SerBoCroatian Marriage Verbs in Queer Contexts

An experimental study in Sociolinguistics

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The present paper examines marriage verbs in SerBoCroatian (BCMS+) in contexts pertaining to same-sex couples. Marriage verbs in BCMS+ have gendered subcategorisations for their arguments, rooted in traditional heteronormative marriage. With the advent of civil partnerships in the Western Balkans, the question arises how frame same-sex unions can be framed using these verbs. How does this relate to speakers' identities and attitudes toward LGBT+ people? To investigate this, this paper used a web-based acceptability task, filled out by 107 native speakers. The results were analysed using categorisation trees. Results showed that attitudes toward the LGBT+ community as well as prescriptivist ideologies are key factors in the acceptability of non-normative marriage verb uses. There is, however, also a clear linguistic effect whereby non-normative subjects are much less acceptable than non-normative objects, perhaps an artefact of processing differences between the two.

1 Introduction

SerBoCroatian or BCMS + [1] is a South Slavic language and has official status in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Montenegro, and the Republic of Serbia, where in each it is also the first language of the vast majority of inhabitants. In two of these states, Montenegro and Croatia, partnerships among same-sex couples have become legally recognised (Republika Hrvatska 2020, Ministarstvo pravde, ljudskih i manjinskih prava Crne Gore 2020).[2] In Serbia a similar law is under discussion (Martinović 2021) and in one of the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina a working group has been set up to this end, but its work has been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic (Erjavec 2020). These developments suggest concomitant changes in mainstream attitudes toward the LGBT + community, i.e., the group of individuals who identify with sexual or gender identities other than those prescribed by cis-heteronormativity. Linguistically, these developments are noteworthy because the heteronormative binary of "man" and "woman" is embedded in the semantics of BCMS + verbs of marriage. Similar to Latin and Mandarin, there are specific verbs that denote a man marrying a woman and a woman marrying a man, as in (1). Rooted in traditional marriage rites, these verbs highlight the different roles of men and women in the ceremony and marriage more broadly. It is unclear, then, how civil partnerships or marriages between two women or two men are described using these verbs. It is not my intention to imply that marriage and civil partnership are the same from a legal perspective, which would be false. However, given that both describe a legal and societal recognition of a long-term romantic partnership, I regard them as semantically similar enough for mar-

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[1] I will use this acronym throughout this paper to refer to the language(s) variously labelled Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin, etc. As such a differentiation is highly controversial on linguistic grounds on the one hand, but, on the other hand, explicitly not the concern of this paper, the plus sign was added to include speakers who do not identify with any of the labels given to the official languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

[2] For the purposes of this paper, the term *civil partnership* shall be used to describe legally recognised same-sex partnerships which are not marriage, which is the closest translation of the BCMS + term *civilno partnerstvo*. Furthermore, *civil union* will be used as an umbrella term to cover both *civil partnerships* and *marriages*.

riage verbs to be used to describe both. Moreover, there are no specialised verbs yet in BCMS + to describe civil partnerships, so marriage verbs may be used casually in unofficial speech.

(1) a. *muškarac* *se* **oženio** *ženom*
         man-NOM.SG REF wed.PST.SG.M woman.INS.SG
         'a man wed a woman'

     b. *žena* *se* **udala** *za muškarca*
         woman-NOM.SG.F REF wed.PST.SG.F for man.ACC.SG
         'a woman wed a man'

A number of factors must be considered when investigating which verbs speakers choose as acceptable for describing legally-recognised same-sex unions. For example, attitudes towards the LGBT + community could be one factor: It may be hypothesised that the degree to which the use of traditional marriage verbs is considered acceptable is correlated with a speaker's attitude towards LGBT + people. Additionally, morphosyntax may play a role as well: for example, grammatical subjects tend to be more conceptually salient than grammatical objects (Van Valin 2001) and that semantic feature matching often breaks down in contexts of long-distance dependency (Motschenbacher & Weikert 2015). It may, therefore, be that certain syntactic structures using traditional marriage verbs with same-sex spouses may be judged as more acceptable than other syntactic structures using these verbs with same-sex spouses. As discourse on civil unions of same-sex couples in BCMS + countries is emergent and still relatively infrequent, the present paper takes an experimental rather than a corpus-based approach to investigate how traditional marriage verbs are used in new same-sex contexts. BCMS + speaker judgements were collected using an offline judgement task, which included a short questionnaire to capture basic demographic information, as well as participants' attitudes toward the LGBT + community. The aggregate results are analysed, with attitudes correlated with judgements of acceptability.

It is worth mentioning that the usage of BCMS + marriage verbs for same-sex cou-

ples has not been researched academically to date. There is, therefore, no literature to review concerned with this particular topic. For similar cases such as Romanian and Mandarin this is also the case to my knowledge. Mallet-Jiang (2021), discussed below, discusses marriage verbs in Mandarin in detail, however, same-sex marriage is mentioned only briefly. Instead of a literature review, the following sections look more closely at the category of gender in BCMS + in particular, as well as studies from other languages which are concerned with the various intersections of gender, identity, grammar and perception.

1.1 Gender in BCMS+

As with many other Indo-European languages, BCMS + is highly fusional and possesses three distinct noun classes (masculine, feminine and neuter — traditionally referred to as grammatical genders), which govern agreement patterns within and outside the noun phrase and which correlate with declension patterns. Additionally, as with other Indo-European languages such as German or Romanian, social gender[3] dictates grammatical gender for nominals (nouns, adjectives, participles, pronouns) used for human referents. For example, a male-identified inhabitant of Zagreb is a *zagrepćanin* (m.) and a female-identified inhabitant of Zagreb is a *zagrepćanka* (f.), as in (2).

(2) a. *Mlad-ø   zagrep-ćan-in-ø   je kupi-o   voće.*
        young-NOM.SG.M Zagreb-DER-M-NOM.SG AUX buy-PST.SG.M fruit
        'A young Zagreber (m.) bought fruit.'

    b. *Mlad-a   zagrep-ćan-k-a   je kupi-l-a   voće.*
        young-NOM.SG.F Zagreber-DER-F-NOM.SG AUX buy-PST-SG.F fruit
        'A young Zagreber (f.) bought fruit.'

Agreement between social gender and grammatical gender is largely consistent, however, there are some instances where morphosyntactic peculiarities override this consistency. For example, there is a considerable number of masculine nouns (most of which

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[3]Whether someone identifies/is perceived as male or female.

refer to male humans) which decline like the largest group of feminine nouns, ending in /-a/ in the nominative singular (Motschenbacher 2015). When plural morphology is required, the appropriate agreement pattern based on grammatical (and usually social) gender (masculine) is in direct competition with feminine plural agreement primed by the similarity with the feminine morphological pattern. Motschenbacher (2015) reports that in these cases proximity between the agreeing constituent and the noun in question is the best predictor of which agreement pattern is chosen. The closer the constituent is to the noun, the more likely it is to take feminine plural morphology, the further away, the more likely it is to take masculine plural morphology, as in (3); however, in actual usage, a variety of combinations is possible.

(3) *Naš-i   hrabr-e   djed-e   su   se*
   our-NOM.PL.**M** courageous-NOM.PL.**F** grandfather-NOM.PL AUX REFL
   bori-l-e   za slobodu i   pobjedi-l-i   su   fašizam.
   fight-PST.PL-**F** for freedom and defeat-PST-PL-**M** AUX fascism

   'Our courageous grandfathers fought for freedom and defeated fascism.'[4]

Further complicating matters is the rule whereby quantifiers, including numbers with a last digit higher than 4, trigger neuter agreement outside the NP, irrespective of the gender of the noun they quantify (Alexander 2006), as illustrated in (4).

(4) *Pedeset pet djevojaka   je   doš-lo   na koncert.*
   Fifty   five girl.GEN.PL AUX come.PST.SG.N to concert

   '55 girls came to the concert.'

The above examples show that the correspondence between grammatical and social gender is challenged in a number of instances. Neither grammatical gender nor social gender is the sole determinant of morphological agreement. This draws attention to the role of the broader linguistic context, syntactic structure, and constituent distance. This is relevant for the current study insofar as these facts undermine a purely deterministic, heteronormative pattern of agreement in BCMS +. Though social gender, as

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[4]Adapted from Motschenbacher (2015).

constructed in a heteronormative mainstream society, plays a crucial role in agreement patterns, extra-social factors also influence actual usage.

Social gender is not only entrenched in the nominal system in BCMS+. In semantic fields that are highly gendered in BCMS+ societies (and societies more generally), such as pregnancy and marriage, gendered restrictions apply to verbs as well. Marriage verbs impose gendered semantic restrictions not only on their subjects but also their objects. In a heteronormative understanding of marriage, which has been the sole legal basis for civil unions in the region until recently, the subject and object of a verb meaning 'to marry' must be of opposite gender to make a felicitous statement. As same-sex unions have become the subject of recent political debate in BCMS+ communities and as civil partnerships have been legalised in Croatia and Montenegro, it is unclear how these gendered semantic restrictions apply to same-sex marriages. In media discourse we find varied usage, which points to speakers' uncertainties surrounding such constructions. In (5), we see *udati se* used both for marriage between two women and marriage between two women. In heteronormative contexts, *udati se,* has a feminine subject and a masculine object. Both examples are taken from online news outlets. The quotation marks used in (5b) further indicate that the author of the article is unsure about usage (Nacey 2012).

(5)   a.   *Sandra   je ostavi-l-a   deč k-a   posle dug-e*
         Sandra-NOM AUX leave-PTCP-F bofriend-ACC after long-GEN
         *vez-e,   da   bi   se   **uda-l-a**   za žen-u   u*
         relationship-GEN COMP COND REF marry-PTCP-F to woman-ACC into
         koj-u   se   zaljubi-l-a   na odmor-u.
         who-ACC REF fall.in.love-PTCP-F on holiday-LOC

         'Sandra left her boyfriend after a long relationship to marry a woman she had fallen in love with on holiday.' (Telegraf.rs 2019)

   b.   *Belgijsk-i robijaš-ø **'uda-o'**   se   za ljubavni-k-a na doživotnoj.*
         Belgian-M robber-M marry-PTCP.M REF to lover-M-ACC on life.long-LOC
         'A Belgian robber (m.) 'married' his lover (m.) in life-long custody.' (24sata

2008)

Further, it remains to be discovered how speakers' attitudes toward the LGBT+ community influence their views on how to correctly use marriage verbs for same-sex couples.

1.2 Syntax and Semantics of BCMS+ Marriage Verbs

There are three verbs meaning 'to marry (someone)' in BCMS+ shown in Table 1.[5,6]

Table 1: Verbs of marriage in BCMS+

| Verb | Subject | | Object | |
	Case	Restriction	(Prep.) + Case	Restriction
v(j)enčati se	NOM		*sa* + INST	
udati se	NOM	woman	*za* + ACC	man
oženiti se	NOM	man	INST	woman

All three verbs are syntactically reflexive, as represented by the reflexive particle *se*. The three verbs can also be used in a transitive configuration, i.e., without the particle and followed by a direct object in the accusative case, with a different meaning: *v(j)enčati* means 'marry (a couple, as an officiant)', while *udati* and *oženiti* mean 'to marry (usually one's children) off'. Compare (6a)–(6b).

(6) a. *Majk-a   se   uda-l-a   za oc-a   svoj-e   kćerk-e.*
mother-NOM REF marry-PTCP-F for father-ACC POSS-GEN daughter-GEN
'The mother married the father of her daughter.'[7]

    b. *Majk-a   je   uda-l-a   svoj-u   kćerk-u.*
mother-NOM AUX marry-PTCP-F POSS-ACC daughter-ACC

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[5]Common Slavic yat *ě corresponds to /ije/ or /je/ in standard Bosnian, Croatian and Montenegrin, as well as one Serbian standard, and to /e/ in the prevailing Serbian standard. A bracketed spelling convention has been adopted to allow for both readings.

[6]Like other Slavic languages, BCMS+ morphologically differentiates between an imperfective and a perfective aspect. As aspectual differences are not germane to the present discussion perfective forms are used exclusively throughout this paper.

[7]The third-person singular past tense auxiliary *je* is consistently omitted when *se* is present.

'The mother married off her daughter.'

In normative grammars and dictionaries the distinction between reflexive and transitive meaning is very clearly drawn (e.g. Nikolić 2011:131, 851, 1345); however, in actual language use, the (non-reflexive) transitive forms are occasionally used to mean 'to marry (somebody)'. Example (7) is taken from *Pult24*, an online magazine (Kečan 2021).

(7) *Oženi-o sam žen-u koj-a više voli mene nego*
  marry-PTCP.M AUX woman-ACC REL-NOM.SG.F more love.3SG I.ACC than
  ja nju.
  I.NOM she.ACC
  'I married a woman who loves me more than I love her.'

While exploring the nuances of this variation merits future research, I restrict my analysis to the normative reflexive forms. Importantly, the reflexive forms syntactically require one argument (the subject) only, although semantically they always involve two thematic relations, an agent and a patient. Example (8) is thus considered well-formed.

(8) *Majk-a se uda-l-a.*
  mother-NOM REF marry-PTCP-F
  'The mother married.'

In theories of syntax and information structure, the subject is considered to be a privileged constituent, being highest in the hierarchy of grammatical relations (Van Valin 2001). In BCMS + specifically, subjects are the only antecedents of reflexive pronouns and gerunds, and are the only grammatical element to trigger verbal agreement or control infinitives in varieties of BCMS + which have infinitives. Furthermore, BCMS + is a syntactically and morphologically accusative language, so subjects are coded by a nominative case in both transitive and intransitive sentences. While experiencers are regularly coded by the dative case (Van Valin 2001), actors are typically coded as subjects. In terms of information structure, the subject is the prototypical topic (Leafgren

1997). In other words, the subject (in a canonical context) is what a sentence is about informationally, and, formally, the subject is closely tied to the verb through agreement. From this, it is reasonable to infer that unexpected gender in the subject is less acceptable than unexpected gender in the object. This hypothesis assumes that, in addition to semantic meaning, grammatical roles and information structure are crucially implicated in the question of how to describe the marriage of same sex couples in BCMS +. Both parties involved in a marriage ceremony perform the same action to each other, i.e., they are both the agents and the patients of the action, at least in mainstream contemporary belief. The choice of which person is the subject and which person is the object, therefore, is better explained through foregrounding and topicalisation than through semantic roles in the case of marriage verbs. Verbs such as *(po-)ljubiti* 'to kiss' or *(za-)grliti* 'to hug' function in a similar manner, as they do in English and many other languages. Marrying and actions such as kissing and hugging differ insofar as the latter can be performed unilaterally without the other person's consent, as in (9).

(9)   Tom kissed Peter, but Peter didn't kiss him back.

Cases like (9) aside, and assuming mutual consent has been granted, the examples in (10) all refer to the same event and merely differ in focalisation.

(10)   a.   Frances kissed Mary.

   b.   Mary kissed Frances.

   c.   Mary and Frances kissed.

Turning to semantic restrictions, *udati se* and *oženiti se* encode men and women in specific semantic roles, as shown in Table 1. No such restrictions are reported for *v(j)enčati se*; however, *v(j)enčati se* is associated with the legal act of getting married rather than the celebrations and other social activities associated with a wedding. This semantic differentiation is exemplified by the deverbal nouns *v(j)enčanje* 'getting married (as a legal act)' and *svadba* 'marriage celebration'. Marriage celebrations in the region are

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traditionally long festivities which carry significant cultural importance (Deliso 2008) and are, therefore, quite different from the rather short legal registration of a marriage.

Both *udati se* and *oženiti se* are strongly connected to traditional heteronormative marriage rituals through their etymology. *Udati* may be analysed as 'give away', with *dati* 'give' and the separative prefix /u-/. Traditionally, a married woman would join the household of her husband and cease to be part of the family she was born into. Doubt (2014) reports that *udati se* may be used with reference to a man if he is marrying an economically stronger woman and moves in with her. This underscores the way local heteronormative marriage practices, in which men and women traditionally have had unequal power/status, are still strongly encoded in the verb itself. *Oženiti se* is derived from its own object *žena* 'wife, woman'; however, it is not clear whether the semantic link between the two is strong for native speakers. When asked in personal conversations, neither LGBT+ nor non-LGBT+ speakers of BCMS+ thought the association between *žena* and *ženiti se* was obvious — though, this merits future empirical enquiry.

A comparable phenomenon to BCMS+ marriage verbs exists in Mandarin Chinese. While Mandarin does not have grammatical gender, the male-female binary and traditional gender roles are embedded throughout the Mandarin lexicon. As an example of this, (Mallet-Jiang 2021) points to the semantic restrictions for the subjects and objects for the two Mandarin verbs for 'to marry': 嫁 *jià* and 娶 *qǔ*. The former requires a female (or her family) as a subject and a male as the object. The latter requires a male (or his family) as a subject and a female as an object, as in (11).

(11)   a.   她嫁了那个男人。

       tā jià   le   nà   gè   nánrén
       she marry PRF that CLS man.

       'She married a man'

   b.   他娶了那个女人。

       tā qǔ   le   nà   gè   nǚrén
       he marry PRF that CLS woman.

'He married a woman'

c. 那个男人跟那个女人结婚了。

nà   gè   nánrén gēn nà   gè   nǚrén jiéhūn le
that CLS man   and that CLS woman marry PRF

'the man and the woman married'

Just like BCMS＋, a third option exists: 结婚 *jiéhūn*, an intransitive verb with no object thus no semantic requirement for specific subject or object genders. This third verb existed in Ancient Chinese but it signified the union of two families. Following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, a new marriage law was enacted with the objective of disrupting traditional conceptions of marriage and ensuring quality between spouses. Consequently, 结婚 *jiéhūn* is the only verb used in the text of this law, though the two gender-restricted verbs persist in modern Mandarin (Mallet-Jiang 2021:38–40). That said, all three marriage verb ideographs contain the semantic component 女 'woman', which Mallet-Jiang (2021:38) argues, foregrounds the relationship between the act of marriage and women as objects — specifically the Confucian conceptional of marriage as the transfer of a women (physically and financially) from her father's home to her husband's home. The second component of the ideogram 嫁 *jià* is 家 'home' and the second component of the ideogram 娶 *qǔ* is 取 'obtain'. Mallet-Jiang (2021:41) notes that as homosexuality becomes more accepted in Chinese society — even though it remains stigmatised – and as same-sex marriage becomes legal in more and more countries, "it is very probable that the two 'gendered' verbs will become completely obsolete in the very near future." It may be the case that in BCMS＋ the third option, *v(j)enčati se,* may persist while the semantically-restricted *udati se* and *oženiti se* become obsolete, such that the use of either for same-sex relationships will become moot and the grammatical extension of subjects and objects to include same-sex spouses will never occur.

1.3 Attitudes, Identities and Linguistic Variation

Traditionally, research on sociolinguistic variation has focused on production (e.g., Labov 1966). However, Preston (2011) argued that perception of the phonetic signal is equally shaped by social factors and does not necessarily map onto production patterns. In an earlier study, Niedzielski (1999) had shown that, contrary to expectations, participants from Detroit who were asked to choose between minimal pairs containing vowels affected by the Northern Cities Chain Shift (NCCS) judged and categorised vowels according to the conservative, i.e., pre-NCCS system, although all of the participants were active users of NCCS in production (Niedzielski 1999). Niedzielski (1999) also found that vowels were judged and categorised differently depending on participants' knowledge of speakers' geographical origins came in Canada or Michigan. As the present study is concerned with perception and judgement of linguistic input rather than linguistic output, such findings are crucial to the interpretation of its results. Niedzielski's (1999) research underscores that what speakers produce and what speakers perceive may be two quite different things.

Further, perception is subject to ideological and attitude-driven variation. Strand (1999) found that onset consonants in CVC cues were variously interpreted as /s/ or /ʃ/ by English native speakers depending on whether the rest of the cues were spoken by a typically male- or female-sounding voice and whether they were shown a woman or a man speaking the cue. The main phonetic cue used to differentiate /s/ and /ʃ/ is the frequency at which turbulent acoustic energy is concentrated (each sound's Centre of Gravity, or COG), with /s/ having a higher COG than /ʃ/. Generally speaking, men have a lower overall COG for both fricatives compared to women. This general pattern, so Strand (1999) argues, leads to differences in processing of the phonetic signal, which she calls *gradient normalisation*. She suggests that social cues such as voice quality and the gendered appearance of speakers do not merely constitute additional social information but are entrenched in speakers' grammatical processing. The present

study uses written stimuli and does therefore not investigate the perception of visual or auditory cues provided by speakers. Strand's (1999) findings on the role of gender in grammatical processing are, however, still utterly relevant to the interpretation of this study's results. From a semantic perspective, this can be taken to suggest that the gender of individuals referred to in discourse is equally important to processing, even beyond morphological agreement.

At the syntax/semantics interface, research on singular *they*[8] has yielded similar results, suggesting attitudes toward gender identities play a role in the perception of how gender is indexed with pronouns in English. Singular uses of *they* have a long history in English (Balhorn 2004, Curzan 2003), and for indefinite antecedents (12a) and antecedents where gender is unknown (12b), singular *they* is a largely uncontroversial choice. When referring to persons of known gender (12c) — even individuals whose preferred pronouns are *they/them* — acceptability judgements vary greatly between different socio-demographic groups. Buildling on Bjorkman (2017), Konnelly & Cowper (2020) differentiate between three different dialects or pronoun acceptability systems. In the conservative dialect, constraints apply as described above, i.e., indefinite, unknown, and plural antecedents are followed by *they* and its related pro-forms. Binary gender is a necessary semantic feature, which is activated by singular nouns with referents of known or presumed gender.[9] In the transitionary dialect, the same constraints largely apply. However, individuals who prefer *they/them* pronouns are treated as separate lexical entries with exceptional pronominal agreement. In the progressive dialect, the authors argue, the lexical feature of [MALE] or [FEMALE] is not necessarily activated. *They* acts as a default third-person pronoun, which is neither specified for

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[8]Though referred to as 'singular *they*', this phenomenon includes the use of all third-person plural pro-forms, including the pronouns *they, them, theirs* and the possessive determiner *their*, with a singular antecedent. People who desire to be referred to using all of these pro-forms are colloquially said to 'prefer *they/them* pronouns', even though this desire extends to also include the genitive/possessive forms.

[9]For words such as *spokeswoman* the referent's gender is known, whereas for a word such as *builder*, there are strong tendencies to assume the referent to be male, though this is not explicit.

gender nor number. *He* and *she,* hence, provide additional information about the antecedent, but are not obligatorily activated. This means that, in the progressive dialect, all statements in (12) are grammatically licit:

(12)   a.   <u>Someone</u> has a book that *they* have kept for years.

     b.   <u>The linguist</u> has a book that *they* have kept for years.

     c.   <u>My mother</u> has a book that *they* have kept for years.

Example (12c) is potentially ambiguous, as the referent of *mother* could identify as a woman or as a non-binary person, could be (as is common in drag culture) a gay male drag artist mentor, or could be any number of other entities labelled *mother* through metaphoric extension.[10]   Yet, *mother* still carries a strong association with being female. For Konnelly & Cowper (2020), however, this strong gender expectation is not at odds with singular *they* in the progressive dialect. Germane to the present study, Konnelly & Cowper (2020) found that having the progressive dialect pronoun system correlated with study participants having a positive attitude toward or an affiliation with the LGBT+ community (see also Ackerman et al. 2018Hernandez 2020). Conrod (2018) also found the progressive dialect pronoun system singular *they* was used more frequently among younger speakers and labelled it a change-in-progress (*inter alia* Labov 2001). These findings together suggest that previously-requisite grammatical encoding of natural gender can dissipate with time or as individuals' attitudes toward or assumptions about gender evolve. The same phenomenon may be reflected in judgements about same-sex spouses and BCMS+ marriage verbs.

Also situated at the nexus of morphosyntax and social attitude, Bradley (2020) correlates acceptability judgements of various sentences containing singular and plural *they* with a sexism score and the presence of non-binary people in participants' families. Unsurprisingly, those who identified as non-binary or had non-binary relatives judged

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[10]For example, *Mother Earth* or robots in sci-fi works like *I am Mother* (2019) or *Raised by Wolves* (2020–).

singular *they* for known, canonically-gendered antecedents more acceptable than other participants, aligning with the above findings that individuals' familiarity with non-binary persons impacts their grammatical judgement — and potentially their own grammatical system (see also Hekanaho 2020). Perhaps even more strikingly, sexism scores also showed significant correlations with the acceptability of singular *they* (see also Sarrasin et al. 2012). Bradley (2020) explored both positive and negative sexist attitudes, with the shared implicit assumption being that male and female are inherently different and separate categories. Both types of sexism correlated with lower acceptability of singular *they* for known antecedents. Bradley (2020) concludes that sexist attitudes reinforce the binary opposition of gender in the grammar. In other words, for those with sexist attitudes, gender is a salient semantic feature which pronouns must reflect. These findings indicate that attitudes toward gender categories themselves, not just familiarity with the LGBT+ community, can impact speakers' grammars.

The evolution of "generic" (= non-gender specific) third-person pro-forms is supported by Doherty & Conklin's (2017) online processing and offline judgement experiments, which revealed that although there is a measurable processing cost associated with singular *them* (i.e., number mismatch), it is far lower than for gender mismatches (e.g., *the spokeswoman…he*), and that sentences with singular *them* are considered more acceptable then sentences with gender mismatches. This suggests generic third person pro-forms may be becoming more integrated into speakers' grammars.

From a cognitive/neurolinguistic perspective, the use of singular *they* is not without cost. Sanford & Filik (2007) studied online processing of singular *they/them* using experimental eye tracking data and found plural pronouns with singular antecedents (i.e., *Someone…them*) incurred additional processing costs compared to plural pronouns with plural antecedents (i.e., *Some people…, them*) — though not as much cost as singular pronouns with plural antecedents (*Some people…her*). Prasad & Morris's (2020) ERP study found (even among non-binary participants, and participants who interacted fre-

quently with non-binary people) that there was additional processing associated with hearing *themselves* following an unambiguously-gendered antecedent (as measured by a P600 effect, or a peak in brain activity 600 ms after encountering a presumed grammatical error or syntactic anomaly). This extra processing cost may influence acceptability judgements of generic third-person pro-forms, as utterances more difficult to process are often judged as unacceptable (e.g., Schütze 1996, Hofmeister et al. 2014). The cognitive cost of singular *they* is highly instructive to the current study, as it, too, is situated at the nexus of grammatical acceptability, speech processing, social gender, and morphosyntactic form. For both marriage verbs in BCMS+ and English generic third person pro-forms, gender is a highly salient feature which corresponds to socially negotiated gender categories and the extent to which a sentence may be judged as acceptable may reflect a participant's gender beliefs or their attitudes toward certain groups, but also their ease of processing that sentence — or some combination of all three plus other intangible influences.

Gygax et al. (2021) argue that gender as a semantic feature is necessarily activated even if the context does not necessitate it. Contrary to previous arguments, which assume that gender activation facilitates cohesion in text comprehension, Gygax et al. (2021) provide evidence from French and English which shows that such a functional analysis may not be adequate. In French, which differentiates masculine and feminine gender similar to BCMS+, masculine forms come with an additional processing cost, presumably due to their ambiguity — as they are used for both generic and male referents.

The use of generic masculine forms has long been the subject of feminist linguistics (Motschenbacher & Weikert 2015) and there is a growing body of research which suggests that generic masculines decrease the visibility of women in languages (Stahlberg et al. 2007, Prewitt-Freilino et al. 2011, Hekanaho 2015, etc.). Though the feminist critique of language has lead to heightened awareness of generic masculines and

brought about an increased use of neutral forms, masculine as generic is still a common practice in many European languages expressing gender explicitly, including BCMS + (Hentschel 2015) and the closely related Russian (Doleschal & Schmid 2001). It is not intuitively clear what masculine as default means in the context of marriage verbs, as the societal default involves both a man and a woman, but the dual function of the masculine is important to bare in mind when analysing the data.

The influence of attitudes and ideologies on speech are further illustrated by two case studies on the political/ideological alignment of speakers. First, Hall-Lew et al. (2010) tested whether members of the US Congress pronounced the second vowel in the word *Iraq* as /æ/ or /ɑ/. Historically, foreign /a/ vowels have been borrowed into American varieties of English as /æ/, however, there is a growing tendency to use /ɑ/, which, some argue (e.g., Boberg 1999), sounds more British or closer to the /a/-sound of the donor language to Americans. Either way, the use of /ɑ/ is associated with sophistication, metropolitanism and liberal values (Hall-Lew et al. 2010). /æ/, on the other hand, carries connotations of conservatism. Hall-Lew et al. (2010) showed that for *Iraq*, which at the time of investigation was a highly politicised term due to the US military presence in the region, pronunciation of the second vowel was strongly correlated with partisan affiliation: Democrats favoured /ɑ/ and Republicans /æ/. The effect persisted even when the researchers controlled for accent, which was hypothesised to be a confounding factor, as there were more Southern-accented Republicans in Congress than Democrats.

In a similar vein, Krivoruchko (2008) examined a syntactic-lexical phenomenon which is governed by ideology in Ukrainian and Russian: in both languages, prepositions *na*[11] 'in; on' and *v/(u)*[12] 'in' are in complementary distribution, i.e., some nouns collocate with one, others with the other, and a small number of nouns collocate with both, at

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[11]Transliterations follow the Library of Congress (2022) Romanisation conventions.

[12]In Ukrainian, the preposition in question surfaces as /u/ after consonants and as /v/ after vowels. In Russian, it is always /v/.

least in the spoken languages. The distribution of the two prepositions can to some extent be predicted by semantic cues, e.g., enclosed spaces tend to collocate with *v/(u)*, whereas open spaces usually take *na*. Most countries, however, also collocate with *v/(u)* in both Ukrainian and Russian. Until recently, however, the prescriptive standard for both Ukrainian and Russian was for *Ukraïna/Ukraina* to be preceded by *na*. Though famously used by Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko, *na* became an icon of Russian suppression in Ukraine after independence, and thus a preposition which linguistically undermines Ukraine's status as a sovereign state. This iconisation process (Irvine & Gal 2000) led to the more frequent use of *v Ukraïni/v Ukraine* and an ideological specialisation of the *na* forms. Krivoruchko (2008) argues that *v/(u)* now indexes a progressive, Europe-oriented and decidedly anti-Russian individual, whereas Ukrainian traditionalists, as well as conservative Russian-speakers, use *na*.[13]//

There is a complex relationship between attitudes toward the LGBT+ community as a whole on the one hand and legislation to introduce same-sex unions on the other hand. In an ideal democratic system, the government executes the will of the people. If same-sex couples become more accepted by the majority of society, and calls for the introduction of same-sex unions become louder, the government will implement such legislation. Legislation is a consequence of public opinion. In practice, of course, legislative processes are influenced by a number of factors, many of which are decoupled from public opinion, such as compliance with international law, party politics, or fiscal imperatives. Beyond this, Ofosu et al. (2019) argue that the idea of a government serving the will of its people itself has an impact on public opinion. When citizens feel represented by the government, they are more likely to align with views put forward by that government, even if those views were different prior to a legislative change. Conversely, if a government comprises a political elite out of touch with citizens or their concerns, those citizens may oppose legislation initially in line with popular values

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[13]See also the spelling and pronunciation of Ukrainian capital *Kyiv/Kiev* by English speakers following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia Rice-Oxley 2022, etc.

and opinions. Ofosu et al. (2019) studied how implicit and explicit homophobic biases changed in different US states following the legalisation of same-sex marriage. They found that in all states which introduced local legislation legalising same-sex marriage, the already somewhat declining implicit and explicit homophobic biases accelerated significantly in their decline. Conversely, in states where same-sex marriage was introduced instead by the US Supreme Court (*Obergefell v. Hodges* 2015), no such trend was observed. Ofosu et al. (2019) argue that the local character of the legislative processes among the former fostered a sense of local community representation, whereby people were more likely to identify with the attitudes represented by the legislation. In the case of same-sex marriage established via federal court action, people and attitudes were more removed. Alternatively, it may be argued that the states where same-sex marriage was not introduced locally are the most conservative from the onset, so a change in homophobic biases would be more radical then in more progressive states (Ofosu et al. 2019).

Despite proposed and enacted legislation moving the Western Balkans closer to marriage equality, discrimination and harassment of the LGBT+ community is still widespread in the region. In a report from the World Bank Group (2018), every third LGBT+ person from a sample comprising Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia had experienced violence based on their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation. Discrimination and harassment are common in the workplace and even more common in the education system. Furthermore, LGBT+ persons are perceived as largely absent from public life as a whole. Although Serbian data was not included in the World Bank Group (2018) report, its findings equally apply to Serbian circumstances. Public support of same-sex relationships is regarded as the most important measure in bringing about change, so legislative action is readily supported by members of the LGBT+ community (World Bank Group 2018). Attitudes and treatment of LGBT+ people are more positive in Slovenia, which was the first

country of the region to join the EU in 2004 (European Comission 2019), which may indicate that social change is in progress in the region at large.

George (2019) describes another effect of marriage-equality legislation on public opinion: She argues that after the introduction of same-sex marriage in the US, opponents refocused on trans rights as the new anti-LGBT + frontier, which resulted in a backlash against trans people. Marriage equality in the US, in particular, framed same-sex couples as essentially the same as straight married couples: domestic and monogamous. This naturally excluded a large number of queer relationships. Such a "homonormative" framing of LGBT + people in legislative campaigns persists in the framing of trans issues which focuses on traditionally male and female trans individuals, thereby excluding less traditional and especially non-binary trans individuals (George 2019). The LGBT + community is a heterogeneous group and progress for one sub-group may result in backlash for another. In the public imagination, however the LGBT + community forms an entity, which can explain the conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity in European anti-gender movements (Strube et al. 2021). Legislative successes of gay and bi people can galvanise conservative opinions about the binary opposition of male and female and further the alignment of social attitude with linguistic behaviour. As in Bradley (2020), those who are steeped in the belief of the gender binary are more reluctant to accept singular *they* and perhaps by extension the non-traditional use of BCMS + marriage verbs. In other words, pro-LGBT + legislation can have a divisive effect, strengthening the alignment between attitude and behaviour on both sides of the spectrum.

The history of same-sex relations in the Western Balkans is complex and, in many aspects, vastly under-researched. Under the Ottoman empire, which encompassed much of the region where BCMS + is spoken, male-male desire was largely accepted, at least in the ruling classes, to which a wealth of homoerotic Ottoman poetry bears witness (Murray 2007). In the Austro-Hungarian empire, on the other hand, which became

the main geopolitical actor in the Western Balkans in the second half of the 19th century, homosexuality was a punishable offense and not generally socially accepted (Sked 2012). Though there are accounts of internment of homosexuals in the early days of Socialist Yugoslavia, no major historical inquiry has been made into the subject (Jurčić 2011). Legally, homosexuality was banned in the early days of Yugoslavia. However, the different constituent republics underwent very different trajectories in the 1970s and 1980s. While Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and Voivodina[14] legalised homosexuality in 1977 and had domestic LGBT+ rights movements with a relative degree of public visibility (Jurčić 2011), Serbia did not legalise homosexuality until 1994 (Savić 2011) and the constituent entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 1996, 1998, and 2003, respectively (Gavrić 2011).[15]

In today's political discourse in the countries concerned, as well as the Central and Eastern European region more broadly, the LGBT+ rights movement and, by extension, queer people are framed as an import from the West. Often, they are seen seen as the by-product of neoliberal capitalism, which took hold in the region after the breakdown of Socialist regimes and, in the case of Yugoslavia, civil war. So-called Anti-Genderism has become a leading ideology in the new Central and Eastern European Right, a development concomitant with the rising impact of religion in politics throughout the region, with prominent examples from Poland (Adamiak 2021) and also Serbia (Navratil 2021)). Though this anti-queer rhetoric is ultimately rooted in social conservatism and employed as a populist means to rally support from those disappointed by the promises of Europeanisation, the European push for LGBT+ rights and acceptance is very real (Bilić 2016). The EU makes funds available for LGBT+ activism and community projects in the region both in EU member Croatia and candidate states and declared

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[14]Voivodina is the nothern part of Serbia with a high degree of regional independence both in Socialist Yugoslavia and modern-day Serbia.

[15]In accordance with the Dayton Peace Accord, Bosnia is divided into three entities which largely correspond to the territories formed through the armistice line at the end of the Bosnian war (Mrduljaš 2008). The three entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska and Brčko District, have a high degree of sovereignty.

its territory an *LGBTIQ Freedom Zone* in 2021, in response to the *LGBT-free zones*, which have sprung up across Poland, and to anti-LGBT legislation in Hungary (European Parliament 2021). Both, conservative discourse in the region and the EU's involvement in LGBT+ activism create a close association between LGBT+ issues and conceptions of "the West", in relation to which individuals may position themselves in a number of ways. The complex meaning of LGBT+ rights in post-Yugoslav political discourse is discussed by Brković (2014) in her anthropology of European integration of Montenegro. She outlines that there is a close link between imagined European integration and the LGBT+ movement. EU-funded projects tend to focus on the advancement of legal rights, e.g., marriage equality and on equal access to health care. In the local LGBT+ communities, however, there is a sense that negative social attitudes and limited access to public life as a queer person have been largely left unaddressed by activists, who are seen as detached from the actual LGBT+ community or corrupted by EU funds that they use for their own betterment (Brković 2014). Progressive linguistic behaviour in the present study thus may not be correlated with pro-LGBT+ attitudes, but rather with a more general pro-European or potentially pro-capitalist stance, of which LGBT+ attitudes are merely an index.

2 Experiment

Because of the rarity and variation found in non-traditional uses of BCMS+ marriage verbs in extant written and spoken linguistic corpora of BCMS+, an experimental approach was chosen to investigate the phenomenon. Participants were recruited through personal networks as well as relevant topical sites on social media[16] and through universities in the region. Participation was voluntary and unpaid; participants were given the possibility to request the final version of this paper if they were interested. In an ac-

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[16]I used my personal *Facebook* and *Instagram* profile to advertise the experiment and I posted on a number of relevant *Reddit* forums.

ceptability judgement task, participants were asked to rate sentences on a 6-point Likert scale (0-5). Stimuli were generated from real-word uses of marriage verbs taken from regional news portals. Sentences containing marriage verbs were adapted to include subjects and objects of different gender combinations. All stimuli for of one condition (*v(j)enčati se* with a female subject and object in Ijekavian) are reproduced in (15). Examples sentences were largely drawn from celebrity news, where the non-traditional uses of marriage verbs were easiest to find, such as in (13).

(13) *Portorikanski   pevač-ø   Riki-ø   Martin-ø   venča-o   se*
      Puerto.Rican-M singer-NOM.M Riki-NOM Martin-NOM marry-PTCP-M REF
      sa   svoj-im   partner-om,   arapsk-im   umetni-k-om   Džvan-om
      with REF-INST partner-INST.M Arab-INST artist-M-INST Jwan-INST
      Josef-om.
      Yosef-INST
      'Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin married his partner, the Arab artist Jwan
      Yosef.'

In contrast, in news about marriage equality, paraphrases using *istopolna zajednica* 'same-sex union' or *brak* 'marriage' are more common, as in (14).

(14) *Matičar-k-a   Žan-a   Kap-a   očekuj-e   da   za dvadeset-ak*
      registrar-F-NOM Žana-NOM Kapa-NOM expect-3SG COMP in 20-around
      dan-a   sklop-i   prv-u   istopoln-u   zajednic-u.
      day-GEN.PL conclude-3SG first-ACC same.sex-ACC union-ACC
      'Registrar Žana Kapa expects to conclude the first same-sex union in around
      twenty days.' (Durović 2021)

(15) Stimuli for the condition [*v(j)enčati se*: Feminine subject, Feminine Object] in
      Ijekavian

      a. *Buduć-a kraljic-a   Englesk-e   može   se   vjenča-ti sa*
          future-F queen-NOM England-GEN can.3SG REF marry.INF with
          ženom.
          woman.INST
          'The future Queen of England may marry a woman.'

b. *Sandr-a   je   raskinu-l-a dug-u   vez-u   da   bi*
Sandra-NOM AUX end-PTCP-F long-ACC relationship-ACC COMP COND
se   vjenča-l-a   sa Sar-om   u   koj-u   se   zaljubi-l-a
REF marry-PTCP-F with Sara-INST into who-ACC REF fall.in.love-PTCP-F
na odmor-u.
on holiday-LOC

'Sandra ended a long-term relationship to marry Sara, who she fell in love

with on holiday.'

c. *Vjenča-l-a   se   sa dugogodišnj-om   partner-ic-om Sar-om*
marry-PTCP-F REF with long.standing-INST.F partner-F-INST Sara-INST
Miller u Njujork-u.
Miller in New.York-LOC

'She married her long-standing partner Sara Miller in New York.'

d. *Belgijsk-a robijaš-ic-a   će   se   vjenča-ti sa   ljubavni-c-om na*
Belgian-F robber-F-NOM FUT REF marry-inf with lover-F-INST on
doživotnoj.
life.long-LOC

'A Belgian robber will marry her lover in life-long custody.'

e. *Mi-a   se   preseli-l-a   u London, a   onda se   2011. godin-e*
Mia-NOM REF move-PTCP-F to London and then REF 2011st year-GEN
vjenča-l-a   sa svetski poznat-om   plesač-ic-om Em-om   King.
marry-PTCP-F with world famous-INST dancer-F-INST Ema-INST King

'Mia moved to London and then she married the world-renowned dancer

Ema King in 2011.'

f. *Vjenča-l-a   se   sa žen-om   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
marry-PTCP-F REF with woman-INST REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN

'She married the woman of her dreams.'

g. *Fotografij-om   na društven-im   mrež-ama   ona   je*
photograph-INST on social-LOC.PL network-LOC.PL she.NOM AUX
otkri-l-a   da   će   se   vjenča-ti sa   žen-om   sv-og
reveal-PTCP-F COMP FUT REF marry-INF with woman-INST REF-GEN
život-a.
life-GEN

'With a photo on social media, she revealed that she will marry the woman

of her life.'

h. *T-a   cur-a   Rit-a   će   se   vjenča-ti   sa   Kristin-om.*
that-F girl-NOM Rita-NOM FUT REF marry-INF with Kristina-INST

'This girl Rita will marry Kristina.'

i. *Englesk-a pjevač-ic-a   Laur-a   Smith se   vjenča-l-a   sa*
English-F singer-F-NOM Laura-NOM Smith REF marry-PTCP-F with
svoj-om   partneri-c-om,   škotsk-om   umjetni-c-om Martin-om
REF-INST partner-F-INST Scottish-INST artist-F-INST Martina-INST
Robinson.
Robinson

'English singer Laura Smith married her partner, Scottish artist Martina

Robinson.'

j. *Premijer-k-a   Luksemburg-a   će   se   danas vjenča-ti   sa*
Prime.Minister-F-NOM Luxembourg-GEN FUT REF today marry-INF with
svoj-om   partneri-c-om.
REF-INST partner-F-INST

'The PM of Luxembourg will marry her partner today.'

k. *Kćerk-a   naš-e   poznat-e   maneken-k-e će   se   vjenča-ti*
daughter-NOM our-GEN famous-GEN model-F-GEN FUT REF marry-INF
sa   djevojk-om.
with girl-INST

'The daughter of our famous model will marry her girlfriend.'

l. *Švedsk-a princez-a   bi   mog-l-a   da   se   vjenč-a   sa*
Swedish-F princess-NOM COND can-PTCP-F COMP REF marry-3SG with
cur-om.
girl-INST

'The Swedish princess could marry a girl.'

Where examples contained personal names, they were changed to English and international sounding names to avoid ethnic bias. In the region where BCMS+ is spoken, both, given names and family names, are key indices of ethnic identity and fully neutral names, i.e., names that are not considered Bosniak, Serbian, or Croatian are rare. It is unclear how individual attitudes toward specific ethnic groups would influence judgements but as Niedzielski (1999) showed, ethnic/national identifiers can indeed be a crucial factor in grammatical acceptability, so it is important to control for it. The

names used in the experiment were carefully chosen to still comply with unmarked BCMS + declension: male names end in a consonant and female names end in *-a* in the nominative. This means that names are be clearly identifiable as male or female as well as parsed for the intended case, reducing ambiguity. This is especially important for female names which cannot be felicitously declined unless they end in *-a* in standard BCMS +. Lastly, names were chosen which complied with varying spelling conventions in the different standards of BCMS +. In standard Croatian, the spelling of foreign names remains unchanged and inflectional endings are added if appropriate. In the Serbian and Montenegrin standards, however, foreign names are re-spelled to reflect their pronunciation, e.g., *James Dean* becomes *Džejms Din* and *Simone de Beauvoir* is *Simon de Bovoar*. The Bosnian standard allows for both. The names chosen for stimuli such as *Ana* or *Peter* are spelled the same under both conventions. Some common English names where only minor differences have to be accounted for, e.g., Ijekavian *Smith* versus Ekavian *Smit* were also included. Where personal names are absent, professional/noble/political titles are used which form a well established lexico-morphological pair, e.g. *kraljica* 'queen' — *kralj* 'king', to reduce lexical ambiguity. Place names and ethnonyms used are all situated outside the BCMS + region to avoid the introduction of ethno-national biases as a confounding factor. Lastly, stimuli are balanced between past tense and future tense uses of marriage verb conditions (five each), as well as one sentence each using an infinitive and one with a final clause with "present tense".[17] The exclusion of present tense in the main clause is partly conditioned by the publisher source, namely newspapers, which either report on recent or imminent weddings. Furthermore, present tense usually requires the use of imperfective aspect, whereas in the case of 'getting married', which is a classical two-state verb (see Klein 1995 for discussion), future and past tense usually select perfective aspect. Given this, only perfective-aspect verbs are used for the stimuli.

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[17] This is not actual present tense but an embedded clause with a synthetically conjugated perfective verb, which often replaces perfective infinitival constructions.

There are three dimensions to the experiment: subject gender, marriage verb, and object gender. Subject and object gender have two conditions each: feminine and masculine. The marriage verb dimension has three conditions: *v(j)enčati se, udati se* and *oženiti se*. An Ekavian example of all conditions is given in (16–18) This $2 \times 3 \times 2$ set-up yields 12 unique conditions which were matched with 12 example sentences, yielding 144 unique stimuli.

(16) *v(j)enčati se*

    a. *Venča-l-a   se sa žen-om   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-F REF with woman-INST REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'She married the woman of her dreams.'

    b. *Venča-l-a   se sa muškarc-em svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-F REF with man-INST   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'She married the man of her dreams.'

    c. *Venča-o   se sa muškarc-em svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-M REF with man-INST   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'He married the man of his dreams.'

    d. *Venča-o   se sa žen-om   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-M REF with woman-INST REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'He married the woman of his dreams.'

(17) *udati se*

    a. *Uda-l-a   se za žen-u   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-F REF for woman-ACC REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'She married the woman of her dreams.'

    b. *Uda-l-a   se za muškarc-a svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-F REF for man-ACC   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'She married the man of her dreams.'

    c. *Uda-o   se za muškarc-a svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-M REF for man-ACC   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
        'He married the man of his dreams.'

    d. *Uda-o   se za žen-u   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
        marry-PTCP-M REF for woman-ACC REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN

'He married the woman of his dreams.'

(18) *oženiti se*

    a. *Oženi-l-a   se žen-om   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
       marry-PTCP-F REF woman-INST REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
       'She married the woman of her dreams.'

    b. *Oženi-l-a   se muškarc-em svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
       marry-PTCP-F REF man-INST   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
       'She married the man of her dreams.'

    c. *Oženi-o   se muškarc-em svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
       marry-PTCP-M REF man-INST   REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
       'He married the man of his dreams.'

    d. *Oženi-o   se žen-om   svoj-ih   sn-ov-a.*
       marry-PTCP-M REF woman-INST REF-GEN.PL dream-PL-GEN
       'He married the woman of his dreams.'

Participants were presented with each condition three times in pseudorandomised order, i.e., each participant judged 36 experimental stimuli that were interspersed with 36 filler items. Half of the fillers were grammatical and the other half were ungrammatical. In terms of genre, fillers were also taken from regional news portals and revolve around romantic relationships in order not to be easily distinguishable from the experimental stimuli. Having clearly grammatical and clearly ungrammatical filler items ensured that stimuli that were perceived as grammatical or ungrammatical did not stand out. Rather, there was a balance between grammatical and ungrammatical stimuli and fillers. Originally devised in the western Ijekavian variety of BCMS+, the experiment was cloned and adapted to the eastern Ekavian variety. Though the separation of BCMS+ into distinct languages is largely political, there are some clear differences between the variety spoken in the west of the region and the variety in the east, with a transitional variant in-between. Phonologically, the most important distinction per-

tains to the reflexes of Common Slavic *yat* /ě/ which is /e/ in the east and /je/ or /ije/ in the central and western part of the region. There are also dialects with an /i/ reflex, but, given that they have no literary standard, they are now regarded as stylistically marked and "dialectal". Another distinction between east and west pertains to the distribution of suffixes *-ka* and *-ica* to derive feminine agentative nouns. *-ka* is preferred in the east, *-ica* in the west. The two versions of the experiment rely on dictionaries for the use of *yat* reflexes and feminine agentative suffixes to reduce the influence of unfamiliar word forms on participants' judgements. Separate links to the respective versions were provided in the recruitment materials for the experiment and participants were asked to click the appropriate link based on their pronunciation of the word *r(ij)eč* 'word'. Both versions use Latin script, although Cyrillic is also widely used for both, Ekavian and Ijekavian. Only Latin is, however, intelligible to all literate speakers, since Cyrillic is usually not taught and read in Croatia and parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Magner 2001). Furthermore, even in the Serbian public, Cyrillic has a much more specialised indexical meaning than Latin, which would have introduced unwanted biases into the data. Specifically, the Cyrillic script is associated with social conservation, nationalism and Orthodoxy in the Serbian perception (Ivković 2015b). The default script in online discourses is Latin, a feature rooted in the limited accessibility of non-Latin keyboards and word processors in the early days of the Internet in the Western Balkans (Ivković 2015a). The experiment was hosted on *PCIbex* (Schwarz & Zehr 2018) and based on Dillon & Ivan's 2018 code for acceptability judgement experiments, which includes automated counterbalancing/pseudorandomisation.

The experiment was followed by a short questionnaire, asking participants their age, place of origin, and gender, as well as their attitude toward the LGBT+ community and whether they considered themselves or their friends to be part of it. Demographic questions were open-ended, in line with a queer research paradigm, so participants were free to label their gender and place of origin in their own terms. Furthermore, *Yes-No*

questions were formulated using the normatively preferred forms for the Ekavian and Ijekavian standard respectively, i.e., Ijekavian questions were verb-initial followed by the interrogative particle *li*, whereas Ekavian questions were introduced by *da li* and followed SVO word order, as in (19).

(19) a. *Smatra-te   li se dijel-om   LGBT populacij-e?*
               consider-2SG.POL INT REF part-INST.SG LGBT population-GEN.SG
               'Do you consider yourself part of the LGBT population?'

        b. *Da   li se smatra-te   del-om   LGBT populacij-e?*
               COMP INT REF consider-2SG.POL part-INST.SG LGBT population-GEN.SG
               'Do you consider yourself part of the LGBT population?'

Lastly, participants were asked whether they considered themselves language mavens,[18] which may be a confounding factor in the acceptability of non-traditional language use. The BCMS + region has a strong normative tradition when it comes to language education and standard language ideologies are prevalent (Kordić 2010), in part due to the instrumentalisation of language for political ends at various times in the history of the region and most recently in the "national revivals" concomitant with the break-up of Yugoslavia (Greenberg 2008). Self-identified mavens may be less willing to accept non-normative language use, irrespective of their attitudes toward the LGBT + community. The questionnaire asks *Bavite li se lingvistikom?/Da li se bavite lingvistikom?* 'Are you concerned with Linguistics?', which makes no distinction between academically trained linguists and those merely privately engaged with what they understand under the term. However, because of the prevalence of standard language ideologies both, within and outside academia in the region, this distinction may not in fact be very important for the present purposes. To avoid confusion, the group that answered *Yes* to 'Are you concerned with Linguistics?' will be referred to as language mavens. Participants who left this category blank were grouped with non-mavens, as they did

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[18]For clarity, the term *language maven* is used throughout this paper to describe speakers with a prescriptivist approach to language.

not explicitly identify as language mavens. Attitudes were elicited on a 6-point Likert scale (0–5), to facilitate correlation with the acceptability data. Asking about attitudes toward the LGBT + community can only elicit explicit biases, rather than implicit ones (Ofosu et al. 2019). Explicit biases describe attitudes of individuals above the level of consciousness and are, therefore, also susceptible to self-policing and self-censorship. In the context of the present experiment, this means that participants may report their attitude toward the LGBT + community as overly positive if they feel that there is a social taboo of being openly anti-LGBT +, even if the task is anonymous and participants have been made aware of this. Ofosu et al. (2019) describe such an effect for the U.S. However, such a finding may not be as pronounced in the BCMS + region, where anti-LGBT + rhetoric is prominent in public and political discourses (Navratil 2021).

To decouple social from linguistic judgements as much as possible, no mention of the LGBT + community or same-sex relations was made in the advertisement text, consent form, or instructions for the experiment. Participants were informed that verbs pertaining to romantic relationships were the subject of the survey and that some sentences may sound very odd. Throughout the experiment no reference was made to notions of correctness or grammaticality to avoid priming participants to adopt a normative standard-language-driven mindset. Furthermore, the questionnaire followed the judgement task, meaning the LGBT + context was only introduced overtly once the linguistic judgement task had been completed. However, the built-in morphological salience of the gender of subjects and objects led (at least) one participant to conclude that the task was in fact designed to elicit social judgements about same-sex relations, rather than linguistic ones in the judgement task, as in 20

(20) *jako više vuče na istraživanje o mišljenjima ka LGBT populaciji, izgleda kao da nema veze sa lingvistikom pa sam zato i prestao da radim anketu*

sa jedne strane razumem pitanja npr. Engleski premijer se oženio za lika/momka/muškarca i kao razlike između tih reči u značenju "partner", ali više vuče ka tome "hej koliko

ti je čudno ako kažem muškarac umesto žena" i ja tu ne vidim nikakvu lingvističku

dobrobit

srećno

'This seems much more like a study about attitudes toward the LGBT population, it looks like that it has nothing to do with linguistics and therefore I also stopped doing the questionnaire.

On the one hand, I understand the questions, for example, *The English Prime Minister married a guy/dude/man,* and like the difference between these words meaning *partner,* but it seems more like "Hey, look how weird it is if I say man instead of woman." and in this I do not see any linguistic benefit.

Good luck!'[19]

Moreover, some commentors on *Reddit* took issue with the formulation of the text advertising the experiment. In line with a queer research paradigm, inclusive language was used, including underscores to demarcate masculine and feminine morphemes in words such as *govornik_ca* '(male_female) speaker'. Additionally, the collocation *bhs jezik* 'Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian language' was used to be inclusive in terms of ethnolinguistic affiliation. Both of these conventions are endorsed by *Sarajevski otvoreni centar*, a Sarajevo-based human-rights non-governmental organization (Čaušević & Zlotrg 2011). The use of inclusive language is, however, not widespread as an institutional practice in the region and, therefore, speakers are likely to not have encountered such language use. This may have confused and alienated a number of potential participants. Conversely, a less inclusive advertisement text may have equally alienated potential participants, merely ones from other demographics.

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[19]Translation by the author.

3 Hypotheses

Based on the above grammatical overview and literature review, a number of hypotheses about the experimental data were formulated.

Hypothesis 1 *LGBT+ community membership, having LGBT+ personal networks, and having a positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community will be positively correlated with higher acceptability scores for gendered marriage verbs in same-sex stimuli. Effect sizes are informed by how important LGBT+ issues are to speakers, and hence ordered thus: community membership > attitude > personal networks*

As previous research has shown for singular *they* in English, exposure to a novel form and the attitudes toward the social implications it has may have an influence on individuals' grammars. Situations where social gender is concerned, are particularly salient here, since social gender plays an important role in agreement and anaphora in many of the world's languages, including BCMS+. Stuart-Smith et al. (2013) argues in her study on Glaswegian teenagers' speech that sociophonetic variables are highly informed by what speakers care about. In her study, speakers who watched EastEnders regularly and identified with characters and plot lines adopted ways of speaking typical for urban London dialects. In other words, linguistic behaviour is influenced by who and what we identify with. Assuming a similar correlation holds for perception as well, the more speakers care about the LGBT+ community, the more accepting they should be of sentences with same-sex couples in the experiment. Out of the three measures investigated, being part of the LGBT+ community should therefore be most strongly correlated with higher judgements of acceptability, because this measure is most closely tied to one's own identity. This measure is followed by participants' attitudes towards the LGBT+ community, as attitudes and opinions also inform one's identity and vice versa, albeit not as directly. The weakest measure, I conjecture, will be the presence of LGBT+ friends in participants' lives. Even though, they may feel strongly about them,

in this measure participants᾽ own identity is not directly concerned. The ordering proposed may be understood as an implicational hierarchy. If a participant is higher on the hierarchy, the points lower on the hierarchy are likely to apply to them as well (though see Jones 2018).

Hypothesis 2 *Same-sex stimuli using* v(j)enčati se *will receive higher acceptability scores than same-sex stimuli using* udati se *and* oženiti se*.*

Because of the less constrained nature of *v(j)enčati* in normative/mixed-sex contexts, it can be conjectured that this verb will be given higher judgements of acceptability in same-sex contexts compared to the other two verbs. *V(j)enčati* can take both masculine and feminine arguments as subjects and objects. Its only non-normative element is the co-ocurrence of a masculine subject and a masculine object or a feminine subject and a feminine object, both of which are low frequency and refer to a non-traditional couple, therefore *V(j)enčati* stimuli with same-sex spouses may yield lower acceptability scores than their mixed-sex counterparts.

Hypothesis 3 *For same-sex stimuli with* udati se *and* oženiti se*, stimuli where the subject's gender corresponds to the normative gender of the marriage verb will receive higher acceptability scores than same-sex stimuli where the object's gender corresponds to the normative gender of the marriage verb.*

The salience of subjects in syntactic information structure generally and for BCMS + marriage verbs specifically suggests that subjects are also more salient semantically, and therefore will have a higher influence on acceptability judgements than objects.

4 Results

From a total of 4,708 non-filler experimental responses from 107 participants, 3,489 responses from 96 participants were selected for analysis. Responses from 9 participants

were laid aside due to incomplete demographic information (though see Section 5.5). One was laid aside, as they identified as a gender other than male or female. Given the CART analysis conducted can only process binary nominal variables, they could not be included in the initial analysis. However, they were discussed individually later. Additionally, 4 tokens were excluded for atypical response times, which suggests that those stimli were not judged as intuitively as needed for the experiment.[20] After an initial Categorisation and Regression Tree (CART) analysis, one additional participant stood out as an outlier for her negative judgements of stimuli that in all respects conform to normative grammar. Upon closer inspection, it emerged that the participant had evaluated 28 out of the 36 stimuli as 0/5. A technical issue or misunderstanding of the task may have lead to this participant's anomalous judgements. As her exclusion did not influence the grouping of 3 categories identified in the CART analysis and rendered 2 categories more interpretable, this participant's data was removed from the analysis. The final dataset consists of 3,489 individual tokens from 96 participants. Of these, 74 were women, 22 men; 13 considered themselves part of the LGBT+ community (7 men and 6 women); 63 considered themselves language mavens; and 89 spoke one or more foreign language. Thirty-three participants filled out the Ekavian task, 63 the Ijekavian task. Forty-one participants were from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 22 from Serbia, 22 from Croatia, and 11 from elsewhere or of unknown origin. Participants were between 19 and 59 years old, with a median age of 29 ($sd = 9.42$). Using the same scale as for the judgement task (6-point Likert, 0-5), participants rated their attitude toward the LGBT+ community 4.03 on average ($sd = 1.38$) and the prevalence of LGBT+ friends in their lives 2.58 ($sd = 1.69$). For both ratings, participants made use of the scale's full range. For ease of analysis, the 12 experimental conditions were collapsed into five categories:

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[20] *PCIbex* records response latency (time between presentation of stimuli and participant response). Four tokens were flagged as statistical outliers for their statistically significant longer latency.

Opp.Sex-Norm. Opposite-sex stimuli with normative subject/object gender:

- *udati se*   Female Subject, Male Object

- *oženiti se*   Male Subject, Female Object

- *v(j)enčati se*   Male Subject, Female Object

- *v(j)enčati se*   Female Subject, Male Object

Opp.Sex-Inv. Opposite-sex stimuli with inverse normative subject/object gender:

- *udati se*   *Male Subject, *Female Object

- *oženiti se*   *Female Subject, *Male Object

Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj. Same-sex stimuli with normative subject and inverse normative object gender.

- *udati se*   Female Subject, *Female Object

- *oženiti se*   Male Subject, *Male Object

Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj. Same-sex stimuli with inverse normative subject and normative object gender.

- *udati se*   *Female Subject, Female Object

- *oženiti se*   *Male Subject, Male Object

Same.Sex-Ambiguous Same-sex stimuli with normative subject/object gender, but where same-sex combination is non-normative.

- *v(j)enčati se*   *(Female Subject, Female Object)

- *v(j)enčati se*   *(Male Subject, Male Object)

Descriptive statistics for acceptability distributions can be found in Table 2. As expected, the mean acceptability is highest for **Opp.Sex-Norm.**, which entails canonical, normative, opposite-sex stimuli. Similarly highly-rated are the **Same.Sex-Ambiguous**

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Acceptability per Category

Category	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Opp.Sex-Norm.	0	5	4.35	5	1.23
Same.Sex-Ambiguous	0	5	4.05	5	1.56
Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.	0	5	3.73	5	1.77
Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.	0	5	2.23	2	1.99
Opp.Sex-Inv.	0	5	1.94	1	1.98

stimuli, where neither the subject nor the object on its own violates the semantic expectations associated with the verb. The only "unusual" thing about them is the same-sex constellation itself. This corroborates Hypothesis 2, in which it was predicted that same-sex stimuli with *v(j)enčati* would be deemed most acceptable out of all same-sex stimuli. Overall, **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli, in which the subject adheres to normative expectations but the object does not, were, on average, more acceptable than **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli, in which the subject does not adhere to normative expectations but the object does. This corroborates Hypothesis 3 and is in line with syntactic and semantic literature claiming a privileged status of subjects. Stimuli from the category **Opp.Sex-Inv.**, where both subject and object violate semantic expectations, but a heteronormative world is presented, were unsurprisingly rated least acceptable. **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli were rated unacceptable (< 2.5) on average. All other stimuli averaged in the acceptable range (> 2.5). It is worth mentioning that 1.94 is still a surprisingly high average for normatively completely untenable constructions. This may suggest that the normatively posited subcategorisations for gender in BCMS $+$ marriage verbs are not in fact as clear cut in practice.

For each category, a CART analysis[21] was conducted with acceptability judgements

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[21]The analysis and visualisation were conducted using *R* (R Core Team 2021) and the package *partykit* (Hothorn et al. 2006, 2015)

as the dependent variable. Independent variables were drawn from the demographic questionnaire and included participants' attitude toward the LGBT+ community, to which extent they had LGBT+ friends, whether they considered themselves part of the LGBT+ community, whether they considered themselves language mavens, whether they spoke one or more foreign languages, their age, and their gender. Place of origin was not included, as the variable did not account for urban/rural divides, regional differences within countries, etc. — an unfortunate artefact of the open-ended question asking about place of origin on the demographic questionnaire.

The use of CART analysis is advocated by Endresen & Janda (2017), who tested 5 statistical models of their Likert-scale derived data on Russian marginal verbs. They used a number of parametric and non-parametric models, with non-parametric CART models delivering the most fine-grained and interpretable results. From a statistical point of view, CART analyses are also the most conservative, as they do not draw conclusions based on preconceived ideal distributions but are based merely on the distribution of the data itself. Furthermore, the regression-tree model used here processes the acceptability-judgement data as ordinal, rather than continuous, i.e., the distance between measurements of value judgements cannot be meaningfully interpreted.

4.1 Opp.Sex-Norm.

In the **Opp.Sex-Norm.** category, judgements are fairly uniform. In the largest grouping of the data (n = 1,031), the overwhelming majority of stimuli were judged 5 (fully grammatical). Given that these are canonical examples taken from online news outlets, this is not surprising. It is, however, a good indicator of participants taking the task set seriously, rather than making choices willy-nilly. A much smaller group (n = 96), still largely judged stimuli as grammatical (3-5). However, their judgements are more spread out. Since these judgements correlate with an overall negative attitude toward the LGBT+ community (0-2), it might be that here the use of inclusive language in the
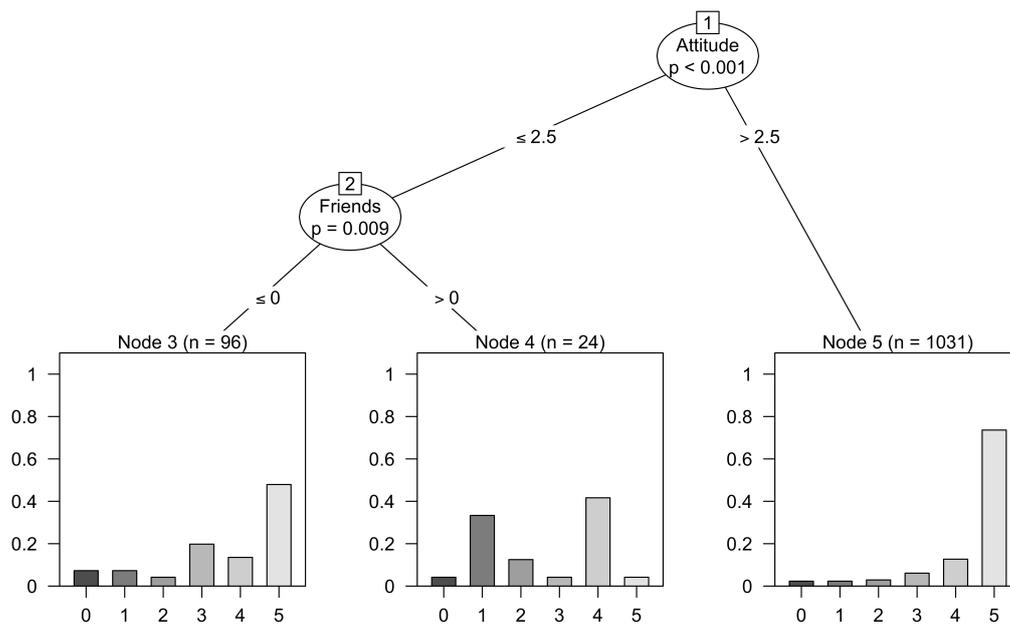
Figure 1: CTree of judgements in the **Opp.Sex-Norm.** category

instructions and the presence of same-sex stimuli overall dampened their judgement. These participants be more critical in their judgement of acceptability because they are more critical of the task at hand compared to those with a positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community. A yet smaller group (n = 24), has peaks at 1 and 4, which is rather surprising. Given that 24 tokens translate to two participants, it may be fruitful to study their behaviour across categories more closely, to find clues for their differing behaviour.

4.2 Opp.Sex-Inv.

In the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category, things are not as straightforward. One might expect that the grouping here would be analogous to **Opp.Sex-Norm.**, as from a social perspective they do not differ. However, results are correlated with standard-language ideologies and age differences.

Figure 2: CTree of judgements in the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category

Those aged 24 and under have the highest proportion of stimuli judged 5 (fully grammatical), however, more stimuli were judged ungrammatical (0–2) than grammatical (3–5) in this group. Still, the high proportion of stimuli judged grammatical is surprising, given that in this category both subject and object normative expectations for gender are violated. This may point to relaxed gender expectations among younger speakers. In the group of over 24-year-olds, language mavens' intuitions are quite clear, largely rejecting the acceptability of the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** stimuli. Especially striking are two LGBT + participants who judged each of the stimuli in this category as fully unacceptable (0). Awareness of and identification with standard language norms are clearly active here, overriding identity categories for these two, who are instead more sensitive to violations of the normative marriage verb gender expectations. For non-mavens over 24, there is a gender effect, whereby men are more firm on the unacceptability of the stimuli and pattern similar to conservative language mavens, whereas women's judgements are more spread out. Women over 24, hence, pattern with younger partici-

pants. This is in-line with the variationist literature on language change which predicts women to be at the forefront of change (*inter alia* Labov 2001).

4.3 Same-Sex Conditions

Turning now to same-sex stimuli, there is an overall correlation between attitude toward the LGBT + community on acceptability judgements of same-sex stimuli with normative subject gender but non-normative object gender: **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** ($R = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$), and **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** ($R = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). However, for **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**, while the trend persists ($R = 0.11$) the correlation is not significant ($p = 0.15$).

Figure 3: Correlation of Acceptability and Attitude with regression line.

Comparing Figure 3[22] with the ranking in Table 2, it becomes apparent that the overall effect size of having positive LGBT + attitudes increases with the overall acceptability of each marriage verb gender configuration. This indicates that linguistic

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[22]Data was visualised using *R* (R Core Team 2021) and the package *ggpubr* (Kassambara 2020)

factors, which are shared across the population, moderate the extent to which social attitudes influence grammatical acceptability.

In the least controversial category (**Same.Sex-Ambiguous**), attitude toward the LGBT community is the main predictor for acceptability. Those with negative attitudes (2-0), have the highest share of stimuli rated unacceptable and the highest share of stimuli rated fully unacceptable (0).
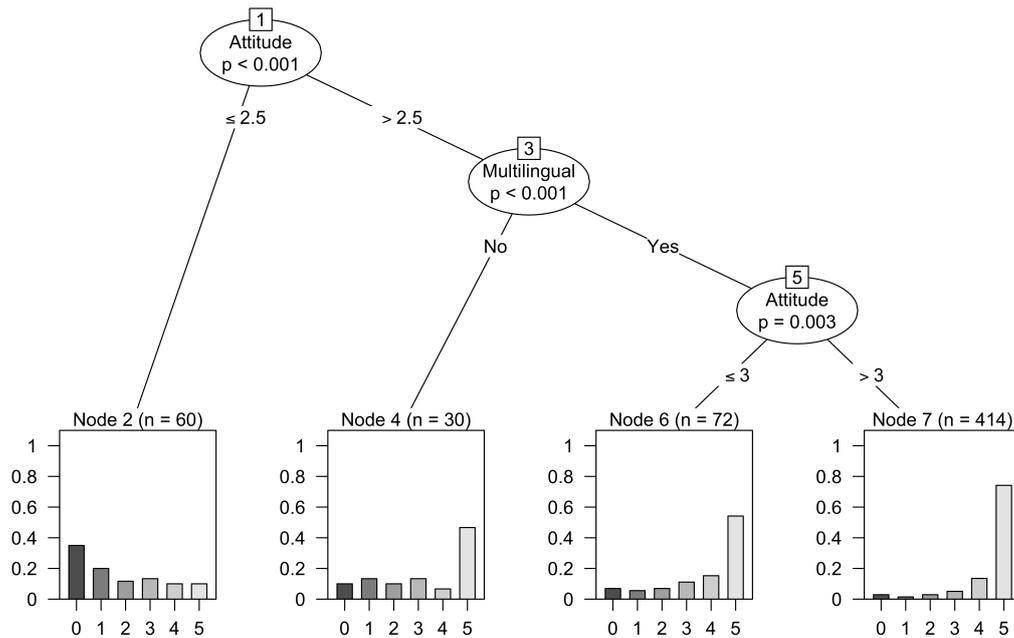

Figure 4: CTree of judgements in the **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** category

For those with an attitude toward the LGBT+ community rated ≥ 3, **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** stimuli are overwhelmingly acceptable; these participants rate the stimuli similarly to canonical opposite-sex stimuli (**Opp.Sex-Norm.**). There is some gradation between those who speak no foreign language and those who do, as well as between those with an attitude rating of 3 and those with a rating of 4 or 5 among those who speak of a foreign language. The fact that monolingual participants are less accepting of **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** could be due to a number of reasons. Multilinguals are somewhat more likely to be urban dwellers (EuroStat 2019), which would expose them more

to the LGBT+ community, or indeed foreign language media where same-sex marriage is more prevalent. This, in turn, could make these multilinguals more familiar with constructions like the stimuli presented. In any case, the effect of multilingualism is relatively small, as Figure 5 shows.[23]
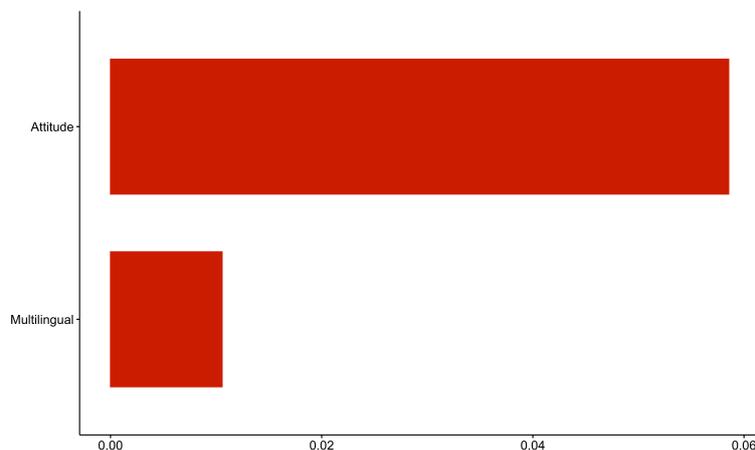

Figure 5: Variable Importance in **Same.Sex-Ambiguous**

In the **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** category, where the subjects of same-sex stimuli agree with the normative gender expectations of the verbs but the objects do not, attitude is again a highest-ranked factor. Again, those with a negative attitude (0-2) deem the stimuli in this category largely unacceptable (Mean $= 1.77$, $sd = 1.77$). However, those with an attitude rated 3 (moderately positive) but with few to no LGBT+ friends, were even clearer in their negative evaluation of the stimuli (Mean $= 1.67$, $sd = 1.71$). For those who rated their attitude 3 with more LGBT+ friends, the stimuli were largely acceptable, with most stimuli rated 4 or 5. For those with an attitude 4 or 5, the distributions are very similar. However, there is a small age effect, where judgements of participants over 36 have a higher share of stimuli judged fully unacceptable (0) than those of younger ones, who on the other hand have a higher share of stimuli

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[23]Variable Importance was only recorded for variables significant in **Same.Sex-Ambiguous**. Variable importance was calculated and visualised in *R* (R Core Team 2021), using packages *permimp* (Debeer et al. 2021), *randomForest* (Liaw & Wiener 2002), *tidyr* (Wickham & Girlich 2022) and *ggpubr* (Kassambara 2020).

judged fully acceptable (5). This reinforces the results from the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category, where those under 24 were more accepting of non-normative stimuli than those older. Two participants judged a surprising number of stimuli as fully unacceptable (0), despite their many LGBT+ friends (5) and moderately positive attitude (3) toward the community. It may be that a factor not considered in the data is operational here.
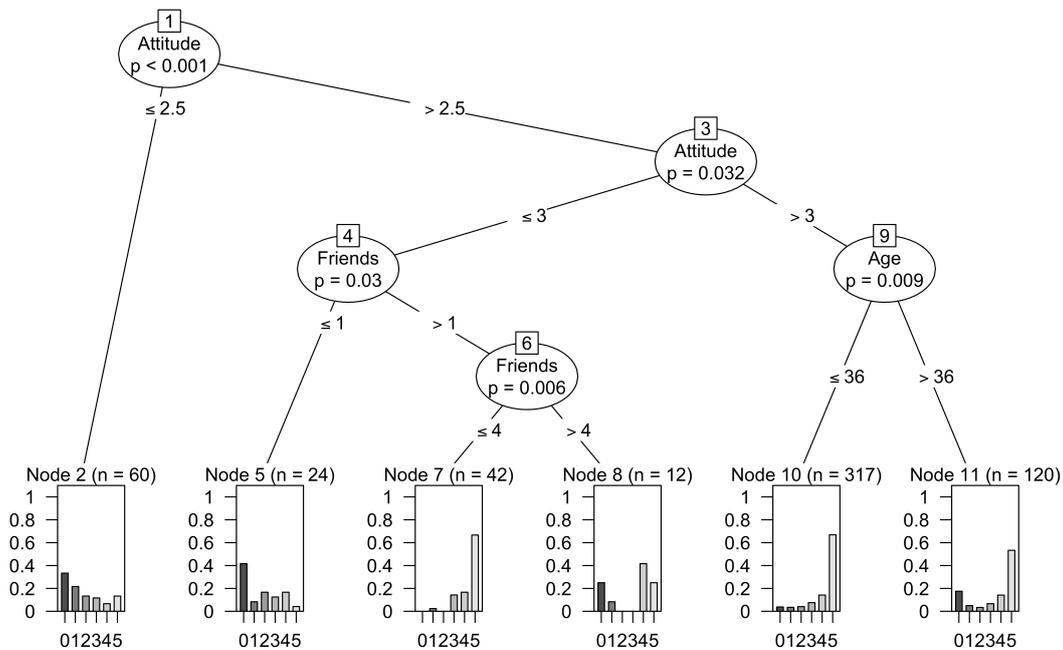
Figure 6: CTree of judgements in the **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** category

For same-sex stimuli where the subject's gender aligns with the normative gender expectations of the verb, there is again an age split at 36. For those aged 36 and younger, a negative or somewhat positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community (0-3), the majority of stimuli in this category were either fully unacceptable or mostly unacceptable (0-1). However, around 30% of them were also rated fully acceptable (5). This distribution resembles that of those 24 years old and younger in the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category, but judgements are even more concentrated at the extremes. For those with strongly positive attitudes (4 and 5) in this age group, whether or not they speak a foreign language is a decisive factor. The judgements of participants who do speak a foreign language

are fairly evenly distributed, whereas participants who do not overwhelmingly rated stimuli in this category fully acceptable (5). This is at odds with the presumption that multilinguals are more accepting of non-normative constructions, as observed in the **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** category. For **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli the exact opposite is the case. In fact, monolinguals 36 and under with a positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community (4-5) are the group which finds **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli the most acceptable. Given this group is only made up of three participants, it is difficult to gauge whether other factors influenced their acceptability judgements. In any case, this group deserves further investigation.
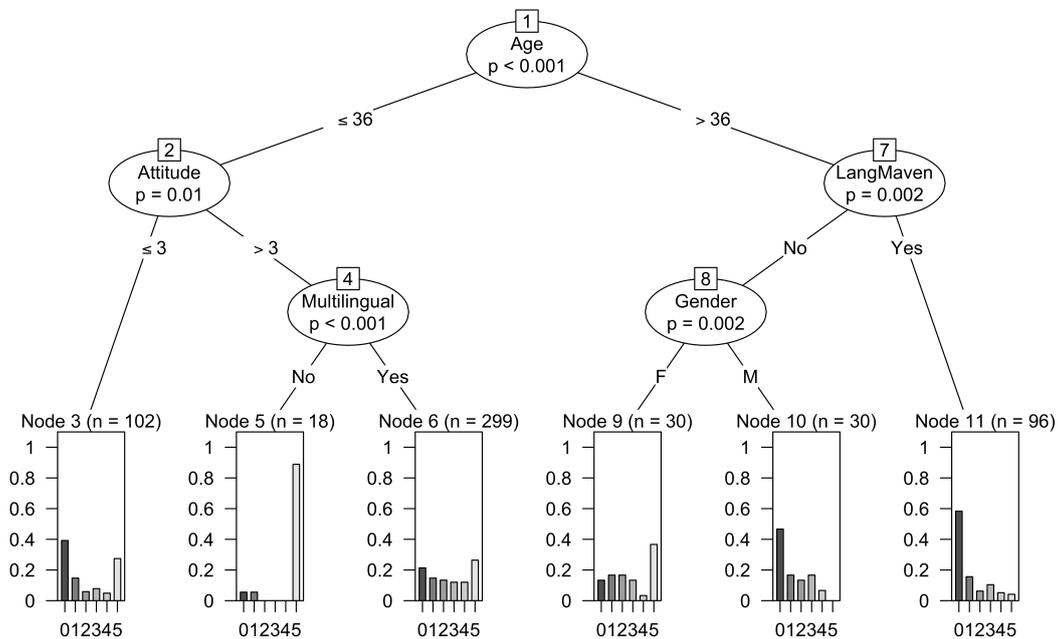

Figure 7: CTree of judgements in the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category

Quite strikingly, there is a very similar pattern between those older than 36 in the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category and those older than 24 in the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category. For **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**, language mavens' judgements are even more pronounced. They are the group with the highest proportions of stimuli judged fully unacceptable (0), with over 60% of stimuli in **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**

judged as such. Contrary to the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category, language mavens do not divide further based on LGBT + group membership, although there is one participant in that group who indeed identifies as LGBT +. Again, normative notions of grammaticality likely have a strong influence on language mavens' judgements. Non-mavens over 36 divide by gender, similarly to non-mavens over 24 in the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** condition. Here, too, men's judgements are conservative and concentrated at the lower end of the scale while women's judgements are more distributed. For **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**, there is even a relative plurality (around 40%) of stimuli judged fully grammatical (5). It will be discussed below how to reconcile this gendered behaviour with assumptions about the role of gender in traditional variationist sociolinguistics (e.g., Labov 1990; 2001).

5 Discussion

5.1 The LGBT+ community: attitudes and exposure

In all categories involving same-sex couples (**Same.Sex-Ambiguous**, **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**), attitude toward the LGBT + community correlates significantly with acceptability judgements (e.g., Figure 3). A negative attitude (0–2) yields rather negative judgements of **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** (Figure 4) and **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** (Figure 6;) for **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, participants with an attitudinal score of 3 but few or no LGBT + friends produced even more pronounced negative judgements (Figure 7). For the 36-and-under age group, those with an attitude 0–3 (negative or moderately positive) also have the most negative ratings. This suggests that participants' attitudes do correlate with their perception of stimuli's grammaticality in conditions with same-sex couples. More generally, this could mean that speakers' judgement of grammaticality is influenced by their societal attitudes, which are, to an extent, decoupled from language. Importantly, however,

in this experiment, as well as the studies by Bradley (2020) and Hernandez (2020) conducted on singular *they*, constructions were investigated where social categories are overtly expressed through lexical and morphological forms. This means that there is a link between the grammar and the social reality of speakers, which facilitates a carry-over effect from social attitudes to grammatical ones. Acceptability judgements therefore index social attitudes as well as grammatical knowledge. In other words, speakers may show their disapproval of the LGBT+ community as a whole or same-sex couples/same-sex marriage more specifically through their dislike of constructions involving same-sex couples.

Contrary to my hypothesis, attitude has shown to be the most important predictor of acceptability judgements for the **Same.Sex-Ambiguous**, **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** categories among the three independent variables concerned with the LGBT+ community. My prediction was that membership in the LGBT+ community would exert the most influence on participants' linguistic intuitions. However, apart from having friends in the community for the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category, only attitude towards the LGBT+ community is statistically significant. The reason for this may lay in the semi-conscious nature of participants' linguistic behaviour. As mentioned above, the semantics of gender and marriage verbs are fairly transparent in the presented contexts. Although gender and agreement in BCMS+ depend on factors other than semantics (see Section 1.1), the stimuli in the present study were all unambiguous in terms of semantic and social gender. It can, therefore, be assumed that there is some conscious component in participants' judgements. Such a conscious evaluation is more likely to be influenced by ideology or attitude than judgements which rely more heavily on subconscious linguistic intuitions. Participants may chose to rate a stimulus featuring a same-sex couple highly acceptable because they think it is the right thing to do, in line with their ideological conviction. Conversely, if they have a negative attitude, they may consciously choose to give a stimulus a low

rating if it features a same-sex couple. It is likely that for stimuli that elicit fully sub-conscious judgements, exposure effects would be stronger, reflecting convergence with people's social networks or communities of practice. I am, however, not aware of any indicators that differentiate gay speak from straight speak in BCMS +, anecdotally or from a close reading of the BCMS + literature.

Another caveat in the interpretation of results pertains to the formulation of the task. In order not to prime judgements moderated by prescriptivist notions of correctness, I decided to use non-technical language in the instructions. Participants were asked to rate sentences on a scale from *čudno* 'odd' (0) to *normalno* 'normal' (5). This formulation could, in theory, prime participants to rely more on their social judgement of non-heteronormative stimuli than on linguistic knowledge.

5.2 Syntax and Processing

Despite these considerations, the judgements of stimuli in the different categories pertaining to same-sex couples still pattern differently (e.g., Figure 5), suggesting that there is not a one-to-one mapping between attitude and judgement. Rather, I would suggest that grammatical intuitions moderate attitudinal judgements. The overall effect of attitude on judgements is largest in the **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** category, where normative gender expectations for the verbs are not violated. In categories **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** and **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, one of two arguments violates the verb's normative gender expectations. For **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, the violation occurs in the object, whereas for **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**, the violation occurs in the subject. Ostensibly judgements of **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli should pattern in very much the same way. However, object violation (**Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**) is more acceptable than subject violation (**Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**) overall, as shown in Table 2. Furthermore, **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli evoke similar prescrip-

tivist tendencies as **Opp.Sex-Norm.** stimuli, where both object and subject violate the verb's normative gender expectations. That same is not observed for **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli. The clear inference must be that participants are generally more irked by an unexpected subject gender than by an unexpected object gender. This corroborates Hypothesis 3, which pertains to the privileged position of subjects in syntax and information structure. Apart from this general linguistic claim that subjects are more closely connected to verbs than objects and are further privileged in various binding phenomena (Van Valin 2001), there are also several language-specific observations that further explain this pattern. First, the verbs *udati se* and *oženiti se* are not syntactically transitive. Both take oblique objects rather than direct objects marked by the accusative. The reason for this lies in the presence of the reflexive/reciprocal particle *se*, which de-transivises the verb.[24] The oblique objects can be omitted from sentences with *udati se* and *oženiti se* without rendering them ungrammatical; they are not syntactically obligatory. From a semantic point of view, however, they clearly are, as one cannot possibly marry without a partner. In terms of salience, however, this lack of syntactic obligation may render objects less salient from the onset and make them less irritating if they are of unexpected gender. Another factor may be morphology. Five out of 12 lexicalisations are in the periphrastic past tense with a participle agreeing in gender with the subject. If the subject is of non-canonical gender, this yields the otherwise never encountered gender-inflected forms *uda + o* and *oženi + la* 'married'. When only the object violates the verb's normative gender expectations, no novel morphological forms arise, as verbs never agree with their objects in BCMS +. Lastly, there may also be a word order effect. All stimuli follow (S)OV word order. If the subject complies with the verb's normative gender expectations, the unexpected gender is only encountered at the object, which comes relatively late in the sentence. Arguably, subject and verb are chunked together and the mismatch is only processed

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[24]This *se* may be analysed as a medio-passive marker, suggesting that the subject is the one doing the marrying and the one being married off simultaneously.

a posteriori. If the subject, however, is at odds with the normative gender expectations of the verb, the mismatch occurs at the verb. In other words, the subject (if overt) is processed as usual and the mismatch with the verb only becomes apparent once the verb is encountered. The mismatch happens earlier and in the obligatory part of the construction, which renders it more detrimental. These processing factors then interact with societal attitudes to produce the final judgement seen in the data. Given this judgement task was done offline, more fine-grained differences in (online) processing could not be captured, but eye-tracking data from Sanford & Filik (2007) on singular *they* suggests that less common constructions, including the most acceptable stimuli with same-sex couples, have different processing costs compared to their normative same-sex counterparts. In future studies of this phenomenon, it would be prudent to control for these morphological and word-order effects, i.e., balance stimuli between past and non-past, as well as between canonical and non-canonical word order.

5.3 Prescriptivism

Participants' self-identification as language mavens was a significant correlate of acceptability in the two categories which received the lowest average acceptability judgement (**Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**). In both cases the effect was only significant for the older age category, although the split was at 24 years old for **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and at 36 years old for **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** Put plainly, older language mavens give low ratings to stimuli where the subject's gender does not match the normative expectation of the verb. This is the case in **Opp.Sex-Inv.**, where both subject and object do not match (opposite-sex couples) and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** where the object matches but the subject does not (same-sex couples). Above, I considered a number of reasons why these conditions are especially challenging for processing. However, the older language mavens are the group with the lowest scores for these stimuli. For neither category is attitude a significant factor for this group. Strikingly,

two LGBT+-identified language mavens over 24 rated all **Opp.Sex-Inv.** stimuli fully unacceptable (0).

The combined effects of age and being a language maven suggest prescriptivist language ideologies are in force here. The linguistic tradition of the region is very focused on normative grammar and "correct" language use. Moreover, standard language ideologies have become a key political instrument in the national(ist) projects of the BCMS+-speaking constituent republics of Yugoslavia, both leading up to and in the aftermath of the country's break-up (Greenberg 2008). This intensification of standard language ideologies has its roots in the very early days of Serbian and Croatian nation building, both of which started out as cultural movements with the proclaimed need for a standard language to justify each region's status as a sovereign nation. Correct use of each standard becomes a badge of national loyalty and forms part of an ideological complex that differentiates the national in-group from outsiders. Furthermore, standard language competencies are an important source of social prestige. In the region, linguistics, especially the study of BCMS+ as a native language, is steeped in political ideology, and although academics may not subscribe to such convictions, self-styled language mavens' certainly do. Those who reported being concerned with linguistics may be academics, or more likely, people who take pride in their knowledge of (standard) language and its (prescriptive) rules without an academic subject background. These self-identified linguists, or "language mavens" as I have labelled them, could equally be called pedants or "grammar sticklers" and their intuitions likely reflect ingrained biases against non-normative or innovative language use.

The behaviour of multilinguals aged 36 and younger with more than a moderately positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community (4-5) for stimuli in the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category may also be explained by prescriptivist ideologies. In the region, people who speak a foreign language are more likely to have a higher level of education than those who do not (EuroStat 2019). As a result, they have been more

exposed to standard language teaching and may also be more aware of the social capital linked to such competencies. This in turn moderates their judgement of the linguistically controversial stimuli in **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**, despite their positive social attitudes. Monolinguals, on the other hand, may have a lower level of general education and rely more on social attitudes in their judgement. The behaviour of monolinguals and multilinguals with a positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community (>2.5) in **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** would contradict such an interpretation, as here monolinguals are more conservative than multilinguals. However, looking at the different distributions (Figure 4), monolinguals and multilinguals behave much more similarly in **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** than they do in **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** There may be a number of relevant conditioning factors that were unfortunately not captured by the demographic information collected from participants, so the diverging behaviours of multilinguals in **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** and **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** may be an artefact of the data collection methodology and thus merits exploration in future enquiry on the present topic.

The question now arises whether older language mavens (i.e., those over 24 and over 36 respectively) and men of the same age group being more conservative plus younger participants' and older, non-maven women having more distributed acceptability judgements of innovative marriage verb gender constellations is evidence of a linguistic change in progress. The answer is likely yes. If synchronic variation reflects diachronic change (Bailey et al. 1991, etc.), with the language of young women being the vanguard of said change (Labov 1990, etc.), the increased tolerance of violations to the gender expectations for *udati se* and *oženiti se* likely reflects an change occurring in BCSM+ — a change concomitant with evolving societal attitudes toward marriage equality, LGBT+ people, and perhaps also traditional gender roles (including traditional gender roles in the act of marrying). As discussed above, the roles associated with men and women in marriage rites are traditionally quite different. As society

changes, those roles may become less differentiated. The sociolinguistics of gender posit that the more socially different men and women are —i.e., the more different the spheres they inhabit — the more different their language will be. One way to account for these differences lies in the social gains from performing one's gender appropriately to social norms: if gender is a crucial part of one's social identity, performing gender is a critical identity practice. In settings or communities where gender is a less salient identity feature, the requirement to perform gendered behaviour, including speech, is less urgent. Further, in highly-gendered settings, the ways in which men and women are talked about differ considerably. In BCMS + marriage verbs, this differentiation has become lexicalised. As the Western Balkans evolve ideologically, it is likely that the prescription to use specifically gendered subjects and objects for *udati se* and *oženiti se* will also evolve (an outcome the present results signal), or it may be that these outmoded verbs fade from use, as Mallet-Jiang (2021) predicts for their Mandarin analogues.

5.4 Gender

It remains to be explained why older non-maven women pattern with younger groups, while their male counterparts have some of the most normative intuitions. Labov (2001) argues that women are more sensitive to symbolic prestige. As Eckert (1989) states, men are judged on the things that they do, while women are judged on who they are. In a patriarchal political economy, women have far fewer opportunities to amass material wealth, so they must rely on symbolic forms of prestige, such as etiquette, personal relations, and, crucially, language use. A critical requirement of marshalling language to garner symbolic prestige is ability to accurately classify linguistic forms as either "correct" (= prestigious) or "incorrect" (= non-prestigious) in-line with community norms.

In the study presented here, the ostensible prestigious constructions are those with normative gender constellations. This would render stimuli in categories **Same.Sex-**

Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj., **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, and **Opp.Sex-Inv.** wholly unacceptable. Older non-maven women, however, do not judge these categories as wholly unacceptable. Older non-maven men, on the other hand, have quite strong normative intuitions. To understand this finding it is first important to point out that women and men are not monolithic categories. While all women suffer subordination in a patriarchal society, the way women garner prestige within such a system is diverse. Self-identified language mavens clearly orient toward standard-language norms, as demonstrating command and knowledge of linguistic norms is conventionally rewarded with symbolic capital. For mon-mavens, however, symbolic capital may result from acceptance of same-sex couples. Despite large-scale discrimination of members of the LGBT+ community in all aspects of post-Yugoslav life (World Bank Group 2018), queer- and gay-friendly attitudes index a progressive ideology and/or a compassionate nature — qualities that too are rewarded with symbolic capital. Homo- and transphobia are deeply intertwined with neoconservative populism in the region, while the LGBT+ community is associated with the West and European integration. The economic development and increase to the living standard associated with Europeanisation in its positive reading are desirable and, therefore, social cues indicating affiliation with these processes can be prestigious. For men, this type of social capital is less accessible, as male homosexuality is more stigmatised than female homosexuality (World Bank Group 2018). Men are therefore taking a higher risk of losing face if they associate themselves with LGBT+ issues. Moreover, this type of social capital may not be particularly useful to men anyway, since they have more opportunities to amass material wealth even without European integration. They may profit more from traditional patriarchal society, which is linguistically manifested in the highly politicised standards of BCMS+ (Greenberg 2008). As convincing as this explanation is, judgements of stimuli under **Opp.Sex-Inv.** cannot fully be ascribed to the prestige of LGBT+ acceptance. Furthermore, attitude was not a significant variable for older non-mavens, which I would

expect if those women oriented toward an LGBT+-friendly linguistic and social prestige.

If expectations for the gender constellations of the BCSM+ marriage verbs are changing, which is likely, it is unsurprising that linguistic maven women, who are the ones aware of normative prestige forms, resist this change. This is especially true if being a language maven is a proxy for a higher level of education.[25] The present findings mirror various findings from Labov (1990; 2001, etc.) and others, where working-class women are more advanced in language change than middle-class women, as their linguistic behaviour is not moderated by overt prestige. The findings from the present study, therefore, do very much fit the variationist literature on gender. However, whether the conjectured change can actually be understood as "a change from below" is less clear. If attitudes play a role at all in this distribution, then we have to consider the change a "change from above", a conscious change in behaviour. The unexpectedly high acceptability of stimuli in the **Opp.Sex-Inv.** category, however, can not be easily explained by the conscious mapping of social attitudes onto linguistic ones. While there may be a weakening of the strict gender expectations of *udati se* and *oženiti se*, the change, is far from complete, as inverse opposite-sex stimuli (**Opp.Sex-Inv.**) are rated below the range of acceptability even by the most advanced groups. We can conjecture that once a full weakening is complete (if it ever will be), that judgements of **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Opp.Sex-Norm.** will be the same.

When discussing gender, we must not forget that the stimuli too differ in the genders of those marrying. The conditions pertaining to same-sex couples (**Same.Sex-Ambiguous**, **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.**) are all divided between male-male and female-female couples. One may expect that different societal expectations for men and women, as well as the higher social stigma associated with male homosexuality compared to female homosexuality, would yield different

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[25]This is an informed conjecture as education was not a question on the demographic questionnaire.

judgements for M/M stimuli and F/F stimuli. Indeed, in the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category, there is an overall lower average judgement for M/M stimuli (Mean = 2.06, $sd = 1.95$), than for F/F (Mean = 2.41, $sd = 2.02$) stimuli. However, this is not selected by the CART analysis. In fact, the CART analysis only identifies a significant difference between stimuli pertaining to same-sex couples of different genders in the **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** category, where again F/F stimuli are judged slightly better than M/M stimuli. In the other two cases, demographic factors fully explain any differences in the data. Because of this rather murky picture, I conclude that the gender of the same-sex couples getting married does not play a significant role in the acceptability of the stimuli. This also suggests that the restricted use of *udati se* meaning 'a man marrying up' described by Doubt (2014) did not factor into participants' judgements of the presented stimuli. Nor does the shared root of *oženiti se* and *žena* show any important influence on the acceptability of stimuli.

5.5 Participants with incomplete demographic questionnaires

The participants who had to be excluded from the initial analysis due to the lack of demographic data points pertaining to their person were analysed as individuals and their responses were compared to the responses from the groups identified by the CART analysis. Out of the 10 participants initially excluded, 4 did not record their attitude toward the LGBT+ community, nor whether they had LGBT+ friends; however, the participants do have patterns of acceptability similar to groups identified by the CART analysis, and from this their attitudes about the LGBT+ community might be inferred. In other words, acceptability of same sex constellations for BCSM+ marriage verbs may be diagnostic of an individual's attitudes towards the LGBT+ community. For two participants in this group, it was possible to infer their attitude based on their linguistic behaviour, one of which was largely positive and the other fairly negative. The participant with a positive attitude was strikingly lenient for an older language maven,

suggesting that she is not a grammar stickler despite her self-identification. The third participant's evaluation of stimuli in all categories but **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** suggests a positive attitude toward the LGBT+ community; however, their **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** stimuli were judged more often as unacceptable than acceptable. This participant did not disclose any demographic information. The fourth participant did record whether she had LGBT+ friends (3 - some friends). Given her responses for **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** and **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli, her attitude toward the LGBT+ community is also likely positive (3-4). Further, a person who reports having some LGBT+ friends should have a somewhat positive attitude toward the community. As a 35 year-old language maven, she would be expected rate stimuli under categories **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** low, which is exactly what she does.

One participant reported a gender other than male or female. However, because of their status as a 33 year-old language maven, their gender is irrelevant to their patterning based on the CART analysis. Indeed, they pattern with older language mavens in **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** and with those with a positive attitude (5) in the other conditions. Alongside them, one other participant who was initially excluded, provided enough relevant demographic information to check whether their behaviour corresponded to the patterns found earlier and perfectly fit the earlier findings. These two participants alongside the 4 from above suggest that the initial model has some predictive power and that the factors identified by it have relevance beyond the very data initially examined. This is good news for further research and gives a certain robustness to the results.

5.6 Methodological Limitations

As with any methodological approach, there are a number of points to problematise in the conducted experiment. First, the Likert scale employed has been variously called

into question for its validity (Bishop & Herron 2015). In the set-up of the experiment, it is assumed that the points on the scale are equidistant, which is not necessarily how participants perceive the scale. The CART analysis alleviates this to an extent, as the model assumes merely a hierarchical ordering of judgements, rather than a linear one (Endresen & Janda 2017). Endresen & Janda (2017), however, do point out that a culturally suited Likert scale is chosen for judgement tasks and that each point on the Likert scale should be explained qualitatively. In their study, they used a a scale well known to their Russian subjects through schooling and demographic surveys (Endresen & Janda 2017). In my experiment, only the extremes of the scale were labelled, which may have contributed to a more binary distribution of the data. However, I am not aware of any Likert scale being particularly culturally entrenched in the BCMS+ region, as Endresen & Janda (2017) describe for Russian, so the 6-point scale chosen was as appropriate as any other. One advantage of a 6-point scale over a 5-point scale pertains to the choice participants have to make between "good" and "bad". There is no neutral choice as such. Still it would be advantageous for any future research to establish whether different scales yield significantly different results in the BCMS+ case and to include more elaborate qualitiative descriptions for each point on the Likert scale, as suggested by Endresen & Janda (2017).

Second, the demographic questionnaire was rather short and quite blunt. This meant the study remained short, which mitigated the risk of a drop in participants' attention. Moreover, participants were not reimbursed for their time, so I deemed it crucial for the study to be as short as possible. On the other hand, such a questionnaire did not allow for a particularly fine-grained analysis of participants' attitudes toward the LGBT+ community. Other studies employed measures such as the *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale* (Herek 1988) used to gauge attitudes by Gowen & Britt (2006) or the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske 1996) used by Bradley (2020) to probe the relationship of sexism and the acceptability of singular *they*. Measures such as these,

establish a person's attitude through a number of prompts rather than just one question, yielding more granular results. However, the correlations found in the present study bear testimony to the strength of the effects observed.

Third, as this is a perceptual study, no direct conclusions about production and usage can be made. As mentioned above, corpus-based investigations of the present subject would not yield statistically robust results due to low sample size. Further, research could take the shape of a free completion or forced choice task, where participants are given prompts with a subject and an object of the same gender and are asked to complete sentences with a marriage verb. Alternatively, interviews with and self-recordings of same-sex couples who speak BCMS+ and are in a civil union would yield interesting qualitative data, as a point of comparison to the present study. Getting a sense of how marriage verbs are used in non-normative ways by the ones most directly affected would not only inform linguistic inquiry but also create a basis for LGBT+ inclusive language policy in the region.

5.7 Marriage Verbs and Inclusive Language in BCMS+

The call for inclusive language use dates back to the second wave of feminism and its feminist critique of language. Though initially focused on removing gendered biases in language and making women more visible in discourse, the mission of inclusion has since become more broad to include any marginalised group and offer alternatives to heteronormative, ableist, racial and other biases in language use. Different languages have had different trajectories that were and continue to be conditioned by both cultural differences and typological idiosyncrasies. Plemenitaš (2014), for example describes different approaches in English and Slovene, which is closely related to BCMS+, in making language more inclusive in terms of gender. While gender-neutrality is usually the goal in English, Slovene aims to make women more visible in discourse alongside men by way of split forms and the inclusion of feminine forms for occupational

and academic titles. The Slovene gender system, which is virtually identical to the BCMS + one, makes it often difficult to realise gender-neutral forms, while in English, most occupational titles (with the exception of pairs such as *actor-actress*) are already gender-neutral from a structural point of view. Čaušević & Zlotrg's (2011) guide for non-discriminatory language in BCMS + is also mostly concerned with gender-sensitive language (*rodnoosjetljiv jezik*) and their recommendations are very much in the same vein as what Plemenitaš (2014) describes for Slovene. Additionally, Čaušević & Zlotrg (2011) include recommendations for non-discriminatory language addressing people with disabilities, the LGBT + community, as well as ethnic minorities such as the Roma. Mostly, the guide gives recommendations on which particular labels to use for specific group and highlights any offensive terms to avoid. The manual takes a community-based approach for most groups concerned: the non-discriminatory or inclusive way to refer to individuals or groups equates to the way they refer to themselves. Such an approach highlights the importance of ownership by marginalised groups over their own narratives. When labels are concerned, this is quite operational. Anybody who is willing to practice discourse respectful of marginalised groups can adopt those labels, much like names for technological innovations or other neologisms. However, a language which is truly inclusive must also allow for marginal experiences to be framed appropriately. Singular *they* and queer uses of marriage verbs in BCMS + aim to achieve exactly this. Both phenomena provide ways for non-hetero- and non-cis-normative experiences to be expressed in BCMS + precisely and succinctly. In this, they both have a considerable impact on morphosyntax and semantics. A similar case can be made for occupational and academic feminine forms, where morphological means are used to create new vocabulary items, and where new conventions are adopted when referring to mixed groups. Of course, here too it is important to take into account in-group usage and preference when making suggestions for society-wide (and hence out-group) discourses. The present research shows that even those with positive attitudes toward the

LGBT + community may struggle to accept certain configurations of BCMS + marriage verbs in connection to same-sex couples. It may not be enough to educate the general public on LGBT + issues and rely on shifting attitudes for linguistic change. Though attitude is a major correlate of linguistic acceptability in the present study, for stimuli in the **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** category, which is a conceivable queer use of marriage verbs, standard language ideologies and linguistic prescriptivism are the decisive factors in acceptability. This hints at a disconnect between attitudes toward the LGBT + community and attitudes toward the queer use of marriage verbs. Since, however, stimuli in the **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** category are not as affected by these ideologies, it seems quite appropriate to suggest the use of *udati se* to talk about lesbian couples and *oženiti se* when talking about gay ones. *V(j)enčati se* is certainly also recommended, with the caveat that its meaning is narrower, pertaining to the legal act of getting married.

More generally, especially in cases where more than just the lexicon is affected, this study is quite instructive for inclusive language use. Some unwillingness or incapability to adopt inclusive language by the majority population may indeed be caused by linguistic obstacles rather than attitudinal ones. One aim of inclusive language must, therefore, be to offer solutions which are linguistically digestible to the general speaker without compromising on accurately describing the experiences and identities of marginalised groups. Singular *they* is an interesting point of comparison here. Given its long history in English for indefinite antecedents of unknown or unspecific gender (Bradley 2020), its evolution to also be used for definite antecedents who do not (exclusively) identify with a binary gender is quite intuitive from a systemic perspective. On the other hand, the plural agreement with verbs, as well as its primary role as a plural pronoun may make it difficult for speakers to adopt, especially because the prescriptive edict to use generic *he, s/he* or other split forms has only recently lost currency (e.g., Saguy & Williams 2021). Singular *they* is an instructive case, as it makes use of material

present in English but changes semantic properties to describe queer experience more accurately. The wealth of discussions around singular *they*, however, equally show the importance of acceptance of novel language use by the majority population. As similar development could be promoted for marriage verbs in BCMS +. In sum, when making recommendations for inclusive language use, the interplay of community-based input, majority attitudes, exposure, and the input's impact on the grammar must be taken into account.

6 Conclusion

This study set out to better understand the acceptability of marriage verbs in BCMS + with respect to the gender of their arguments and the correlation of these verbs with non-linguistic, demographic traits. The experimental approach has successfully corroborated the hypothesised interplay of attitude and acceptability. The analysis revealed that attitudes toward the LGBT + community are a key predictor for the acceptability of stimuli pertaining to same-sex couples. Overall, participants with more positive attitudes toward the LGBT + community rate stimuli pertaining to same-sex couples higher. Other factors connected to attitude and exposure, i.e., self-identification as LGBT + and number of LGBT + friends, are far less important. This suggests that it is indeed attitude which is coupled with linguistic judgements, rather than another factor picked up by the attitude question in the questionnaire. The correlation between attitude and acceptability judgement is moderated by prescriptivism. Normative language ideologies are associated with lower acceptabilities of stimuli with non-normative gender configurations, including same-sex conditions and **Opp.Sex-Inv.** Although normative language ideologies and prescriptivism were not associated exclusively with one specific measure, they account for a large number of groups found in the CART analysis. The measure most closely associated with lower judgements irrespective of atti-

tude is whether participants were language mavens. Unsurprisingly, language mavens judged non-normative stimuli lower than those who were not. For **Opp.Sex-Inv.**, young multilinguals with a positive attitude were more linguistically conservative than their monolingual counterparts, suggesting prescriptivism is associated with the level of education somebody has received. Regarding age, older participants were more normatively minded than younger ones. When it comes to gender, we see a pattern similar to the one described by Labov (2001). For the most divisive categories **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Opp.Sex-Inv.**, women, who are not language mavens, i.e., those who do not consciously orient toward a prestige form, pattern with younger speakers. This mirrors situations of language change, where working class women, who according to Labov (2011) are less aware of prestige norms, are more advanced in any given change than their male counterparts. The distributed nature judgements with younger speakers as well as older non-maven women in **Opp.Sex-Inv.** and **Opp.Sex-Inv.** may indeed signal a change in progress.

In comparing conditions, it emerged that linguistic factors also moderate acceptability judgements, attenuating the effect size of attitude toward the LGBT+ community, as can be inferred by the slopes of the regression lines in Figure 3. **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** stimuli are most acceptable overall and show the largest effect size, as they do not contradict normative specifications for object or subject gender separately. **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** are less acceptable and **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** least acceptable overall. The higher acceptability judgements for stimuli with a normative subject (**Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**) can be explained by the syntactic privilege of subjects and the close association of subject and verb through morphological agreement. In canonical SVO word order, the unexpected element is the verb for **Same.Sex-Inv.Sub/Norm.Obj.** conditions, whereas it is the object for **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** Therefore, the unexpected element is processed later in **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli, which may be less disruptive than an earlier unexpected element. The effect

of unexpected gender constellations on online processing merits future enquiry.

Lastly, the present study is also highly instructive for the implementation of inclusive language policies in the particular case of BCMS + marriage verbs and more generally. For BCMS + marriage verbs, the relatively high acceptability of **Same.Sex-Ambiguous** and **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.** stimuli, make these constructions apt for speaking about same-sex couples in an inclusive way. They were not only relatively well-accepted overall but also by the LGBT + participants in particular. More generally, the present study shows how prescriptive intuitions persist, even when attitudes change. Language mavens largely reject forms of the type **Same.Sex-Norm.Sub/Inv.Obj.**, even if their attitude toward the LGBT + community is positive. This indicates that proponents of inclusive language cannot solely rely on changing attitudes to trigger changes in linguistic behaviour. Though it is crucial to respect the needs and usages of a marginalised group when proposing inclusive norms, the present study suggests that looking at general use is also vital. Linguistic behaviour can only change if the norms proposed are not too far from what is already in use or deemed (at least somewhat) acceptable by the speaker community.

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