

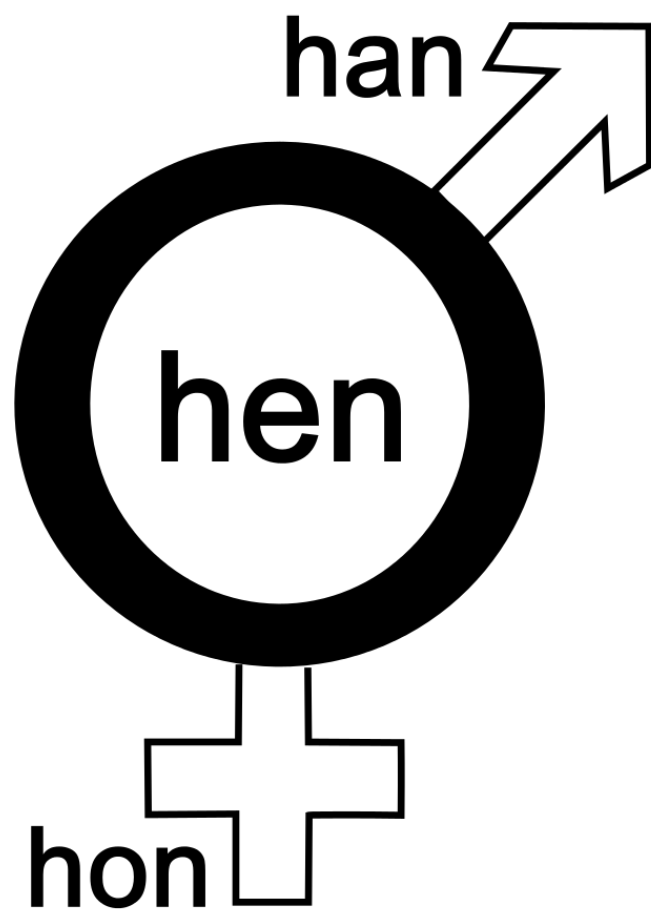
Ten years with *hen*

Public attitudes towards the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun *hen* (2012–2022)

Daniel Wojahn

Södertörn University / Stockholm / Sweden





<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=38525567>; Created by user: Myskoxen

Overview

- Background
- Research questions
- Data & method
- Analysis of the reactions on internet forums
- Summary

Hen – a timeline

1966

- *hen* is proposed by linguists as a short and useful alternative to e.g. *hon eller han* ("she or he")

1994

1990s

- *hen* is introduced by activists in trans*gender and queer communities

ca 2000

- *hen* is used in more widespread queer and feminist magazines and newspapers

January
2012

- start of the extensive media debate on *hen*, sparked by a children's book in which the author labels the main character – a child – *hen*

2015

- *hen* is included in *Svenska Akademiens ordlista* (the "Word list of the Swedish Academy")

2022

- *hen* is widely used in different types of texts; has lost some (most?) of its activist connotations



Research interest

- An analysis of the negative reactions that are provoked by *hen* in public comments in online forums.

- What kind of discursive strategies are used in public comments on *hen*?
- What view on **language** and **gender** is expressed in the reactions?

referential/
constructivist

essentialist perspective/
discursively constructed

The corpus

Negative public comments in online forums

- **2012**

1289 comments

(989 from *Svenska Dagbladet*,
300 from *flashback*)

- **2022**

1122 comments

(800 from *Aftonbladet*,
322 from *flashback*)

Method

Reisigl & Wodak (2016) types of discursive strategies:

- Nomination – How are **persons**, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- Predication – What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors?
- Argumentation – What arguments are employed in the discourse?
- Perspectivisation – From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?

Results



Nomination, predication, and perspectivisation strategies – Discursive construction and characterisation of social actors

US

- *we, the people, ordinary people, normal people, normal humans, us normally functioning parents, and a few more*

THEM

- *the extreme feminists, the fanatic ultra-feminists, the feminist branch of the extreme left, the gender-confused feminists,*
- *the gender “researchers”, the gender idiots, gender Taliban, the mentally disordered gender-extremists, gender-weirdos, the madmen of gender madness, the de-sexing advocates, impotent idiots,*
- *left-wing radicals, ultra-left extremists, the crazy socialists, Marxists, cultural Marxists, the social democrats,*
- *the PC-mafia, moralists, politicians, the elite, crazy transvestites, and many more*

Hardly any changes over time

Types of reactions & argumentation strategies

- ignorance
- incomprehension
- **denial**
- **warning**
- trivialisation
- ridicule
- insult (personal attack)

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1. the established naming practices aren't discriminatory
2. trans*people do not exist
3. the pronoun *hen* doesn't exist

We already have *she* and *he* and those two pronouns include everyone!

(online forum, *Aftonbladet*, 2022)

There are only two biological sexes! Men! And women! There are no hens!

(*flashback*, 2022)

Hen does not exist!! I looked in the dictionary.

(online forum, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2012)

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1. *hen* aims to discriminate against cis men
2. *hen* is introduced “from above” to restrict the freedom of speech
3. gender-neutral pronouns are unique to Sweden and harm Sweden’s image

Obviously, you must be HBT or Muslim to be accepted in today's Sweden. As a white working heterosexual man, you don't get very far...

(online forum, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2012)

Note that this is government policy. Today, you cannot be successful professionally in the public sector if you do not conform to the dogmas of state feminism, where gender studies is the ideological engine.

(online forum, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2012)

Where the hell is this country going? The whole damn Europe is laughing at Sweden and our asexuality...

(*flashback*, 2022)

View on the relation between language and gender

Now, they are also **attacking the order of nature**. New words and concepts are introduced in an attempt to create a new kind of human, a human without identity and gender. Poor children who are exposed to a **gender experiment with an uncertain outcome**.
When will this madness end?

I know a kindergarten in Stockholm where they use that word [*hen*].
Poor kids. **Losing their identity** at such a young age!

Summary

- Nomination, predication, and perspectivisation
 - “normal people” vs. “crazy ultra-feminists”
 - hardly any changes during the last 10 years
- Argumentation
 - denial and warning
 - some smaller changes in the argumentation strategies during the last 10 years
- View on the relation between language and gender
 - 2012: an essential perspective on gender, but simultaneously a constructivist perspective on language; *hen* can change gender, gender norms, and society in a dangerous way
 - 2022: hardly any discussions on the relation between language and gender



Thank you!

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY | STOCKHOLM
sh.se

daniel.wojahn@sh.se