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## Pronoun Specification in German

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### Abstract

The academic and public discussion about addressing and referring to non-binary persons in German is still in its infancy. This discussion encompasses novel reference procedures and pronouns, as well as the specification of preferred pronouns, such as those included in email signatures. In a large-scale online study conducted in 2024 focusing on gender-neutral language usage at the University of Hamburg, I collected comprehensive data from 3,568 participants. These data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, among others, to ascertain participants' procedures of specifying pronouns along with attitudes and perspectives on pronoun specification. The analysis shows that only 12% provide their pronouns in their email signatures. Additionally, 826 participants commented on an open-ended question related to pronoun specification. Evaluating these answers, tendencies were found toward conventional norms (e.g., stating the name followed by personal pronouns in the nominative [PronNOM] and dative [PronDAT] or possessive pronouns [PossPron]). Also, factors were identified, such as the context of communication, the language used, fear of social consequences, and the gender "unambiguity" of the first name, playing a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward pronoun specification. In this study, I highlight initial results about specifying pronouns (procedures, attitudes, stances). Furthermore, I discuss implications for the societal discourse on pronouns and gender-neutral language in German. Based on this, this research contributes to the visibility and acceptance of gender-neutral efforts in Germany.

**Keywords:** pronouns; gender-neutral language; non-binarity; linguistics, survey study