

Non-Binary and Inclusive French

Oral Communication Strategies

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Les noms

#1: Périphrase:

Paraphrase to avoid nouns that mark gender differentially.

Exemple: Je suis étudiant.e.

J'étudie à l'université.
Je me concentre sur mes études.

Exemple: Iel est soignant.e.

Iel soigne les personnes âgées.
Iel figure parmi les soignants à l'hôpital.

"Je remplace quelque chose..."
"On m'a conseillé ça..."

Les adjectifs

#1: Périphrase:

Paraphrase to avoid adjectives that mark gender differentially.

Exemple: Øl est gentil.le.

Øl est sympa.
Øl est agréable.
Øl est aimable.

Exemple: Je suis amusant.e.

Je suis drôle.
Je suis comique.

Circumlocution or paraphrasing is a useful tool any time you aren't sure of a word. We can also use this strategy to purposefully avoid particularly gendered words when speaking about non-binary people.

There are times when it might be particularly challenging or awkward to paraphrase. When you can't quite circumlocute your way around gendering someone, try the other strategies in this list.

*Magnifique!
*Agréable!

#2: ensuite

#2: Noms neutres à l'oreille:

Use nouns that are invariable or phonetically equivalent in their various gendered forms.

Exemple: Cet.te ami.e est sympa.

Cet.te ami.e
Cette amie
Cet ami

Exemple: Quel.le bon.ne élève!

Quel.le bon.ne élève
Quelle bonne élève
**Quel bon_ élève

#2: adjectifs neutres à l'oreille:

Use adjectives that are invariable or phonetically equivalent in their various gendered forms.

Exemple: Iel est aimé.e.

aimé.e
aimée
aimé

Exemple: **Iel est gentil.le.

gentil.le
gentille
gentil

#3: puis

#3: "Quelqu'un" ou "Une personne":

For adjectives and nouns alike, it can sometimes be easiest to use *quelqu'un* or *une personne* as the subject of the sentence and then follow traditional agreements, since these expressions always take the same grammatical agreements no matter the gender of the person to whom we are referring! We can also use other terms à *emploi générique* to avoid grammatical gender.

Exemples:

Iel est quelqu'un de très patient.

Øl est quelqu'un de très patient.

Elle est quelqu'un de très patient.

Il est quelqu'un de très patient.

C'est quelqu'un de très patient.

C'est une personne adorable.

Une connaissance

#3: Néologismes

If you've tried #1, #2, & #3 to no avail, it might be time to see what new words you can find in use or to get to creating your own!

⚠ Careful, though! There is often little consensus as to what forms these new words should take. Some examples include:

[Sœur/Frère →] ***
adolphe / frèreur / frèreuro

[heureux/heureuse →]
heureuxxe

#4: finalement

**** Sometimes, with oral communication, you'll have to get creative and you might feel like your phrasing is a bit awkward (even if it usually isn't noticeable!). This creativity is actually good for the development of your linguistic skills in French and can help you work around any number of possible challenges in expressing yourself!

A starting list of written forms can be found at krisknisely.com

This infographic was adapted from the following publications and does not include all possible language forms. For more details on both written and oral/aural language, please see:
Knisely, Kris. (2020). Le français non-binaire: linguistic forms used by non-binary speakers of French. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(4), 850-876. doi: 10.1111/flan.12590
Knisely, K. (2020). Subverting the culturally unreadable: Understanding the self-positioning of non-binary speakers of French. *The French Review*, 94(2), 149-168.

*Notes

*Ce sont des adjectifs épithètes! In addition to these neutral forms, you can try using truncations (where the end of a word is proverbially clipped off) for nouns and adjectives alike (e.g., *inflexio*, *prof*) or play with formality to find neutral forms (e.g., *forliche*, *feigrasse*).
**This may not be phonetically equivalent for all speakers, in all varieties of French. Where speakers do not find these forms to be phonetically equivalent, they are likely to be close enough to go unnoticed in the vast majority of spoken interactions.
****Adolphe* has appeared with more frequency than *frœur* or *frœuro* in my data as of January 2021.
****Although the language used by non-binary speakers of French varies widely, there is a consistent focus on respecting individual agency and self-determination. See the above and/or krisknisely.com to learn more.

For more on my approach to teaching linguistic variation, please see my publications, presentations, and other resources at krisknisely.com
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