

Summary in English

The dissertation examines the employment and functions of the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* in Swedish picturebooks. The pronoun, initially proposed by linguist Rolf Dunås in 1966, aimed to be a satisfactory gender-inclusive alternative to third person singular pronouns *han* [he] and *hon* [she]. Previously, to include both genders, expressions like *han eller hon* [he or she] or *han/hon* [he/she] were used, which were perceived as overly complicated and unpractical. Alternatively, the generic pronoun *man* [man] was used. Dunås introduced *hen* as a more inclusive word that also adhered to the principle of linguistic economy. However, the introduction of *hen* did not gain immediate acceptance, and it was nearly 50 years later that the pronoun became widely known and discussed by Swedish speakers.

A significant debate regarding *hen* arose in 2012 following the publication of *Kivi & Monsterhund* [Kivi & the Monster dog], written by Jesper Lundqvist with illustrations by Bettina Johansson. The author's decision to use *hen* to describe the main character, Kivi – a child who dreams of owning, ignited a discussion on the boundaries of gender and language. The pronoun gathered both strong supporters and vocal critics. In 2015, it was included in *Svenska Akademiens Ordlista*, the dictionary published by the Swedish Academy, which symbolically concluded the debate with formal acceptance of *hen* into the Swedish language. Since then, *hen* has become an established pronoun used across various contexts, including in literature, media, and official documents.

Despite *hen* gaining prominence through its use in a children's picturebook, its application in such literature remains relatively uncommon. My research identified only eleven additional picturebooks featuring *hen*. While this sample is small, it showcases a diverse array of strategies for employing *hen*. The pronoun is used to describe people, animals, fantastical creatures, emotions and even God, as well as in its generic, non-specific sense. Given that *hen* conveys gender-neutrality, this study emphasizes the representations of gender and gender-neutrality in the analysed picturebooks. To achieve this, I employ both literary and linguistic perspectives, utilizing cognitive poetics and norm-critical approach to guide my analysis. In the final part of the analysis, I explore other inclusive elements within the books – such as representations of sexual orientation, family structure, ethnicity, and age – to assess whether they reinforce, contradict, or ignore existing societal norms, determining if they can be classified as norm-critical.

The analysis reveals diverse approaches to constructing gender-neutrality within the iconotexts. Frequently, it is achieved either by equally combining stereotypical male and female traits, or by avoiding gender characteristics altogether. The latter strategy, while more challenging to implement with human characters, yields more satisfying results when applied to animals, fantastical creatures and abstract concepts. Additionally, in some cases, authors clearly imply the gender of individuals referred to as *hen*, indicating that even characters who conform to traditional gender norms in appearance or behaviour may not necessarily identify as male or female.

Regarding other inclusive elements, the findings reveal significant variation between and within the analysed iconotexts. Picturebooks published by Olikä, a publishing house recognized for promoting diversity, demonstrate a broader range of norm-critical elements across various areas. Nonetheless, each of the analysed books exhibits some form of norm-creativity, including diverse representations of both primary and secondary characters.

In conclusion, this dissertation argues that the picturebook genre, which initially sparked interest and debate around *hen*, continues to serve as a platform for showcasing the broad potential of the new pronoun's application. As demonstrated by the twelve analysed works, *hen* can be employed in multiple contexts to enhance inclusivity and challenge conventional norms. The norm-critical nature of the books also presents opportunities for their use in educational settings. Future research could explore the potential of integrating these picturebooks into classrooms to foster democratic engagement and to promote students' understanding of equality and its significance in contemporary society, aligning with the objectives of Sweden's policy on equality in education.