

The Danish Language Council

and gender-inclusive language



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The Danish Language Council

A governmental research institution under the Ministry of Culture in Denmark.

3 main tasks:

- To follow the **development** of the Danish language - for example by registering new words.
- To answer questions about the Danish language and its usage – **advisory service** through the inquiry phone line.
- To determine **Danish orthography** and to edit and publish the official Danish orthographic **dictionary** - standardizing spelling

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1) Follow the **development** of the language:

- Which gender-neutral pronouns do Danes prefer?
- Is *formand* ('chairman') being replaced by *forkvinde* ('chairwoman') or *forperson* ('chairperson')?

→ research that shows the development in attitudes and language usage in this area in the Danish language

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2) Language **Advisory**:

- “How should I conjugate *hen* in the genitive case?”
- “Should we use *formand* (‘chairman’) or *forperson* (‘chairperson’) in our organization?”
- “Can I write *sangerinde* (female singer) for a woman, or is it discriminatory, and should I instead write *sanger* (‘singer’ – neutral/masculine form)?”

→ research that can help us answer these questions from the Danish population

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3) Orthographic **Dictionary**:

- Should gender-neutral pronouns be included in the dictionary?
- Should *afholdskvinde* ('female temperance advocate') be included in the dictionary as an alternative to *afholdsmænd* ('male temperance advocate')?
- Should we change gendered examples in the dictionary? *Bevæerte* ('to treat'):

'**She** treated the guests with coffee and cake'

→ '**They** treated the guests with coffee and cake'

→ other countries' experiences with editing dictionaries in relation to gender-inclusive language. Descriptivism vs. activism

About me – Marianne Rathje

- Sociolinguist
- Research areas: generational language, language change, swear words and insults, language on social media

Relevant research in this context:

- Danes' experiences with and attitudes towards **gender-neutral pronouns**
- Danes' attitudes towards **gendered suffixes** (*-inde*), **gendered job titles** (*formand*, 'chairman') and **gendered insults** (*luder* ('whore'), *svans* ('sissy'))"

Relevant research

1) Experiences with and attitudes towards **gender-neutral pronouns**:

- masculine pronoun *han* ('he') and the feminine pronoun *hun* ('she').
- gender-neutral pronouns:
 - *de* ('they') (English)
 - *hen* (Swedish)
- non-binary Danes prefer *de* ('they'),
cisgender Danes prefer *hen*

Publication

Marianne Rathje & Thrine Victoria Jarnot Meline (2023): Kønsneutrale pronominer: danskernes erfaringer og holdninger, i: *Nyt fra Sprognævnet*, 2023/1.

Relevant research

2) Gendered **suffixes**, gendered **job titles**, and gendered **insults**:

Young people prefer the gender-neutral *forperson* ('chairperson'), older people prefer *formand* ('chairman').

Thank you!