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The Growing Use of Mx as a Gender-Inclusive Title

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Abstract: The paper explores the growing use and acceptance of gender-neutral honorific titles in India as well as in rest of the world. The primary focus of this paper is to study the growing recognition of Mx as an alternative to gendered honorifics, its comparison with the gendered honorific title Ms, and its growing status as a gender-inclusive title that is widely used by transgender and non-binary people.

IndexTerms - Honorific, Title, Prefix, Mx, Ms, Non-Binary, Transgender

I. HONORIFICS: AN INTRODUCTION

Honorific titles were originally thought to be a mark of respect and majority of them were gendered. Also called prefix or titles, honorifics are still very much in use everywhere in the world. Honorifics can be *titles* preceding a person's name (*Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.*), honorary titles or positions that appear without the person's name (*Captain, Earl, Doctor, etc.*), or honorifics for the nobility, clergy, or royalty (*Your Majesty, Your Highness, etc.*).

II. GENDERED HONORIFIC TITLES IN ENGLISH

English, like most other languages in the world, is highly gendered and uses a variety of gendered honorific titles. Some of the most commonly used gendered prefixes in English are [6]:

- **Master:** Used for young men and boys, or as a professional title
- **Mr:** (Pronounced *mister*) Used for men, regardless of marital status, who do not have another professional or academic title
- **Miss:** (Pronounced *mis*) Used to refer to young, unmarried women
- **Mrs:** (Pronounced *misiz*) Refers to married women and is usually followed by husband's last name
- **Ms:** (Pronounced *miz*) Used for women, regardless of marital status or when marital status is unknown

All the previously mentioned titles only apply to those who fall within the gender binary.

III. GENDER NEUTRAL HONORIFIC TITLES IN ENGLISH

For those who fall outside the gender binary or are gender non-confirming, the English language has a variety of honorifics to choose from [5]. Following are some of the most widely used gender-neutral honorific titles in the world today.

- **Mx:** (Pronounced as *mux, mix, or mixer*) Mx definitely tops the list as one of the most widely used gender-inclusive honorific that transgender and non-binary folks use. According to nonbinary.org, the X in Mx makes it open to any gender expression.
- **Misc:** (Pronounced *misk*) Misc has been derived from the Latin equivalent of the English word miscellaneous, *miscellus*, which means "mixed." Several non-binary people use this honorific as it helps them express aspects of various genders at various times.
- **Pr:** (Pronounced *per*) This honorific title is short for *person*. It's a simple, gender non-confirming honorific, which is sometimes also used as a gender pronoun.
- **Ser:** (Pronounced *sair* - rhymes with *hair*) Ser has been widely used in video games as well as in some novels and TV/web series to address gender-neutral characters. However, its use in the real world remains limited.
- **Ind:** This title is short for *individual* and intended to be completely free of gender. Those who identify as agender, or like to express themselves without gender as opposed to mixing genders use Ind.
- **Mre:** (Pronounced *Mystery* or *Misstree*) An abbreviation for mystery, this honorific is used by those who do not want their identity to be defined by the construct of gender.

IV. COMPARISON BETWEEN MS AND MX

Numerous parallels have been drawn between Mx and Ms (pronounced *miz*). [9] The gendered title Ms dates back to 1901, when it appeared in *The Republican* (a newspaper in Springfield, Massachusetts). More recently, Ms appeared in a magazine with the same name (Ms.) in 1972. However, it was not until 1986 when the *New York Times* adopted it. Despite the pushback, Ms was a welcome move away from Mrs. and Miss, both of which were suggestive of a woman's marital status. In the contemporary world, it provides the womenfolk with an alternative to being identified independently of their marital status. However, even now it has not been fully accepted, as it is often assumed that women who use Ms are lesbians, spinsters, widows, or divorcees.

Mx, on the other hand, provides individuals an alternative to being identified by their gender. Whether a person is cisgender, gender non-confirming, gender fluid or just doesn't wish to disclose their gender to anyone, Mx seems to fit the bill perfectly. Over the years, Mx has gained traction as a universal honorific title that is open to everyone. As a gender-inclusive alternative to gendered honorific titles, Mx has made it to official forms in many nations across the globe. Experts believe that Mx does for the gender-neutral folks what Ms has done for the women who don't wish to disclose their marital status. Definitely, a cultural shift is underway with Mx in the forefront, leading the way. However, Mx will take time to evolve and become a part of our lives.

There is a growing perception among the gatekeepers of the English language that Mx has the potential to be a universally acceptable gender-inclusive honorific rather than just being used by people with non-binary gender identities. [3] They believe that it can replace the need to use Mr. and Ms. as one can never go wrong with Mx. For example, if one doesn't want to assume the gender or the marital status of a person, using the honorific Mx does the trick.

V. THE GROWING USE OF MX

In the last four decades, the honorific Mx has gained a wider acceptance around the world. Listed below are some key milestones of this journey.

1977: The first time when Mx appeared in print in the American magazine 'Single Parent'

2014: The Royal Bank of Scotland (UK) introduced gender-neutral honorifics and offered Mx as one of the alternatives to its customers.

2015: Royal Mail, the National Health Service, and the Department for Work and Pensions in the UK recognized Mx.

2015: [7] The Oxford English Dictionary included Mx to its lexicon with the following definition: "A gender-neutral title of courtesy prefixed to a person's surname, sometimes with first name(s) interposed."

2016: [8] Merriam Webster Unabridged added Mx with the following definition: "—used as a gender-neutral title of courtesy"

2016: A health insurance provider became the first in Australia to recognize customers who identify as gender neutral and do not want traditional titles, offering them the title Mx.

2015: NALSAR University of Law in Hyderabad, India paved the way for gender-neutral honorifics on academic transcripts and awarded a graduation certificate with the honorific Mx to Anindita Mukherjee, a gender non-confirming student

2017: Chandigarh Administration in India introduced the title Mx on admission and application forms in conjunction with Transgender Welfare Board.

2017: HSBC announced it would offer 10 new gender-neutral titles, including Mx to its UK customers.

2018: Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) added the gender-inclusive honorific title Mx to the list of available honorifics.

2019: United Airlines included new non-binary gender options, such as Unspecified (X) and Undisclosed (U).

2019: American Airlines added gender-neutral options for flight booking.

2020: Government of New Zealand included Mx as one of the options on the voting enrolment forms.

2020: Tech giant, Apple rolled out a new gender-neutral emoji Mx Claus in the iOS update 14.2 in October.

2020: [4] An online petition was launched on change.org to include Mx as a non-binary gender option for airline bookings in India.

2021: Axis bank in India announced that customers who are non-binary, gender fluid or transgender can choose Mx as their title for their Savings or Term Deposit Account.

VI. CONCLUSION

One of the biggest concerns with Mx is that it has several pronunciations and people often mispronounce it. Sometimes, it is spelled out as two letters - *MX* (pronounced as *em eks*). Likewise, when pronounced as *mix*, people assume that the person being addressed represents a mix of male and female genders, which does not apply to the majority of cisgender and transgender individuals. Another concern is that Mx is still unfamiliar in many parts of the world and this could pose a challenge for those who use it, especially when they travel to countries that do not recognize Mx.

To conclude, it is worth noting that although Mx has been around only for a couple of decades, it has made some big strides and continues to gain broader recognition. While the acceptance of Mx is growing, it has a long way to go before it is added to the general usage. Although a wider cultural acceptance for Mx is yet to come, it can't be denied that Mx has evolved over the years and begun making waves as a gender-inclusive honorific.

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