



# LUND UNIVERSITY

Centre for Languages and Literature

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## **“Man breastfeeds his young”**

A comparison of attitudes towards the false generics  
*he/han* and *man/man* in the English and Swedish  
languages.

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## 1. Introduction

Gender in the English language is less (grammatically) important than in many other languages (Biber et. al., 2007, p. 311). It is mainly tied to the sex of the referent, and is reflected in “co-occurrence patterns with respect to singular personal pronouns and their corresponding forms” (Biber et. al., 2007, p. 311). When there is a need to refer to nouns which contain dual gender, such as *spokesperson*, *professor* or pronouns such as *anybody* there is a choice in which the required pronouns have different masculine and feminine forms depending upon the sex of the referent (Biber et. al., 2007, p. 316). However, problems arise when the sex of the referent is unknown or irrelevant as the English language does not have a third person gender neutral pronoun. In such instances the traditional choice is to use the masculine pronoun, as seen in the following example:

(1) The student will by the end of term have to be able to show that *he* has acquired the appropriate knowledge of the course.

The English language and one of its close relatives, the Swedish language, contain masculine words that are intended to include both men and women. However, the uses of these words contain a bias for the masculine, as it has been proven that the use of masculine pronouns biases the reader into picturing a male referent (Biber et. al., 2007, p. 316). This is especially noticeable within generic reference. Generic reference in turn, is a way of describing an entire group or class of something as a whole. For example, the words *he* and *man* are both generic and specifically masculine words. This means that they can both include and exclude women, depending on the context. Undoubtedly, this creates a problem as the word in one sense can include women and in the other sense completely excludes them. As an example, consider a popular culture sentence such as the following:

(2) The mission of the star ship Enterprise is to boldly go where *no man has gone before*.

This was used in the massively popular TV series *Star Trek: The Original Series*. One can interpret this as either places where no male human beings have gone before, or places where no human being has gone before. It is difficult to know what is being referred to and this undoubtedly creates confusion due to the dual meaning of the word *man*.

*He* and *man* are what we will refer to as *false generics* in this essay. They can be considered false generics as they can refer to both males and females although most people still think of a man rather than a woman when they are used (Miller & Swift, 1977, pp. 21-26). This is a problem as generics are supposed to show the characteristics of a large group in general, and only about half of the world's population is of male gender while the other half is female. This is then why these generics are false ones, since the majority of the people in the world are not male.

As studies of language and gender have been present for approximately 40 years, the fact that the English language as well as the Swedish language uses false generics has not been ignored, but is a widely discussed topic. Still, as time has progressed and linguistic reforms have made their way into the languages, there have been changes with respect to false generics and masculine bias. This essay deals with the modern day false generics *he* (Swe: *han*) and *man* (Swe: *man*) in the English and Swedish languages. More specifically, I will investigate the attitudes towards the generic masculine of Swedish students of English at the University of Lund in Sweden.

The following research questions will be addressed:

- How do modern-day Swedish students of English interpret the false generics *he/han* and *man/man* in both their mother tongue and in their (presumably) second language, English? Do they accept them as generic and would they use them themselves?
- How do they feel about *he* versus *man*? Are they inclined to think of one of them as more generic than the other?
- Is there a difference in the attitude towards the generics depending on the gender of the test subject?

In order to answer my research questions, I will firstly provide some background information within the study of language and gender as well as false generics and changes in the attitude towards masculine generics. Then, I will present my own study in section 3 and the results of the study in section 4. In section 5 I will discuss the results in relation to the background information, and finally come to a conclusion in section 6 based on the research questions and the data I collected.

## 2. A background to gender and genericity

This section will present relevant background information within my research subject, as to establish what other researchers have found out prior to this study. In addition, relevant terms will be defined.

### 2.1. Language and gender: A brief overview

There are three generally acknowledged approaches to female language; the deficit approach, the dominance approach and the difference approach. Out of these, the dominance approach will be the main focus here. In addition to these three approaches, a fourth and newer approach called the discourse approach has emerged. However, as this approach is not particularly relevant to the present study, it has been excluded in order to not confuse the reader.

The deficit approach is the idea that women's language use is inferior to men's language use. This idea was introduced as early as in 1922, in the chapter *The Woman* in Otto Jespersen's book *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*. In this chapter, he identified features of so-called "women's language". For example, he claimed that women overuse certain adjectives and intensifiers as well as talk too much and never finish their sentences as they have not thought about what they want to say. However, his studies were based on novels where male writers portrayed female conversations and the quality of that chapter could, thus, be very highly debated. Nevertheless, it is still a text of debate and interest today.

During the 1960s, language and gender became a subfield of sociolinguistics. Robin Lakoff's article *Language and Woman's Place* written in 1973 is often considered one of the landmarks within the studies of language differences between men and women. Lakoff argued that women use a form of language which reinforces their subordinate roles in society. This "women's language" is characterized by communicative strategies such as hedging, the avoidance of strong expressions and the use of tag questions (Lakoff, 1973, pp. 49-57).

This leads us into the next approach, namely the dominance approach of which Lakoff was one of the pioneers. This view contains the idea that gender differences in terms of language use are the results of women being dominated and oppressed by men. Numerous early works within the field adhere to this view, most notably the works of Robin Lakoff and Dale Spender. Many of the ideas used were based on observations and claims that were

originally put forward by the deficit approach and it provided a base for further linguistic analysis. Research made within this view identified a number of areas where women's language was (supposedly) different from men's language.

Important for the present study is that both Lakoff (1973, pp. 73-74) and Spender (1980, pp. 151-154) identified that English uses the masculine form when one needs to describe a sexually mixed group. This is the way in which the words *man* and *he* are used as generic terms which supposedly include women as well as men, whereas *woman* and *she* are clearly marked forms that can only include women. However, research has shown that people mainly think of males when they hear the words *man* or *he* (Spender, 1980, pp. 151-152), thus showing that women are a subgroup that does not conform to the male norm that runs through the language and society. The principle of male as norm is mainly visible in the way in which there is a lack of words denoting women in a variety of roles, such as working professions. But when it comes to males entering areas where females previously have been dominant, new words are quickly coined to make up for the non-male words, whereas it takes an extensive amount of time for male-dominated words of profession to become neutral or to take on a female version (Pauwels, 2004).

To expand on the topic of women being the marked gender, Lakoff stated that women are considered as complements to men. As an example, one can consider the words *actor* and *actress*. *Actor* is the form which can describe either a male or female actor, in other words a generic word for any person within the acting profession. *Actress*, on the other hand, is completely reserved for women. The difference between these two words is the distinction between the norm (*actor*) and the deviation (*actress*), marking that the female is not standardly human (Miller & Swift, 1977, p. 50). The suffix makes it very clear that the female form is dependent on the man as the word is a derivation of actor, just like a woman is "supposed" to be a derivation or complement to man.

However, the dominance approach has received a great deal of critique due to the fact that a lot of claims within the field are based on common stereotypes, and not backed up by proper research. It also degrades women to subordinate beings who are not able to escape from their subordinate position.

As an alternative to the dominance approach one can then consider the difference approach. This view states that men and women are distinguished by their differences. The use of men's and women's language is merely a reflection of their different "subcultures". The scholars of this approach argue that it is not a question of power imbalance (as in the dominance approach where the women are dominated by the men) between women and men,

but rather a consequence of the two sexes having different norms for interaction. Deborah Tannen is one of the scholars who adhere to this view as well as Jennifer Coates and plenty of research from the 1980s. In contrast to the dominance approach, there is great amount of proper research made within the difference approach, such as language use in different settings and contexts. It does not only focus on women's language, but men's language as well. In addition, it also deals with mixed sex groups and same sex groups.

Nevertheless, the problem with the difference approach is that it asserts the differences, but there is no discussion as to what the ultimate cause of the difference is. Furthermore, it does not either acknowledge the fact that the differences between men and women could, in fact, be due to male dominance in society.

## 2.2. The problem with false generics

In this section, I will present the use of the generic in both English and Swedish, together with relevant examples. As stated in the introduction, this essay will focus on the English *he* and *man* as well as its Swedish counterparts *han* and *man*. This section is divided into one subsection where I will establish (although briefly) how the generic in English as well as in Swedish is defined and how it is used, one section in which I will focus on *he/han* and *man/man* respectively as well as a final subsection that explains the problem with using these words as generics.

### 2.2.1. The generic: a (short) definition

Let us begin by considering generics in English. First of all, we need to know what the word *generic* means and how it is used. The term is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as:

Characteristic of or relating to a class or type of objects, phenomena, etc.; applicable to a large group or class, or any member of it; not specific, general. [...] Freq. opposed to specific.

(Generic, 2009)

From the above quote one can conclude that in the English language, the generic is a general characteristic applicable to a group of something. There are several ways of giving generic reference in English. For example, consider the following three sentences:

(3) *Tigers* are striped.

(4) *The tiger* is striped.

(5) *A tiger* is striped.

These are all examples of the three *main* types of generic noun phrases in English (Krifka et. al., 1995, p. 10). Example (3) contains a bare plural noun phrase, example (4) contains a definite noun phrase and lastly example (5) shows the use of an indefinite singular noun phrase.

Now, let us move on to the generic in the Swedish language. The Swedish dictionary *Svenska Akademiens Ordlista* defines the Swedish word *generisk* as “something that denotes a category as a whole” (Generisk, 2006, my translation). This seems to correspond to the definition of the same word in English as it refers to a general characteristic applicable to a group of something.

Furthermore, giving generic reference in Swedish is fairly similar to English. Swedes can use all the definite and indefinite forms of the nouns to give generic reference, except singular nouns with the indefinite article (Bolander, 2005, pp. 116-117). See the following examples:

(6) *Tigern* är randig.

‘*The tiger* is striped’

(7) *Tigrarna* är randiga.

‘*The tigers* are striped’

(8) *Tigrar* är randiga.

‘*Tigers* are striped’

(9) *En tiger* är randig.

‘*A tiger* is striped’

The examples can be used in different settings and sometimes indicating different nuances of genericity. The most common way of giving generic reference is the bare plural noun phrase as seen in example (8) (Bolander, 2005, p. 117).



### 2.2.2. Generic *he* (Eng.) and *han* (Swe.)

As we have seen in the previous section, there is more than one way of referencing generically in both the English language and the Swedish language. However, when a person is referring back to a generic noun phrase such as the ones in the examples of the previous section (see examples 3-9) where the gender is either irrelevant or just unknown, the pronoun used (when *it* is not an acceptable form) is the masculine *he* rather than feminine *she* (Quirk et al., p. 353). As mentioned, English does not have a third person pronoun that is gender neutral. For example, consider a sentence such as the following:

(10) The applicant may leave as soon as *he* has filled out *his* questionnaire.

The only reason why the masculine form of the third person pronoun is used is due to tradition (Biber et al., 2007, p. 316), and as one knows women have never had a high standing in society in comparison to men. The use of masculine pronouns for generic reference has been the target of plenty of criticism, and strategies to avoid gender-specific reference are becoming increasingly common.

In Swedish, the use of *han* is basically the same as in English as the masculine forms are preferred. One example being the following:

(11) Ansökanden är fri att gå så snart *han* skrivit ner sitt telefonnummer.

'The applicant is free to leave as soon as he has written down his phone number.'

In addition, it is important to note that during recent years the word *hen* has been introduced into the Swedish language (although it is still not used by most people), which is a third person gender neutral pronoun which serves to remove the generic masculine bias (Milles, 2011, pp. 27-28).

### 2.2.3. Generic *man* (Eng.) and *man* (Swe.)

The main difference between the generics in English and Swedish can be found within the word *man*. In English, the word *man* contains two meanings. One of these meanings is a generic term for the human race including both men and women. The other meaning is that of a human male, a meaning which excludes women completely (Man 2, 2013<sup>1</sup>). Swedish *man*

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity the entry on *Man* in *Norstedts Engelsk-Svenska Ordlista* will be referred to as *Man 1* in this essay, and the entry on *Man* in *The Oxford English Dictionary* will be referred to as *Man 2*.

does, however, mean something else. It is used as an equivalent of the indefinite pronoun *one* (Man 1, 2013), one example being:

(12) *Man* kan tycka att det är dumt.  
'One may think it is stupid.'

The word *man* is, on the other hand, the same within compound nouns such as *fireman* (Swe: *brandman*) and *camera man* (Swe: *kameraman*), but not as a word on its own. When Swedes are referring to humankind they use the word *människa*, which is a neutral way of talking about a human being irrespective of sex. One example of this word being used would be:

(13) *Människan*, som är ett däggdjur, ammar sina unga.  
'Man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young.'

Even though English and Swedish share common roots, this word (*människa*) has not gained a contemporary equivalent in English (Miller & Swift, 1977, p. 27) and the translation becomes quite strange or humorous to an English speaking person.

#### 2.2.4. False generics

We have now briefly gone over the definition of the generic and the uses of the generics that this essay focuses on. Now it is time to explain why the generic *he/han* and *man/man* are problematic. First and foremost, Miller & Swift explain that that the problem with *man* and *he* as generics is that they are, in fact, not generic at all (1977, pp. 21-26). Naturally, one might wonder why this is the case.

Most people tend to think of men rather than women when the words *man* and *he* are used (Gastil, 1990, p. 639), which makes these words *false generics* as the majority of people in the world are not male. Only about half of the world's population is of male sex while the other half is female. A generic word for humans is expected to refer to a general person and the characteristics of a general human being (Man 2, 2013). The fact that it instead only shows characteristics of about half of the world's population makes it false and not generic at all.

As well as this male bias, there is the problem of not knowing whether generic or specific reference was intended by the author. Let us consider a sentence such as the following:

(14) When the student has finished *his* exam *he* may leave.

This sentence could either refer to a specific male student or students as a generic group, but there is no way to tell which one of these uses were intended by the author. Another way to show how odd the use of a masculine generic can be is by using *she* as a generic pronoun instead of *he*. Some feminist writers have done this, and Mills (2008, p. 88) states that this might feel slightly awkward to people as we are used to this word being used in a gender specific way. Nevertheless, it does in fact show just how sex-specific the generic *he* is.

In addition, Martyna (1978) conducted a study worth mentioning. The results of her research seemed to convey that men and women have their own different perceptions of the generic *he*. The men in the study used the pronoun as they identified with it, whereas the women used *he* as the grammatically correct way of referring to a person of unspecified sex and not as a way for them to identify with the pronoun. Research made by others, such as Miller & Swift support her findings. Miller & Swift (1977, p. 29) suggest that boys and girls at an early age learn about the generic masculine in different ways. The boys, as they are male, grow up with being called *he* whereas the girls do at some point in their life realize that *he* can include themselves too, but not always. Women do also use the masculine generics in a lesser extent than men (Silveira, 1980, p. 177).

### 2.3. Changes in attitude towards the generic masculine

Lakoff's article *Language and Woman's Place* (1973) and Spender's book *Man Made Language* (1980) date back to the 1970s and 80s, which is more than 30 years ago. One might wonder if the male bias in the language has changed during the time that has passed.

Cheshire (2008) has conducted two studies about masculine bias in the English language. The first one was in 1985 and the second one roughly 20 years later (2008), which is basically a generation of speakers. In her second study, she collected data through the BBC web pages, and found that there have been changes that suggest a slow removal of male bias in the language. Other researchers have found similar tendencies. In 1984, Robert Cooper conducted a study in which he analyzed a corpus of 525.000 words of running text from American publications. He found that there has been a decline in the rate of which the masculine generics have been used in the U.S., however, he noted that the word least resistant to change was *man*, and the most resistant one was the use of *-man* in compounds. He also

added that the feminist movement seemed to have raised consciousness with respect to sexism within the language (Cooper, 1984, p. 20). In contrast, later studies have shown that the use of *-man* in job titles are frequently replaced with *-person* instead, giving a neutral title that can be used on both men and women (Mills, 2008, p. 92). Examples of this are professions such as *chairperson* instead of the masculine *chairman*. This seems to collide with Cooper's results, where he meant that *-man* was least prone to change.

Stringer & Hopper analyzed generic *he* in everyday conversation in 1998. They analyzed conversations recorded between 1963 and 1997 but did not, to their own surprise; find generic *he* as frequently as they had originally thought they would. The cases in which *he* was used were mainly cases where people were referring to someone in an "unmarked masculine role", such as a member of Congress, or when it was used as a referent to non-humans (Stringer & Hopper, 1998, pp. 218-220).

It is also possible to detect differences within popular culture. The *Star Trek original series* from the 1960s' opening sequence is narrated by William Shatner in the following way:

Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. [...] to boldly go where no **man** has gone before.

(Dinadangdong, 2007)

However, in the later series called *Star Trek: Next Generation* dating from the late 80s to the beginning of the 90s, the opening sequence is narrated by Patrick Stewart in the following way:

Space... the Final Frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. [...], to boldly go where no **one** has gone before.

(TrekCore, 2010)

As one can see, the generic *man* has been replaced by the indefinite pronoun *one*. The reason why this happened was as the result of societal changes and the need to be more politically correct (Hiskey, 2012).

Other studies have shown that the word *they* used in a generic sense for a person whose gender is not known or irrelevant to the context, is getting more common in usage than the generic masculine *he*. The use of *they* is especially frequent in North America and Australasia. In Britain, this usage is not as common (Mills, 2008, p. 87).

We can conclude this section by stating that there has indeed been a change to some extent throughout the years with respect to the usage of the generic masculine. Since the use of the generic masculine seems to have declined slightly, this study seeks to investigate if the masculine generics are still considered generic for a new generation of students.

### 3. Methods and Materials

This section of the essay will explain how my study was conducted in relation to my research questions. It is split into two subsections explaining the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data used in the present study.

#### 3.1. Data collection

As mentioned in section 1 in this essay, my research questions were the following:

- How do modern-day Swedish students of English interpret the false generics *he/han* and *man/man* in both their mother tongue and in their (presumably) second language, English? Do they accept them as generic and would they use them themselves?
- How do they feel about *he* versus *man*? Are they inclined to think of one of them as more generic than the other?
- Is there a difference in the attitude towards the generics depending on the gender of the test subject?

In order to answer these research questions, my test subjects were Swedish students of English at Lund University in Sweden. To get the required data and examine the attitudes of the test subjects, an online questionnaire was designed through Google drive. This questionnaire was e-mailed to all the students studying first and second level English at Lund University during the autumn of 2013. Designing the questionnaire was very time consuming as it was important to not have the students understand what I was investigating. This took more time than I had anticipated. Originally, I had intended to only use students of first level English as my test subjects but as I did not receive enough replies and needed more data I was forced to include students of second level English as well.

The questionnaire was sent to the first level students of English at Lund University on 6 November 2013 and subsequently to the second level students of the same subject on 11 November 2013. About a week after sending the questionnaire to the students I started

collecting and analyzing the data, adding eventual late replies to the results as well. As Google drive has an automated function to get an automatic spreadsheet for your questionnaire, this was fairly easily done and did not take a considerable amount of time.

### 3.2. Data analysis

The questionnaire featured two sections which would help me obtain the data needed to answer my research questions. The first section was a short part where the student was asked to fill in personal information, such as their age range, sex and whether or not their mother tongue was Swedish. The second part contained 20 sentences, out of which 10 were in Swedish and 10 were in English. Half of the sentences contained a generic use of *he/han* and the other half a generic use of *man/man* in a slightly unconventional sentence, such as sentences in which women had generically male job titles. One example being *fireman* used in the following sentence:

(15) The fireman was awarded a medal for risking her own life whilst saving a woman about to commit suicide. (Originally sentence 4)

The reason why this was done was because scholars such as Spender as well as Miller & Swift argue that the use of masculine generics causes a disproportionate number of male images in the head of the reader. This biases the reader towards imagining a male referent (Gastil, 1990, p. 639). If *he/han* or *man/man* are truly generic, one should be able to use them with female referents. All sentences except one were put together by me, and subsequently acknowledged by my supervisor. The sentences used in the questionnaire can be found in appendix 1, ordered the same way as they were in the online questionnaire.

Furthermore, what the students were then asked to do in the second part of the questionnaire was to grade the sentences in relation to how “good” or “bad” they sounded to them, where 1 was considered truly negative and 10 unquestionably positive. A “good” sentence would then be a sentence which the student could easily use themselves in the right sort of context. It was also made clear to the students that I was not trying to test how grammatical they thought the sentences were, but simply how natural these sentences sounded to them. The students could only see one sentence at a time and had no option to go back and change their answers. This was done in an attempt to make sure the student did not understand what was actually being examined, as the answers could then be biased.

The idea behind the questionnaire results was then that if the student found the sentence “good”, it would mean that the generic *man/man* or pronoun *he/han* was, indeed, interpreted as generic in the sentence. But if they found the use of these words odd or bad, they would not be generic in the eyes of the students. However, it is important to clarify that what the students told me was only their interpretation of the test sentences, and not what the test sentence really is in terms of what grammar books declare. A few sentences were, as well, rather extreme (as in using the word *man* together with childbirth) and this could potentially mean that the test subjects were not always reacting to the generic in the sentence. This posed a small problem in regards to the general results, however as the sentences were rather varied I should still have relevant results as the sentences contained no oddities and plenty of time was put into making sure they reacted to the generic.

When all the necessary data had been collected, I started by calculating the overall responses to the sentences to see whether they were rated as leaning towards the negative or the positive aspect of the 1-10 scale, or perhaps more towards the middle of the scale. 1-3 will be considered negative in this study and those sentences are such ones that the students could not see themselves using. 4-7 is the medium group, where the students seem to be a little uncertain. 8-10 will be considered positive, and as something the students could see themselves use in the right sort of context. This would then give me an indication of whether the students could use them themselves and whether they interpret them as being generic, as well as making it possible to see whether there was a difference in the reactions towards the Swedish sentences as opposed to the English sentences. This analysis was made in order for me to be able to answer my first research question.

After analyzing the general results discussed above, I compared the male participants’ results with the female participants’ results, to see whether there was a difference between the interpretation and attitudes between males and females. I also analyzed the age differences to see whether they would indicate anything of interest. In addition, I tried to see whether or not students were more inclined to interpret *he/han* as generic rather than *man/man* or the opposite. These were analyzed in order to try to answer my second and third research questions. As I also included the option for non-Swedish native speakers I examined their results as well, although there was not significant material to establish anything conclusive about their preferences.

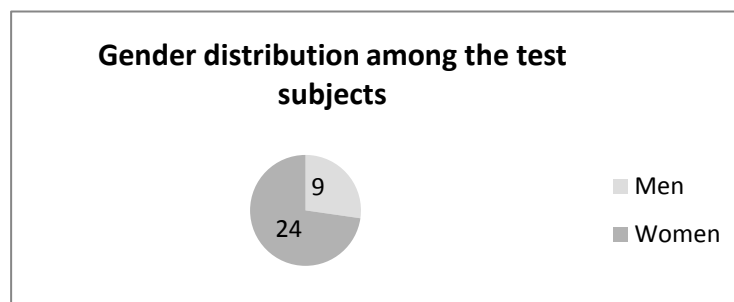
## 4. Results

In this section, I will present the results of my research, such as key findings and what the data can tell us. For convenience this section is divided into two subsections as the questionnaire used as the basis of my research was divided into two sections as well. The data presented will then be discussed in section 5.

### 4.1 Questionnaire section 1

Let us start by examining the results of the first section of the questionnaire where the participants had to enter their age, gender and whether or not Swedish was their mother tongue. As the section was not particularly sizable, the results are clear.

33 people participated in the questionnaire study, out of which nine were men and 24 were women, thus mainly giving a female perspective on the final results. Only two of the participants did not have Swedish as their mother tongue, and they were both women. Please see Figure 1 for a clear image of the gender distribution between the test subjects.



**Figure 1** Gender distribution among the test subjects.

As for the age distribution among the participants, it was as follows:

Age group	Number of people
<b>18-23 years</b>	19
<b>23-28 years</b>	7
<b>28-33 years</b>	4
<b>33+ years</b>	3

**Table 1** Age distribution among the test subjects.



As the table shows, most of the students were fairly young as more than 50% belong to the youngest age group included.

#### 4.2 Questionnaire section 2

Let us now turn to the results of the second and larger part of the questionnaire; the graded sentences. This subsection is divided into four separate sections, as the sentences used in the questionnaire were divided into sets of five sentences of each word I wanted to investigate, meaning five sentences dealt with *he* (Eng.), five sentences with *han* (Swe.), five sentences with *man* (Eng.) and five sentences with *man* (Swe.).

##### 4.2.1. Sentences with *he* (Eng.)

Let us begin by examining the results for the five sentences that contained the English pronoun *he*. The sentences were as follows:

(16) Man is just like any other mammal as he breastfeeds his young. (Originally sentence 9)

(17) If anyone can find my missing book, I will give him a big hug. (Originally sentence 13)

(18) If anyone needs to use the bathroom, he may use the one on the bottom floor. (Originally sentence 17)

(19) When man goes into labour he usually ends up at the hospital to give birth. (Originally sentence 18)

(20) A person who suffers from menstrual pains gets severe cramps and sometimes he even gets nauseous. (Originally sentence 20)

The results for these were fairly clear, with the majority of the test subjects rating them in the negative (1-3) scale; however example (17) had an equally sized pool of people rating the sentence between negative (1-3) and medium (4-7). The following table shows the ratings these sentences received from the students, split into the three groups negative (1-3), medium (4-7) and positive (8-10):

Example no.	Negative (1-3)	Medium (4-7)	Positive (8-10)
<b>16. (orig. 9)</b>	23	8	2
<b>17. (orig. 13)</b>	15	15	3
<b>18. (orig. 17)</b>	17	11	5
<b>19. (orig. 18)</b>	33	0	0
<b>20. (orig. 20)</b>	28	5	0

**Table 2** The attitudes of the participants to sentences containing *he* (*Eng.*) as a generic.

Regarding the differences between the female and male test subjects' results, the female participants had the same general impression of the sentences as the overall results. The only notable difference between the male test subjects and female test subjects was that the majority of the males in example (17) could be found within the medium (4-7) category and the females mainly in the negative (1-3) category. Other than this there was no general difference between the results of the two sexes within this category of sentences.

#### 4.2.2. Sentences with *han* (*Swe.*)

As we now have looked over the results for the English *he*, we move on to the Swedish equivalent of that word, namely *han*. These sentences were as follows:

(21) Ansökanden måste se till att han lämnar sitt telefonnummer längst ner på formulärets sida.

(Originally sentence 2)

'The applicant needs to make sure he leaves his phone number at the bottom of the page of the application form.'

(22) Den patient som får veta att han har livsmoderhalscancer blir helt förkrossad. (Originally sentence 3)

'The patient who finds out that he has got cervical cancer becomes completely devastated.'

(23) Om någon vill röka måste han gå ut på balkongen. (Originally sentence 7)

'If anyone wants to have a smoke he has to go out onto the balcony.'

(24) Han som återfinner den försvunna flickan kommer få en stor belöning. (Originally sentence 12)

'He who finds the missing girl will be greatly rewarded.'

(25) När studenten blivit klar med sin tenta får han lov att gå. (Originally sentence 15)

'When the student has finished his exam he may leave.'

In these sentences, the majority of the test subjects rated them within the negative (1-3) scale, but it is possible to distinguish a tendency of slightly more people rating them medium (4-7) or positively (8-10) in comparison to English *he*. The following table shows the ratings these sentences received from the students, split into the three groups negative (1-3), medium (4-7) and positive (8-10):

Example no.	Negative (1-3)	Medium (4-7)	Positive (8-10)
<b>21. (Orig. 2)</b>	19	9	5
<b>22. (Orig. 3)</b>	30	2	1
<b>23. (Orig. 7)</b>	12	16	5
<b>24. (Orig. 12)</b>	20	9	4
<b>25. (Orig. 15)</b>	15	17	1

**Table 3** The attitudes of the participants to sentences containing *han* (Swe.) as a generic.

Regarding the differences between the female and male test subjects' results, example (23) was mainly rated negatively (1-3) by the female test subjects whereas the majority of the male test subjects rated it within the medium (4-7) group, very similar to example (17) in the previous section. Other than that one sentence, the males and females seem to have similar interpretations with regards to the rest of the sentences.

#### 4.2.3. Sentences with *man* (Eng.)

As the results for both English *he* and Swedish *han* in the questionnaire has been presented, it is time to move on to the results of the English *man*. These were the sentences used in the questionnaire:

(26) Jane is our mailman. (Originally sentence 1)

(15) The fireman was awarded a medal for risking her own life whilst saving a woman about to commit suicide. (Originally sentence 4)

(27) Did you hear that the company spokesman got pregnant? (Originally sentence 5)

(28) Clara sure is a great horseman! (Originally sentence 10)

(29) David's wife is a spaceman. (Originally sentence 19)

These results are slightly more spread out than in the previous sections, and it was difficult to find a particular pattern amongst the test subjects. Nevertheless, the majority could still be found within the negative (1-3) frame. The following table shows the ratings these sentences received from the students, split into the three groups negative (1-3), medium (4-7) and positive (8-10):

Example no.	Negative (1-3)	Medium (4-7)	Positive (8-10)
<b>26. (Orig. 1)</b>	8	14	11
<b>15. (Orig. 4)</b>	12	15	6
<b>27. (Orig. 5)</b>	12	11	10
<b>28. (Orig. 10)</b>	17	9	7
<b>29. (Orig. 19)</b>	20	9	4

**Table 4** The attitudes of the participants to sentences containing *man* (Eng.) as a generic.

The majority of the male test subjects rated example (26) within the positive (8-10) frame whereas the females preferred the medium (4-7) frame. In example (27), a clear majority of female subjects rated it within the negative (1-3) frame whereas the male majority on the other hand could be found in the positive (8-10) frame. The remaining sentences did not have a clear difference between the male and female test subjects.

#### 4.2.4. Sentences with *man* (Swe.)

Finally, I will present the results from the questionnaire sentences containing Swedish *man*.

The sentences were the following:

(30) Riksdagmannen led av kraftig PMS. (Originally sentence 6)

'The member of parliament suffered from heavy premenstrual syndromes.'

(31) Visste du att Anna har blivit ombudsman? (Originally sentence 8)

'Did you know that Anna has become an ombudsman?'

(32) Vetenskapsmannen i fråga hette Annette Karlsson och bodde i Stockholm. (Originally sentence 11)

'The scientist in question was named Annette Karlsson and she lived in Stockholm.'

(33) Jag tycker att du borde anställa Lisa, hon är en väldigt duktig kameraman. (Originally sentence 14)

'I think you should hire Lisa, she is a really good camera man.'

(34) Tror du att Sara gillar sitt nya jobb som rådman? (Originally sentence 16)

'Do you think Sara likes her new job as a district court judge?'

This group of sentences is fairly interesting as it is the only one where a majority of the students rated some sentences within the positive (8-10) frame. Example (31), (33) and (34) had a majority of people rating them positively. The following table shows the ratings these sentences received from the students, split into the three groups negative (1-3), medium (4-7) and positive (8-10):

Example no.	Negative (1-3)	Medium (4-7)	Positive (8-10)
<b>30. (Orig. 6)</b>	21	11	1
<b>31. (Orig. 8)</b>	1	9	23
<b>32. (Orig. 11)</b>	16	11	6
<b>33. (Orig. 14)</b>	9	10	14
<b>34. (Orig. 16)</b>	3	13	17

**Table 5** The attitudes of the participants to sentences containing *man* (Swe.) as a generic

Now let us take a look at the results of the males and females. Example (33) was a borderline case for the men as all the frames of rating had the same amount of people within them, whereas the women were clearly in a positive (8-10) majority. Example (34) was also a bit of a borderline case for the males as the group within the medium (4-7) was the same size as the positive (8-10), but for the women a clear majority could be found within the positive frame (8-10).

## 5. Discussion

This section of the essay will discuss the results from the previous section in relation to my research questions. In order to do so in a clear manner I will split this section into three sections. The first section will deal with *he/han* (5.1) and the second section will deal with *man/man* (5.2). The third section will deal with additional observations (5.3) that do not fit under the other two sections.

### 5.1. *He* (Eng.) vs. *Han* (Swe.)

In this section, I will compare the results for the English *he* to the results for the Swedish *han* presented in sections 4.2.1. and 4.2.2. respectively. We will begin by examining and discussing the general results for the sentences containing English *he*. These sentences mainly got a majority of ratings within the negative (1-3) scale. Most of the students considered all of the sentences in this section to be unusable to them in a proper context. According to Stringer & Hopper (1998, p. 219), the generic *he* in spoken language seems to be very rare, and perhaps this accounts for written language as well these days.

The only sentence in the whole questionnaire that did not get a single rating above three was also included in this group. That sentence was example (19), repeated here for clarification:

(19) When man goes into labour he usually ends up at the hospital to give birth. (Originally sentence 18)

One may wonder why this sentence out of all the 20 sentences is the only one which had no medium or positive grading at all. The sentence is “grammatically correct” and perfectly usable as *he* and *man* are both supposed to be generic words. My hypothesis is that the students have a hard time to connect the masculine generics to childbirth which is a clearly feminine feature. However, I have no evidence of why the students interpreted this sentence within the negative spectrum so no clear statement can be made here.

Now we will consider the general results for the Swedish *han*. Firstly, none of the results from these sentences had an overly positive rating, just like the sentences with English *he*. Thus, it would seem like the students do not interpret these instances of generic *he/han* as particularly generic. However, if we look at the results of both languages, it is possible to discern more people within the medium (4-7) and positive (8-10) range for Swedish *han* than English *he*.

As we now have established the differences and similarities between the general results, I would like to consider the results based on the two sexes of the test subjects. Let us start by looking at English *he*. There was only one small difference to be found between males and females within the results. Example (17) is repeated here for clarity:

(17) If anyone can find my missing book, I will give him a big hug. (Originally sentence 13)

This sentence had, as seen in the results section, a majority of females in the negative (1-3) rating whereas the majority of the men could be found in the medium (4-7) frame. Other than this, no difference between female and male results could be found, suggesting that there is not much of a difference when it comes to the question of sex mattering for the interpretation.

Now let us consider the corresponding results within the sentences with Swedish *han*. Within the Swedish sentences there was a very similar phenomenon in relation to example (17) shown above. This is visible in the following example:

(23) Om någon vill röka måste han gå ut på balkongen. (Originally sentence 7)  
'If anyone wants to have a smoke he has to go out onto the balcony'

This sentence had the same sort of division between male and female test subjects as in the English example (17). The majority of the females rated the sentence within the negative (1-3) frame whereas the majority of the males rated the sentence within the medium (4-7) frame. This was the only sentence where a discernible difference could be found.

## 5.2. *Man (Eng.) vs. Man (Swe.)*

As both English *he* and Swedish *han* have now been discussed, it is time to move to the English *man* and Swedish *man*. In this section, I will compare the results for the English *man* to the results for the Swedish *man* presented in sections 4.2.3. and 4.2.4. respectively.

The results for these sentences were a bit more spread out and not as clear as the *he* and *han* results, but the majority of the test subjects' results were all found in either the negative (1-3) or medium (4-7) group. I wonder what would have happened if I had used male names instead of female ones for the referents in the questionnaire, as people are more likely to imagine male referents when masculine generics are used (Miller & Swift, 1977, pp. 21-23). But then we have the problem of *man* both being generic and specific. People tend to go for the specific meaning rather than the generic in cases like this (Miller & Swift, 1977) and in such a case it would be impossible to know whether the students interpreted a sentence specifically or generically.

Cooper's studies found that the most resistant use of man was the use of *-man* in compounds (1984, p. 19). This does not correspond to the results I found within the compound nouns with *-man*, as none of the sentences had a positive majority. Conversely,

research made later than Cooper's research tells us that *-man* in compound nouns is indeed changing in favour for more neutral words such as *-person* (Mills, 2008, p. 92). This could explain why the following sentence, for example, did not receive many positive ratings:

(15) The fireman was awarded a medal for risking her own life whilst saving a woman about to commit suicide. (Originally sentence 4)

Here we have an example of *fireman*, a word which nowadays usually is replaced with the term *firefighter*, as it is neutral (Cheshire, 2008, p. 8). If we then consider the other compound nouns used in the questionnaire (all rated generally negatively) such as *horseman* and *spaceman* a brief consultation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that there is no gender neutral version of them or a female counterpart. Perhaps the students either think it is weird to put a woman into a masculine job title (which is still supposed to be generic) or perhaps they just want to use a neutral title to make it sound more natural.

Now we will move on to the results for Swedish *man*. Only three of the twenty sentences included in the questionnaire had an overly positive rating by the students. These three sentences were all sentences in Swedish with *-man* used in compound nouns. Those were the following, repeated for clarity:

(31) Visste du att Anna har blivit ombudsman? (Originally sentence 8)  
'Did you know that Anna has become an ombudsman?'

(33) Jag tycker att du borde anställa Lisa, hon är en väldigt duktig kameraman. (Originally sentence 14)  
'I think you should hire Lisa, she is a really good camera man.'

(34) Tror du att Sara gillar sitt nya jobb som rådman? (Originally sentence 16)  
'Do you think Sara likes her new job as a district court judge?'

All of these sentences contain *-man* in compounds, and they are as well names of working professions. I do not have an answer as to why the students graded these three sentences positively and not the other two, however. The other two sentences were the following:

(30) Riksdagmannen led av kraftig PMS. (Originally sentence 6)  
'The member of parliament suffered from heavy premenstrual syndromes.'

(32) Vetenskapsmannen i fråga hette Annette Karlsson och bodde i Stockholm. (Originally sentence 11)



'The scientist in question was named Annette Karlsson and she lived in Stockholm.'

According to a brief look into *Svenska Akademiens Ordlista*, the only word within all the five Swedish *-man* sentences that has a feminine counterpart is *riksdagsman*, and this counterpart is called *riksdagskvinna* (Riksdagskvinna, 2006). But if one googles *kamerakvinna*, *ombudskvinna* and *vetenskapskvinna*, there are plenty of articles to be found where these words are used. *Rådskvinna*, on the contrary, does not exist at all, and that could explain why example (34) got a positive rating as there is no other alternative to the word. As for the reasons why examples (31) and (33) got a majority amongst the positive frame, my data cannot say.

As both the general results for English *man* and Swedish *man* have been discussed, it is time to consider the results based on the two sexes of the test subjects. Let us begin by examining the results for English *man*. The notable differences could be found in examples (26) and (27), repeated here:

(26) Jane is our mailman. (Originally sentence 1)

(27) Did you hear that the company spokesman got pregnant? (Originally sentence 5)

Example (26) was mainly rated positive (8-10) by the males whereas the females preferred the medium (4-7) frame, indicating that the males seem to be more inclined to use generic *man* in this context. They seem to not have a problem with a female referent used together with this generic, and their interpretation would then suggest that this is indeed generic to the majority of the men, but the women are more skeptical.

Example (27) also contained interesting results as the female majority could not see themselves using the sentence and rated it negative (1-3) whereas the male majority actually could be found in the positive (8-10) frame. This seems to correspond to the findings of Silveira who compared the results of fourteen studies within the use of masculine generics used by U.S. students. Seven of those studies reported that women tend to give less male-biased responses to the generic masculine than men, and no studies indicated the opposite (Silveira, pp. 170-171). She also found that women use the masculine generics in a lesser extent than men (Silveira, 1980, p. 177).

Finally, we are going to discuss the differences between the two sexes when it comes to the Swedish *man*. Not much of a difference could be found, as mentioned in the results

section. However, there were a few differences in respect to examples (33) and (34), repeated here:

(33) Jag tycker att du borde anställa Lisa, hon är en väldigt duktig kameraman. (Originally sentence 14)  
'I think you should hire Lisa, she is a really good camera man.'

(34) Tror du att Sara gillar sitt nya jobb som rådman? (Originally sentence 16)  
'Do you think Sara likes her new job as a district court judge?'

The male test subjects treated example (33) as a borderline case as all three groups (negative, medium and positive) had the same amount of people in them and in example (34) a similar phenomenon was found as both medium and positive groups had the same amount of male test subjects in them. The female test subjects for both these examples were interestingly in a positive majority, in contrast to what Silveira said about women being less likely to use masculine generics than men (1980, p. 177).

### 5.3. Additional observations

As the main differences and similarities between *he/han* and *man/man* have been discussed, there are still a few observations left to consider, and this is the section in which they will get examined.

Originally, I had anticipated that more males would be answering my questionnaire than they did, but as the results show, only nine of the 33 test subjects were male. This, I first thought, makes it difficult to answer as to whether there is a difference between how males and females among these students interpret the generics. However, this is not the case at all. After looking through the student lists, I came to the conclusion that only a third of Lund University's English students are male. If we take that into account, the fact that nine out of 33 participants were male actually gives us an accurate representation of the male students.

Moreover, as the age differences of the test subjects were not evenly spread out, it was not possible to find any signifying difference when it came to the age of the participants and their attitudes. The same applies to the participants who did not have Swedish as their mother tongue as there were only two of them. This is unfortunate as I believe that there could be a difference between attitudes regarding at least the age of the subjects.

Lastly, as one of my research questions deals with the questions as to whether or not the students prefer one generic over the other, it seems like they certainly prefer the use of *man*

(*Eng.*)/*man* (*Swe.*) to the use of *he/han*. This due to the results showing a significantly larger portion of the test subjects rating the sentences with *he/han* mainly within the negative scales whereas the results for *man* (*Eng.*)/*man* (*Swe.*) had more medium and positive ratings. Further studies could perhaps try to find out why this is the case, as my study could only determine there is a difference but not specify or determine why this difference is present.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study sought to find the answers to the following research questions:

- How do modern-day Swedish students of English interpret the false generics *he/han* and *man/man* in both their mother tongue and in their (presumably) second language, English? Do they accept them as generic and would they use them themselves?
- How do they feel about *he* versus *man*? Are they inclined to think of one of them as more generic than the other?
- Is there a difference in the attitude towards the generics depending on the gender of the test subject?

In order to answer these questions, I completed a questionnaire study aimed at Swedish students of English at Lund University. In this questionnaire, the students were asked to grade 20 sentences in which masculine generics in English and Swedish were used on a scale of 1 to 10. The grading was made on the basis of whether or not the students would be able to use the sentences in the right sort of context. The students also had to fill in their sex, age range and whether or not they had Swedish as their native language. As the study only examined the current students of English at Lund University there are obviously limitations. As this is just one out of many Swedish places of higher education it cannot account for the results of all Swedish students of English. Perhaps further studies could extend the research to more than one institution of higher education.

Nevertheless, my data suggests that Swedish university students of English at Lund University do not interpret the generic reference of English *he*, Swedish *han* or English *man* as particularly generic, at least not in the sense of themselves being able to use them in the context of my example sentences. However, *-man* in Swedish got a somewhat positive response from the students. The questionnaire study shows that only three out of 20 sentences could be seen as generic by the majority of the test subjects in the way of them being able to use them. All those sentences contained Swedish *-man*.

Finally, the compound nouns *-man (Eng.)/-man (Swe.)* had, according to my research, generally more positive attitudes towards them rather than the use of *he/han* as a generic pronoun. There was no way of finding out why this was the case, but the data suggests that generic *man (Eng.)/man (Swe.)* is more likely used in the right sort of context by the students than generic *he/han*. My data also indicates that there is a difference between the attitudes of men and women among my test subjects. The results show that the male test subjects were more inclined to rate the sentences positively than the female test subjects. Perhaps further studies could look into this more thoroughly.

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## Appendix 1

### Sentences used in the online questionnaire

1. "Jane is our mailman"
2. "Ansökanden måste se till att han lämnar sitt telefonnummer längst ner på formulärets sida."
3. "Den patient som får veta att han har livsmoderhalscancer blir helt förkrossad."
4. "The fireman was awarded a medal for risking her own life whilst saving a woman about to commit suicide."
5. "Did you hear that the company spokesman got pregnant?"
6. "Riksdagmannen led av kraftig PMS."
7. "Om någon vill röka måste han gå ut på balkongen." (Anonymous, 2013)
8. "Visste du att Anna har blivit ombudsman?"
9. "Man is just like any other mammal as he breastfeeds his young."
10. "Clara sure is a great horseman!"
11. "Vetenskapsmannen i fråga hette Annette Karlsson och bodde i Stockholm."
12. "Han som återfinner den försvunna flickan kommer få en stor belöning."
13. "If anyone can find my missing book, I will give him a big hug."
14. "Jag tycker att du borde anställa Lisa, hon är en väldigt duktig kameraman."
15. "När studenten blivit klar med sin tenta får han lov att gå."
16. "Tror du att Sara gillar sitt nya jobb som rådman?"
17. "If anyone needs to use the bathroom, he may use the one on the bottom floor."
18. "When man goes into labour he usually ends up at the hospital to give birth."
19. "David's wife is a spaceman."
20. "A person who suffers from menstrual pains gets severe cramps and sometimes he even gets nauseous."