Processing gender-neutral pronouns in reading: Evidence from eye movements

Föreläsare
Doktorand Hellen Vergoossen, Psykologiska institutionen.

Titel
Processing gender-neutral pronouns in reading: Evidence from eye movements

Tid

Plats
Rum 357, Frescati Hagväg 14, plan 3.

Ansvarig avdelning
Personlighets-, social- och utvecklingspsykologi.

Presentation/abstract
The gender-neutral pronoun “hen” was introduced to the Swedish Academic dictionary in 2015 after a long and heated debate. A common argument against adopting “hen” was that it takes attention from the message, and that it makes a text harder to read. Proponents of “hen” argued that “hen” can reduce stereotyping in language, and is inclusive to non-binary individuals.

Gender stereotypes can affect the way we understand and read a text. Past research found that first reading a role noun associated with a gender stereotype (e.g., secretary), and then encountering a pronoun with incongruent gender (e.g., he), slows down reading. Because secretaries are thought to be predominantly female, it delays understanding what the pronoun “he” refers back to (a process called anaphora resolution). This slowing down in reading is thought to reflect the updating of the reader’s mental model, including the stereotypical representations the reader has about secretaries.

In this seminar, I present the first results on how the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun “hen” affects anaphora resolution, and the implications this has for understanding how gender-neutral language may work as a gender-fair language strategy.