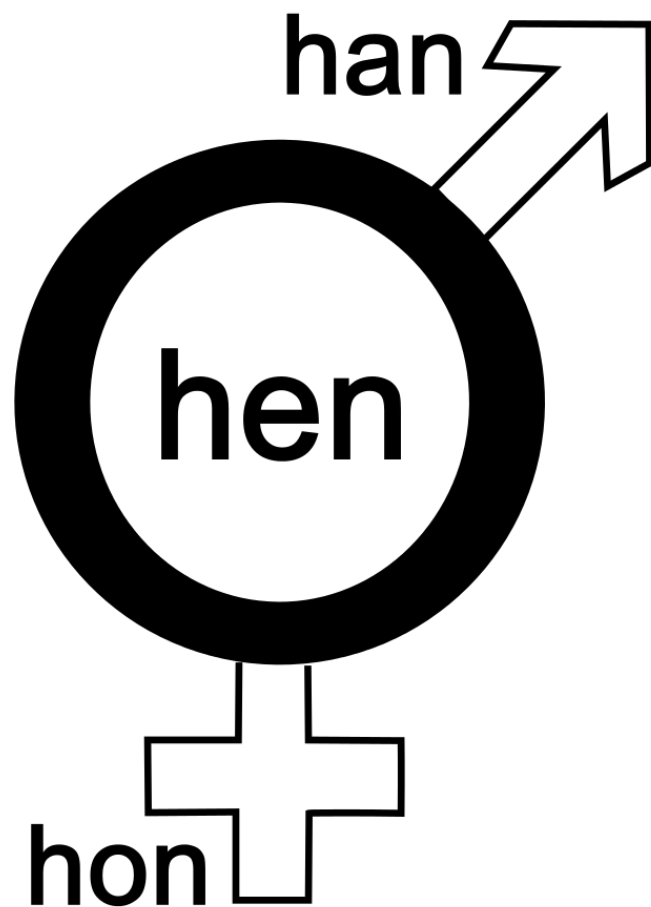


Swedish: Ten Years of Using the Gender-Neutral pronoun *hen* (2012– 2022)

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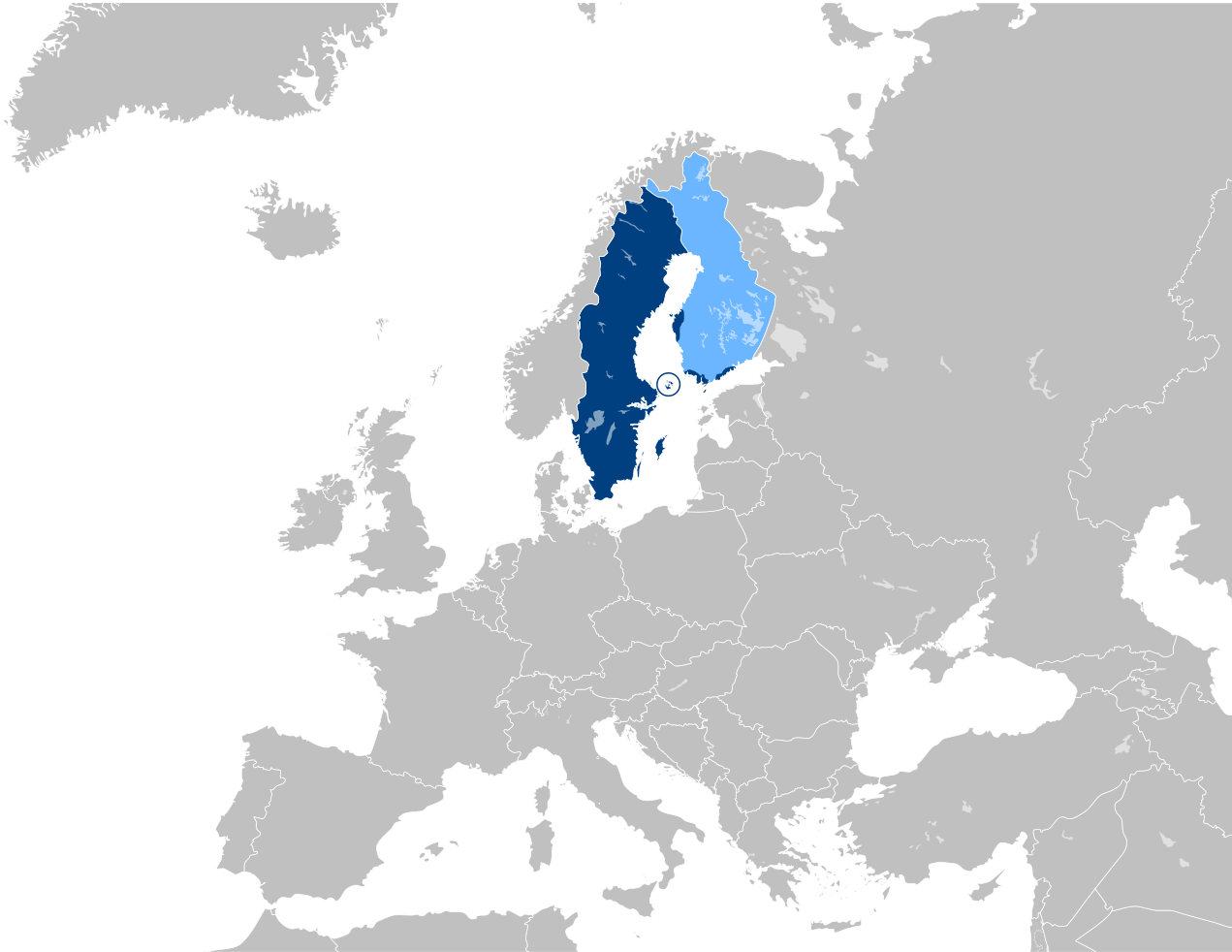


Overview

- History of *hen*
- Analysis of public attitudes towards *hen*

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

Swedish



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Swedish_language_map.svg

- a North Germanic language
- spoken as a first language by ~ 10 million speakers (ISO 2020)
- official language in Sweden and Finland
- in Finland, 5.2% of the population speak Swedish as their first language (OSF 2023)

Hen – a timeline (1/2)

1966

- *hen* is proposed by a linguist as a short and useful alternative to e.g., *hon eller han* (“she or he”), inspired by the Finnish gender-neutral pronoun *hän* (Dunås 1966)

1970s -
1990s

- *hen* is occasionally mentioned by other linguists as an inclusive generic term for both women and men (e.g., Molde 1976; Blume 1982; Sahlquist 1984; Mårtensson 1988; Karlgren 1994)

1990s

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

ca 2005

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

2009

- *hen* is included in the online version of the *Nationalencyklopedin* (a Swedish-language encyclopedia)

Hen – a timeline (2/2)

January
2012

- start of the extensive media debate on *hen*

2015

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

2023

- *hen* is widely used in different types of texts; has lost a lot of its activist connotations



Today's use of *hen*:

- (1) as a generic pronoun
- (2) to anonymize the gender identity of specific persons
- (3) to refer to specific non-binary people
- (4) as the sole third-person pronoun to challenge gender binary radically

Public attitudes towards *hen* - the corpus

- **2012**

1474 comments

(989 from *Svenska Dagbladet*,
485 from *Flashback forum*)

- **2022**

1176 comments

(800 from *Aftonbladet*,
376 from *Flashback forum*)

Wojahn (2015; 2023)

Us and them in public online comments about *hen*

US

- *we, the people, ordinary people, normal people, we ordinary people, and a few more*

THEM

- *the extreme feminists, the fanatic ultra-feminists, the crazy feminists, gender-confused feminists, etc.*
- *the gender idiots, the gender Taliban, the gender weirdos, etc.*
- *left-wing radicals, ultra-left extremists, the crazy socialists, Marxists, etc.*
- *moralists, politicians, the elite, etc.*

Hardly any changes over time

Types of reactions to *hen*

- denial
- warning
- downplaying
- ridiculing
- personal attack

1. trans*people do not exist
2. ...

1. *hen* aims to discriminate against cis men
2. *hen* is implemented by an elite aiming to limit the freedom of speech
3. discussions on gender-neutral pronouns are unique to Sweden and damage Sweden's image abroad
4. ...

There are only two biological sexes!
Men! And women! There are no hens!
(Flashback forum, 2022)

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)

**In 2022, there are still strong reactions to *hen*.
But the total number of negative reactions is lower.**



Thank you for listening!

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