

On My Gender, and Pronouns Sie and Hir, by Seeley Quest

With years of getting addressed as “sir” and “ma’am” in 2000 I accepted my gender didn’t operate within only one common gender role or the other. It’s accurate to call me ‘ftm’ but my gender feels fluid, not within a binary system. So far having a mix of gendered attributes and androgyny has felt most fitting. It continues to suit me to use two pronouns meant to indicate an alternative, unspecific position: sie and hir.

Sie is pronounced like “see.” It’s used as you would ‘she’ or ‘he.’

Hir is pronounced like “hear.” It’s used as you would ‘him’, ‘her’, ‘his’, or ‘hers.’

For example: That’s a bold move sie’s just made. Sie has a quirky sense of humour.

That’s one of hir picks. Sie had cards; I don’t know which were hirs, or belonged to hir.

I encourage folks to practice. Think about the logic of their grammar used in sentences correctly. When I was introduced to these and other common transgender alternate pronoun choices, I had to slow down and think how to incorporate them so that referring to someone who wants to be referred to in those ways can be stated without awkwardness. Our language can include words newer to English in a naturalizing way, that’s congruent with how to speak about anyone using more expected pronouns.

I decided I preferred ‘sie’ to ‘ze’ or ‘zie’ though some friends choose ‘ze’ for zemselves, because I know folks named Zee or Z and thought it’d be too confusing. I also prefer these to ‘they/them’ which many gender-transgressive folks adopt, because it affirms creating new language. English keeps growing and adapting—there are new nouns and verbs coined yearly—and we who speak it can accommodate new indicators of gender. One of the trans rights movement icons, Leslie Feinberg, wrote on the first page of hir 1998 book, *Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue*, that sie chose these same pronouns.

They’ve been used in trans community since at least the mid-’90s, and satisfy me to use for myself and anyone else who wants the option. (And there’s history of other English alternate pronouns tried over centuries too.) Now that you know, please don’t use ‘they’ or ‘them’ for me. Since 2017-22 living in Montreal, my French is limited, but I’m trying iel for sie, and ellui for hir. If someone with English as a later language really struggles with my pronouns after trying to learn them, I’d rather just be referred to as Seeley: “Seeley said Seeley will clean up.”

I’ve come out to all friends, family, co-workers so far, so it’s generally appropriate to speak about me with these terms of “Seeley gave hir proposal that I talk with you; sie’s a fan of open communication,” etc., and to mention if necessary that I identify as trans. Nowadays when I pass as male more often, if allies and I are in a gender-conforming environment, it may occasionally feel risky to indicate my queer status publicly; usually I’d still rather make the social statement, but check with me if unsure about “outing,”

For terms of address, “Mx. Quest” or “Dr. Quest” work. Respectful questions are fine! Thanks for your support, SQ