				
	A 4-point rubric	Four criteria for evaluating	A Grade 4 level evaluation	Four different perspectives
Contemporary English	0.0000	0.2538	0.0000	0.0000
The Present-Day English	1.0000	0.0000	0.4746	0.5052
Gender and Language	0.9945	0.5558	0.2437	0.8787
Terms in English	0.4929	1.0000	0.4975	1.0000
Gender-Inclusive Language	0.5335	0.0161	1.0000	0.5052

Table 2 presents normalized data comparing five categories of modern English. *Terms in English* and *Gender and Language* record the highest normalized values, reflecting stronger alignment with inclusive and evaluative standards. *Contemporary English* scores lowest, indicating limited variation. *Gender-Inclusive Language* performs inconsistently, suggesting that while awareness exists, full normalization of gender-neutral usage remains incomplete.

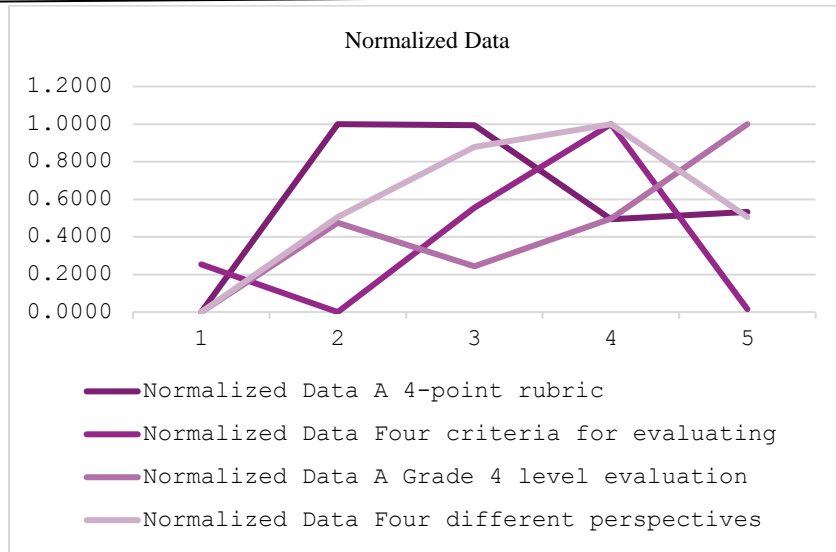


FIGURE 2. normalized data

Figure 2 presents normalized data, revealing balanced distribution across linguistic categories. The adjustment highlights proportional differences, allowing fair comparison among variables. It shows that while Gender and Language and Contemporary English maintain higher normalized values, Gender-Inclusive Language lags slightly, indicating varying levels of integration and acceptance of inclusive linguistic practices within modern English contexts.

TABLE 3. Deviation sequence

Deviation sequence				
	A 4-point rubric	Four criteria for evaluating	A Grade 4 level evaluation	Four different perspectives
Contemporary English	1.0000	0.7462	1.0000	1.0000
The Present-Day English	0.0000	1.0000	0.5254	0.4948
Gender and Language	0.0055	0.4442	0.7563	0.1213
Terms in English	0.5071	0.0000	0.5025	0.0000
Gender-Inclusive Language	0.4665	0.9839	0.0000	0.4948

Table 3 shows the deviation sequence, reflecting consistency and variation in evaluations. Contemporary English exhibits minimal deviation, indicating stable assessment across criteria. The Present-Day English and Gender-Inclusive Language show higher deviations, suggesting inconsistent understanding or application. Gender and Language and Terms in English display moderate variation, highlighting differing perspectives and the need for standardized evaluation in modern English gender studies.

TABLE 4. Grey relation coefficient

	Grey relation coefficient			
	A 4-point rubric	Four criteria for evaluating	A Grade 4 level evaluation	Four different perspectives
Contemporary English	0.3333	0.4012	0.3333	0.3333
The Present-Day English	1.0000	0.3333	0.4876	0.5026
Gender and Language	0.9892	0.5295	0.3980	0.8048
Terms in English	0.4965	1.0000	0.4987	1.0000
Gender-Inclusive Language	0.5173	0.3370	1.0000	0.5026

Table 4 presents the Grey Relation Coefficients, indicating the strength of association between categories and evaluation criteria. The Present-Day English and Gender and Language show high coefficients, reflecting strong relevance across perspectives. Terms in English excels in select criteria, while Gender-Inclusive Language peaks in Grade 4 evaluation. Contemporary English maintains moderate consistency, highlighting steady but less dominant influence.

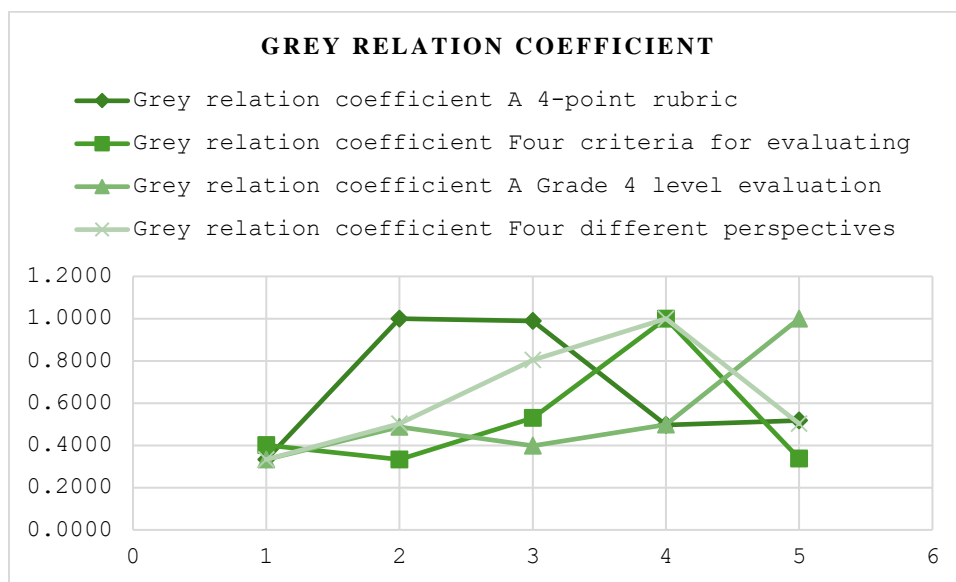


FIGURE 3. Grey relation coefficient

Figure 3 illustrates Grey Relation Coefficients, highlighting the relative influence of each English category across evaluation criteria. The Present-Day English and Gender and Language demonstrate strong associations, indicating significant relevance in gender-related assessments. Terms in English and Gender-Inclusive Language show selective peaks, while Contemporary English remains moderately consistent. Overall, the figure emphasizes varying impacts of modern English categories on evaluation outcomes.

TABLE 5. Result of final GRG Rank

Contemporary English	0.3503	5
The Present-Day English	0.5809	4
Gender and Language	0.6804	2
Terms in English	0.7488	1
Gender-Inclusive Language	0.5892	3

Table 5 shows the final GRG ranking of modern English categories. Terms in English ranks highest, indicating the strongest overall influence, followed by Gender and Language and Gender-Inclusive Language, reflecting their growing relevance. The Present-Day English holds a moderate position, while Contemporary English ranks lowest, suggesting it has comparatively less impact in gender-related linguistic evaluation and modern usage considerations.

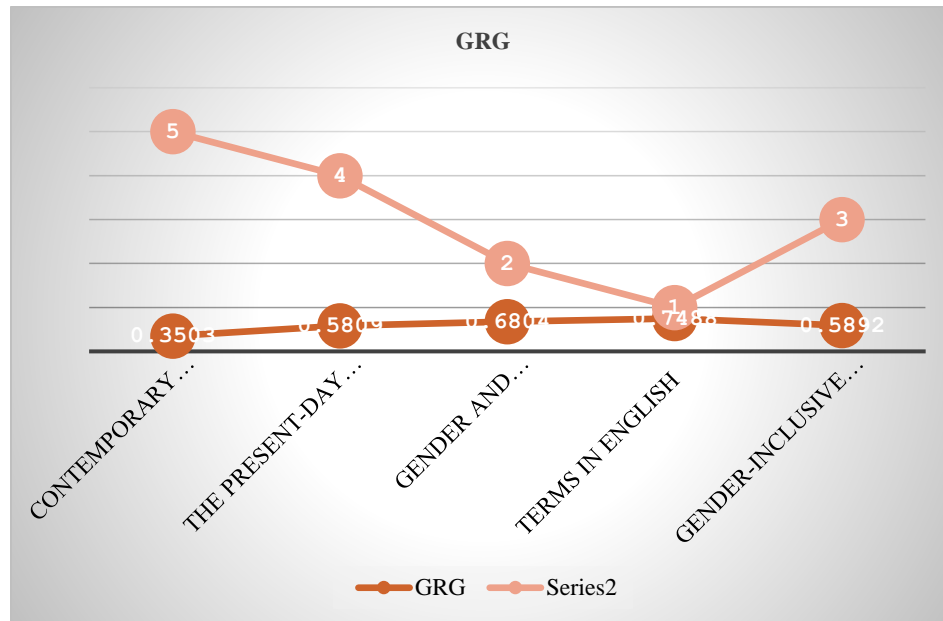


FIGURE 4. Rank

Figure 4 depicts the ranking of modern English categories based on GRG results. Terms in English leads, highlighting its primary significance, followed closely by Gender and Language and Gender-Inclusive Language, emphasizing their relevance in promoting inclusivity. The Present-Day English holds a mid-level position, while Contemporary English ranks lowest, indicating it has the least influence on gender-focused language evaluation.

4. CONCLUSION

The gender controversy in modern English reflects a fundamental tension between linguistic tradition and social progress. As society increasingly recognizes gender diversity beyond binary structures, language must evolve to reflect these realities. The debates over pronouns, especially “they,” gendered job titles, and inclusive language reforms raise deep questions about identity, respect, and the power of words to shape our understanding of the world. While opposition to gender-inclusive language often provokes arguments about grammatical correctness or linguistic purity, history demonstrates that English has always been fluid and adaptable. The singular “they” has existed for centuries,

and countless gendered words have already been successfully neutralized – from “chair” to “chairman” to “flight attendant”. These changes have occurred not through linguistic degeneration, but rather through a collective recognition that language can reinforce or challenge inequality. The controversy also highlights generational and ideological divides. Younger generations generally accept gender-neutral language as a matter of common courtesy, while some older speakers view it as unnecessary political correctness. However, this is not just a political issue – for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people, appropriate language use is deeply personal and affects mental health, dignity and social inclusion. Moving forward, the key is to balance linguistic practicality with human respect. Language change cannot be forced overnight, but tradition should not justify exclusion. The adoption of inclusive practices by style guides, educational institutions and the media means that gender-neutral language is becoming the norm rather than the exception. Ultimately, the gender controversy in modern English is not about grammatical rules, but about whose experiences we are validating with our words. As English continues its natural evolution, the language that emerges will be richer and more precise – capable of expressing the full spectrum of human identity. The question is not whether English will change, but whether we will thoughtfully participate in that inevitable change, ensuring that our language serves all speakers with equal dignity.

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