Narrator:

The Missouri state journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

Inclusivity, celebration of diversity, seeking equity. This is what we strive for with cultural heritage months throughout the year. Each September, we recognize and celebrate Latin X heritage month. I'm Nicki Donnelson. Today, I have Dr. Jason Jolley as my guest. He is the associate Dean of the Reynold College of Arts and Letters at Missouri State, and a professor of Spanish. Jolley explains the term Latin X, which has become more frequently used in the last 10 years.

Dr. Jason Jolley:

Latin X is an English word. It emerged in the, in the U S sociopolitical context. And well sort of accelerated with social justice movements more recently. And so, it has had some penetration into Spanish, particularly in writing throughout Latin America. But one curious thing about Latin X is the last two letters are the last sound, which is that X sound is not a phonetic sequence that the Spanish language allows at the end of words. So, the uptake of the term, Latin X and spoken Spanish, at least, isn't quite there. One thing about Latin X is like the predecessor term Latino, it is meant to reassert that Latin American identity as something separate from Spain and to a lesser extent, the Spanish language, which people in Latin American, some Latinos in the United States, see as kind of a colonial imposition, right? Another thing about Latin X that we do sometimes explain to our students, and they will ask us about more and more is that Latin X also primarily I would say, um, emerged as sort of an alternative to the gendered endings of Spanish Latino, right? Latina, Hispanic doesn't have that, but Latino and Latina are words that, that work in, in the Spanish phonetic system. And so, the, the gender of Spanish is male, female binary, and so for some people who don't identify on that binary, they prefer the term Latin X as being gender neutral or non-binary. So that's another reason for the interest in the term, Latin X.

Nicki Donnelson:

As the larger discussion around gender identity has come to the forefront, language teachers and scholars have begun to think about addressing these concerns in the classroom.

Dr. Jason Jolley:

So one of the outgrowths really of this emergence of terms like Latin X and gender terms in Spanish is a broader movement, particularly here in the United States, but also in Europe and throughout Latin America to sort of de-gender, I guess, some terms in Spanish that refer to persons, for example, so that the language is more inclusive of people, individuals who don't identify as being male or female who may be non-binary or gender neutral. There's an attempt growing among the Spanish-speaking community and Spanish-teaching to recognize that and to start exploring alternative, you know, morphology the ending of words so that maybe they don't end in the O or the OSS sound. And so different possibilities are being explored. It's kind of a new area. I mean, language change happens. It happens organically, and it could be started by something like this.

Nicki Donnelson:

Recently, Daisy Hernandez, author of *The Kissing Bug*, was interviewed for NPR. She talked about the use of Latin X and her experience in the LGBTQ community. However, she also said that these words are not what people from the culture may use to describe one another or themselves at all. Jolly continues.

Dr. Jason Jolley:

Not everybody identifies with these pan ethnic terms like Latino or Hispanic, Latina, Latin X. There was actually some interesting research that was done by the Pew Research Institute. Only 65% of US Hispanics had heard the term Latin X, for example, and of those that had heard it only a third of them thought, well, this is an inappropriate term to refer to us. And of those, right, those that had heard the term Latin X only 10% said it was their preferred terms. So, it's not like there's this huge consensus, when they did ask them what they preferred, it came down as let's see, I have the number 61 prefer the term Hispanic followed by 29, who preferred the term Latino, 5 who say something else, and then only 4%. So Latin X had the lowest percentage of acceptability among US Hispanics. Something else that 5% is that adjective of nationality, right? Their community, who they identify with and many times who they live surrounded by. It's really important to, for us to realize, although, sometimes these discussions of these terms might blow up on social media or traditional media, most folks want to be referred to by their nationality or a term that's closer to their community. I think the last thing I would say about this topic is we're living in very polarized times and sometimes people will fixate on the language we use. And I think that we just have to be, you know, we have to recognize that most people are doing the best they can. Most people are making their decisions based on the information they have. And it's okay to gently correct somebody, but I think that we just need to extend a lot of grace and, and not fixate when somebody may be using a term that you think is outmoded or this other person thinks is outmoded. And so, there's a lot of education that can happen, but I think tolerance is still important.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Jason Jolley. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State journal.

Narrator:

For more information, contact the office of university communications at 4 1 7 8 3 6 6 3 9 7.