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# 38. Challenging the homogeneity assumption in language variation analysis: Findings from a study of multilingual urban spaces

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## 1. Introduction

The close tie between language and space − the idea that "in country/region/neighbor-hood/community X people speak language/variety X" − is a powerful conception in popular as well as professional discourse about language. Its influence is not confined to that of the ideal of one language−one nation, routinely refuted in most textbooks on sociolinguistics and multilingualism, but can also be detected in contemporary percep-tions of and approaches to language variation and varieties. Linguistics has been, and to a large extent still is, permeated by the conception of languages and varieties as bounded in space and tied to local, homogeneous speech communities. More generally, like classical sociological research, sociolinguistics within the quantitative paradigm has

had as its point of departure a homogeneity assumption: that groups of speakers who are sociologically similar tend to be linguistically similar (Romaine 1982: 11; Wolfram and Thomas 2002: 160). While this would at first glance appear to be a necessary step in hypothesis formulation, it tends to have the effect that not only (perceived) groups of speakers, but also (perceived) ways of speaking are commonly "homogenized" and essentialized − both by lay persons and linguists (for further discussions see, e.g., Le Page 1977, 1988; Pratt 1987; Leung, Harris and Rampton 1997; Bucholtz 2003). Many sociolinguists continue to work as if individual variation or intragroup variation is of secondary importance (cf. Rampton 1997: 330; Wolfram and Thomas 2002: 160−165; Wolfram 2007).

The language and space tie and the homogeneity assumption are coupled with the tendency among both laymen and linguists to uncritically apply dichotomous categorizations of language users such as native/non-native speakers, first/second language users and speakers/non-speakers (of language X) − implying that any individual is either a native first language user or a non-native second language user, and that any individual either speaks or does not speak language X. The default assumption is that individuals are monolingual and that, if not, they are either balanced bilinguals (i. e., two monolinguals in one) or bilinguals with one language clearly dominant (i. e., monolinguals with clear first and second languages). This monolingual bias or norm for linguistics has been pointed out by many others before us (e.g., Cook 1992; Kachru 1994; Backus 1999; Block 2003).

The tie between language and space disavows the realities of widespread and multifaceted multilingualism and the diversity of language practices involving multitudes of languages and varieties in "the same" or contiguous spaces, global interaction involved in long distance travel or various forms of mass media and computer-mediated communication, similarities in patterns of variation over non-contiguous areas, and the transnational nature of migrant languages and non-territorial minority languages, as well as the sort of individual variation in micro-groups that Dorian (1994) among others has studied. The dichotomies of nativeness fail to account for the linguistic realities of many speakers, excluding forms of language competences and practices involving, e.g., partial knowledge of languages (e.g., Dorian's [1981] semi-speakers), code-switching, or the mere use of a limited number of indexical words or phrases from another language for various purposes usually studied with regard to the concept of identity (e.g., Childs and Mallinson 2006).

All these, often implicit (and therefore potentially even more damaging), assumptions have attracted increasing criticism for at least three decades. The criticism has in particular been rooted in experiences from multilingual practices and contexts, something which to some extent might explain why it has not reached the linguistic society at large. But even in countries like Sweden, where a monolingual ideology has been dominant for a long time, things are changing. Today, the complex and diverse linguistic realities of, in particular, young people of the modern multilingual city and the variation in the ways languages are acquired and used forcefully challenge the language−space tie, the homogeneity assumption and the dichotomous notions connected with nativeness. This complexity has also been the challenge of the Gothenburg-Lund-Stockholm project, *Språk och språkbruk bland ungdomar i flerspråkiga storstadsmiljöer* (SUF) 'Language and language use among adolescents in multilingual urban settings'. The aim of the project, which was funded by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, is to describe and analyze language as it is used in such settings.

This article will briefly summarize some results and implications from five of the sub-studies within the SUF project. It will describe where a journey starting with the preconceived notion of a new variety of Swedish called Rinkeby Swedish (hereafter RS) has taken members of this project. In this article, we will argue that while varieties such as RS (here also used to refer to its equivalents in Gothenburg and Malmö) certainly have a valid existence as social constructions (among lay people as well as linguists), they cannot be adequately described as varieties in the traditional sense of a set of linguistic features connected to a specific speech community (cf. Hudson 1996). Language and language use (as well as speakers) in contemporary multilingual settings in Sweden (and possibly elsewhere) exhibit a variation that we can only hope to be able to account for by avoiding essentializing categorizations of speakers and their ways of speaking, and by using an analysis integrating various linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic approaches.

## 2. Multilingual urban spaces in Sweden

After its long history as a country which *sent* migrants to other parts of the world, Sweden has become a country which *receives* immigrants (cf. Statistics Sweden, <http://www.scb.se>; Boyd 2001). Since the mid 1960s relatively large numbers of labor market migrants, refugees and their families and adopted children have come to the country. Sweden having no history of major colonies, its foreign-born population is unusually diverse. Furthermore, the country of origin with the highest number of new arrivals changes every few years in line with changing conditions in different parts of the world and shifting immigration policies in Sweden. Currently, national groups from outside of Europe dominate, particularly persons born in Iraq, but during the 1990s for example, refugees from former Yugoslavia dominated the new arrivals.

Fluctuations of this kind in immigration to Sweden have resulted in a very diverse population. In addition to historical minorities, ten percent of the total population and twenty to thirty percent of the population of the three largest cities have a "foreign background", i. e., are either born abroad or are children of two parents born abroad. The proportion of young people of school age with a foreign background (using this definition) has recently been estimated to be fourteen percent in Sweden as a whole (SOU 2008: 153).

New arrivals in Sweden tend to live in the three largest cities of Sweden, although many refugees are at least initially directed to live in other municipalities. In the cities, they typically settle in publicly owned apartments in neighborhoods on the outskirts which were built in the 1960s or early 1970s. The populations of these suburbs include not only new arrivals, but also earlier ones who have stayed in the area, as well as working or lower class native-born persons and their families. The neighborhoods are therefore quite diverse, typically lacking a single dominant national or ethnic origin group; in other words, there are few, if any, "little Helsinkis", "Bosnian neighborhoods" or the like in Sweden. The number of heritage languages in neighborhood schools is often claimed to be over 50 and may sometimes be as many as 100.

The majority of the young people studied in the SUF project grew up at least partly in such settings. Primary and lower secondary public education is typically organized by

neighborhood, so the schools the young people have attended have also been diverse in this respect. When our project was carried out, however, the young people studied were attending upper secondary school, which in some cases implied that they had left their neighborhoods to attend school with peers from other parts of the city. All schools included not only a diversity of pupils of foreign background, but also pupils with a monolingual Swedish background. In all three cities, attending upper secondary school involved a broadening of the young people's contacts with pupils from neighborhoods and backgrounds other than their own. There were certainly strong similarities between the spaces (neighborhoods and schools) the students had grown up in and the spaces (i. e., upper secondary schools) they now moved in, even though the range of movement for almost all students had increased significantly.

## 3. Some results from the SUF project in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö

The overarching aim of the SUF project has been to describe, analyze and compare language and language use among young people from multilingual urban settings in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, with a focus on the majority language, Swedish. The sub-studies encompass analyses of phonetics and phonology, syntax, lexicogrammar and pragmatics as well as of perceptions of varieties, identity development and ethnographies of the negotiation of identity and power in the multilingual classroom (see Källström and Lindberg to appear). The project staff consisted of two post-doctoral and five senior researchers and several graduate students.

The participants in the project have been 222 young people from eight classes at eight upper secondary schools. All classes but one followed the social science program, a broad academic program which provides basic qualification for certain programs or courses at university; this was chosen because it was offered at all the selected schools and had a good balance of male and female students. The aim was to include schools with differing proportions of pupils with foreign background; in the selected classes the proportion varies between 33 and 100 percent. Almost three-fifths (59 percent) of all participants were either themselves born abroad or both their parents were born abroad. About thirty percent have no foreign background, while the remaining eleven percent have one parent born abroad.

The project team gathered data from the young people in a wide variety of settings, both in and outside of school. The participants were first interviewed by a researcher about their backgrounds and language use, then recordings (the bulk of them audio) were made of semi-directed and non-directed group discussions, individual presentations to the class, and in a number of informal circumstances. Many informal recordings were self-recordings, where the participants borrowed equipment and recorded themselves in various everyday situations. The individual graduate students also made more directed recordings, such as interviews, focus group discussions, film-retellings and picture series descriptions, in order to elicit speech of a specific type for their particular research questions. Samples of the young people's writing, in the form of the essay component of the national examination in Swedish, have also been collected and analyzed.

Four of the sub-studies described below focus on different linguistic features that had been observed to vary in the speech of young people in Sweden today. The features differ with regard to their association with, on the one hand, alleged new varieties such as RS, and/or, on the other hand, learner language. As will be shown, they represent all four possible combinations of these associations. The fifth study investigates young people's perceptions of contemporary language variation, reflecting the diversity of social meanings that are attributed to different ways of speaking.

## 3.1. Phonetic/phonological variation

In addressing the question of potentially conventionalized phonetic features of the language of young people in multilingual urban spaces in Sweden, Petra Bodén (formerly Hansson) carried out a preliminary series of listener tests (Hansson and Svensson 2004; Bodén and Grosse 2006). The aim was to see if young people had similar ideas about which of a number of selected speech samples could be labeled as examples of RS. The speech samples were extracted from the total of about 300 hours of recordings in the SUF project. Each listener group only listened to samples from their own city.

It turned out that young people in all three cities chose rather consistently between "RS" and "not RS" for a number of the samples, although there was also some disagreement between listeners. (As we will see in section 3.5, another sub-study indicates that different listeners appear to apply these labels to rather different entities.) Interestingly, different stimuli from the same speaker could be labeled differently, and the "RS" label was not applied solely to the speech of young people with a foreign background or of those who were active multilinguals, nor was the "not RS" label applied only to monolingual young people with no foreign background. An interesting question is what phonetic characteristics led most listeners to apply the RS label.

In her main study, Bodén carried out phonetic analyses of the speech samples identified by a majority of listeners as RS. Bodén found both segmental and prosodic features characteristic of the identified samples. A segmental feature found to vary in all three cities was the use of an affricate or a fricative in loan words such as *checka* 'check out', *chilla* 'chill out' or names like *Charles* and *Jesus*. In standard Swedish phonology, these affricates are typically replaced by simple fricatives, but in the speech samples studied the young people sometimes used an affricate. Bodén could find no "foreign accent" explanation for this replacement, as it occurred even among young people without affricates in their heritage language.

Prosodic features that varied in the material for the listener test included the typical Swedish stress pattern in phrases. In Swedish, the basic pattern is that the last content word in a phrase receives the greatest prominence; occasionally, however, Bodén found examples of phrases among young people from all three cities, where a non-content word receives such prominence. In Malmö, this more consistent tendency for stress on the last item in a phrase or sentence was coupled with a flat or slightly rising $F_0$, where the pattern for standard Swedish is a lowering of $F_0$ through the sentence. This variation in the basic $F_0$ pattern was, however, not found in the other two cities. Bodén has furthermore found many examples where young people use rising $F_0$ within the stressed syllable of a word to signal prominence, a feature which is unmarked in languages of the world, but which is *not* used in most dialects of Swedish, restricted as it is by its

distinctive word accents. This final prosodic feature was found in recordings in all three cities. These prosodic features help to contribute to the impression of a distinctive "staccato" rhythm that the speech of some young people gives to listeners.

Bodén concludes that one segmental and several prosodic features of the language of young people in these multilingual urban spaces can be found in all three cities; others are specific to one city only. Thus, the speech recorded in multilingual urban spaces shows both characteristics shared with other such spaces in the same country and characteristics of the local environment, e.g., diphthongs in Malmö. Many listeners describe the prosody as "bumpy" or "staccato". Interestingly, similar terms have been used about the prosody of Danish and German spoken in multilingual contexts in Copenhagen (Quist 2000) and Berlin (Kern 2007), respectively, as well as in Nuuk-Danish (Jacobsen 2000, 2001). These similarities should be studied with care, in order to avoid hasty conclusions about prosodic features common to a certain type of contact variety and about their possible sources, but the similarity in characterization is nonetheless interesting and worth investigating further.

## 3.2. Instances of grammaticalization: *sån* 'such', *å sånt* 'and such' and *helt* 'totally'

Lena Ekberg has carried out research within the SUF project on particular uses of three lexical items that appear to be characteristic of the speech of some of the young people in Malmö. One is the pronoun *sån*, a spoken form of the written form *sådan* 'such (a)', which is beginning to acquire the functions of a determiner, specifically an indefinite article. (Note that the names below and in other sub-studies of the project are pseudonyms).

(1)  Gorda:  *nej de e sån journalfilm # sån färgfilm # ja # såna fem kakor*
               'No, it's such news film, such color movie, yes, such five cakes'
                                                                    (Ekberg 2007: 52)

The second is the tag expression *å sånt* 'and such' (cf. English *and stuff*), an extremely frequent discourse particle in the Malmö material, which also seems to be broadening functionally to be not only a modifier, but also a terminal marker of reported speech or a general boundary marker.

(2)  Aurora:  *han ba kan du inte komma hit å sånt*
               'He just [said] can't you come here and stuff.'          (Ekberg 2007: 68)

The third is the adverb *helt* 'totally', which is beginning to be used as an emphasizer also with unbounded adjectives, such as *benig* 'boney' and *ful* 'ugly'.

(3)  Jing:  *han var helt svettig*
               'He was totally sweaty.'                                (Ekberg 2007: 71)

The material Ekberg bases her (primarily cognitive semantic) analysis on consists of recordings of two groups of girls who were close friends, from the project sample in Malmö (see Svensson 2009: 90−94). The groups attend different schools in the city and take two different programs of study. The four girls in one group (Cgr1) have a variety of foreign backgrounds, are actively bilingual and are (based on information from interviews and various other contacts with them) ambitious, good students; the three girls in the other (Egr2) do not have foreign background, are monolingual and are not as ambitious or interested in succeeding in school as the first group. The student body of both classes includes students with foreign background to about the same degree (60 to 65 percent). All four of the students in the first group were included in Bodén's listener test (see section 3.3.1); two were judged by listeners to be "speakers of RS", the third not, and the fourth ended up in between. Stimuli from two of the girls in the second group were also included in the listener test: both samples were considered "not RS".

From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, what is interesting about Ekberg's results is that there is no indication of differing usage of the three lexical variables between the girls in the two groups. The monolingual, less ambitious girls in the second group, who were judged not to be speakers of RS, use the forms studied to the same degree as the multilingual, ambitious girls (at least two of whom were judged to be speakers of RS) of the first group. The variation does not therefore seem to be something particular to girls with a foreign background or to a particular multiethnic style or variety, as some girls were judged to be speakers of RS and others not.

Since all the speakers in this sub-study were girls attending schools in multilingual environments in Malmö, and the material the study was based on was very informal speech, further research is needed in order to find out to what extent this usage is found among other young speakers in other places, for example, among boys and also in more monolingual environments in general (as Ekberg believes might be the case), as well as in more formal speech. Ekberg suggests that at least the second variable, *å sånt*, is probably a current, local Malmö phenomenon. Comparisons with data from other studies in other parts of Sweden suggest that frequent use of this tag could be specific either to Malmö, to more recent times, or to both (Ekberg 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to note that we have here three variables whose use is partly local, perhaps more common in casual speech and among girls, and possibly linked to multilingual environments in Malmö but not specifically to multilingual speakers.

## 3.3. Variation in reflexive/personal pronoun usage

Sofia Tingsell's work (2007) with a sub-sample of young people from the full project sample, as well as with a small sample of adults, has been on the use of reflexive versus personal pronouns. Tingsell has based her findings primarily on directed speech and writing tasks, which generate 35 to 40 examples per person. Variation in choice of pronouns has existed in the language for some time and is described to some extent in the literature of (native) Swedish linguistics (Teleman, Hellberg and Andersson 1999), but Tingsell sees signs that the variation she has recorded involves relatively new contexts, at least as compared with those described by Teleman and coauthors. Since it is a pattern which is difficult for many learners, a connection with learner language must be considered. In contrast to the XSV word order studied by Ganuza (2008, see section 3.4), we

believe the choice of pronoun to have a relatively low salience, not being heavily stigmatized.

In Swedish, the basic pattern is that reflexive pronouns are used when possessive or object pro-forms are coreferential with the subject within the same domain, usually the same clause, as in (4):

(4) *Anna gick på bio med sin* (REFL) *bror.*
 'Anna went to the movies with her (i. e., Anna's) brother.'

When the pro-form is not coreferential with the subject in the same domain, a personal pronoun is used, as in (5):

(5) *Anna gick på bio med hennes* (PERS POSS) *bror.*
 'Anna went to the movies with her (i. e., someone else's) brother.'

In Tingsell's material, a certain amount of variation or deviation from the norm as described above occurred. In some of these cases (examples [6] and [7]), personal pronouns were used instead of reflexive pronouns; in other contexts (example [8]), it was the other way around.

(6) Interviewer: *… vem tror du att hon e sur på?*
 '… who do you think she's mad at?'
 B: *på hennes* (PERS POSS) *mor*
 'her mother' (Tingsell 2007: 102)

(7) *å så kollade hon i hennes + i hennes väska då*
 'and then she checked in her (PERS POSS) + in her (PERS POSS) bag'
 (Tingsell 2007: 100)

(8) *Hon ger gubben*$_i$ *sin*$_i$ *plånbok och går hem.*
 'She gives the guy his (REFL) wallet and goes home.'
 (Tingsell 2007: 96; written data)

Since the choice between reflexive and personal pronouns is a problem for learners of Swedish, Tingsell tested the hypothesis that the variation would be related to the age at which a young person began to acquire Swedish. It turned out, however, that the pattern of variation was more complicated than that. The number of deviations from the norm was relatively low overall, but variation occurred in the speech of a sizeable proportion of (at least by heritage) monolingual young people as well as over half of the multilingual young people (Tingsell 2007: 152). (Tingsell's characterizations of participants as "monolingual" or "multilingual" are based on analyses of several variables in the database.) At the same time, 49 percent of the monolingual and 40 percent of the multilingual young people had no such variation at all. Only a small number of young people produced more than a few examples of deviant pronoun use. Although the proportion of deviations was significantly higher among multilingual young people there was no such clear effect for the variable "age of onset", operationalized as the age the young person reported having begun to learn Swedish. In an earlier paper (Fraurud and Boyd 2006), we

discuss some of the problems with operationalizing "age of onset" as well as with the concept of nativeness as applied to young people such as those in this study.

Despite the connections of this kind of variation with multilingualism and learner errors, this variable would seem not to be simply a feature of interlanguage. Rather, the variation proved more significantly linked to the young people's multilingualism and social networks at the time of the study. There was for example a difference in the amount of variation between young people who reported actively using their languages-other-than-Swedish (at the time of the study) and those that did not; the former deviated in the use to a slightly higher degree than the latter. An important factor, according to Tingsell, seems to be the kind of micro-environment the individual young people can be found in as well as their choice of social network. Her findings indicate that multilingual young people in more "monolingual" schools (i. e., schools with fewer multilingual students) vary less than their counterparts in more "multilingual" schools. There were also interesting differences in the micro-environments of the monolingual young people. For them, variation seemed to be unaffected by the proportion of young people in their school with foreign background. However, the by heritage monolingual young people who have multilingual friends and who speak languages-other-than-Swedish with their friends vary more (i. e., follow the norm less closely) than monolingual young people who do not. This would seem to indicate that going to the same school as other speakers who vary their speech in this way isn't sufficient; the young person also needs to socialize with multilingual young people in order to have this resource at hand. It also suggests a complex connection between this variable and multilingualism.

## 3.4. Variation in subject-verb word order

Natalia Ganuza's work within the project has concerned a highly stigmatized syntactic variable that is common in at least lower stages of Swedish as a second language, but which also is commonly associated with the Swedish of multilingual young people more generally: the XSV word order or "non-inversion" (Ganuza 2008).

Swedish is a typical V2 language, which requires that if a sentence begins with a constituent other than the subject (e.g., an adverbial or a fronted object), the order of subject and first auxiliary or main verb is inverted, here exemplified by the participant Bushra:

(7)  SVX order:  *han började springa du vet.*
                       'he started running you know.'                    (Ganuza, pers. comm.)

(8)  XVS order:  *så började han kuta.*
                       'then he started running.' (lit.: 'then started he running')
                                                                                   (Ganuza, pers. comm.)

What are found in typical "learner Swedish" and variably in the Swedish of young people in multilingual environments are constructions of the type XSV, as in this example from the same participant:

(9)  XSV order:  *å sen dom kutar ut*
                       'and then they run out'                              (Ganuza, pers. comm.)

Ganuza analyzed both spoken and written data from one larger sub-sample comprising 126 participants, whose data include a film re-telling, a written essay and a grammaticality judgment test, and a smaller sub-sample comprising 20 participants, who contributed several additional data types for analysis, including self-recordings, group discussions and presentations in class.

Contrary to her expectations, clear cases of XSV constructions such as the one in (9) occur in only about four percent of possible environments (i. e., clauses with constituents other than the subject in initial position) in her large sample. In the smaller sample, which included more recordings from spontaneous speech, the proportion increased, but only to ten percent.

The SV inversion rule (or V2 rule) constitutes a problem for learners of Swedish as a second language. It is a very frequent construction, which is acquired early in L1 Swedish (Håkansson 1998). Håkansson (2003), using Pienemann's processability hierarchy, considers mastery of the V2 rule as an important milestone in acquisition of Swedish as a second language. That this variable originates in learner Swedish seems unquestionable, a conclusion supported by the fact that similar variable word orders are characteristic of the V2 languages Norwegian and Danish of young speakers in multilingual settings in Oslo and Køge (outside Copenhagen) (Aasheim 1997; Quist 2000).

It is interesting to note that XSV word order, which is used extremely frequently in literary versions or stylizations of these varieties − cf. Källström's (2003, 2005) studies within the SUF project − and in various attempts to re-create it in other forms of art and entertainment, occurs to such a limited extent in our corpus. Even the most consistent users of XSV word order in Ganuza's small sample use it less often than the standard XVS order. However, when discussing RS, some of the young people in the Malmö sample exemplified the variety using a sentence with this distinctive word order (as well as a distinctive prosody). In other words, despite its low frequency in our corpus, the feature has high salience and is strongly associated with these perceived varieties.

The rate of inversion or non-inversion turns out to covary with a number of constraints, both internal and external. The internal constraints include the length and type of the fronted constituent. For example, the adverbials *sen* 'then/after that' and *då* 'then/ at that time', frequent connectors in narratives, tend to favor non-inversion more than other adverbials − at least for some speakers in some situations, but non-inversion also occurs with (the less frequent) fronted subclauses and prepositional phrases.

In addition to the internal factors, there are a large number of external constraints that appear to be in operation. Although XSV word order, like pronoun choice, would seem to have its origin in interlanguage, there turned out to be no clear relationship between this variable and age at which the young people began to acquire or learn Swedish ("age of onset"). The more frequent users of XSV did not differ significantly from those who never used it in terms of the age at which they report having begun to learn Swedish; further, some young people with a monolingual Swedish background did use the feature. Looking at the results from a geographical perspective, the proportion of inversion did not differ significantly between the three cities. If one looks at the results on an individual level, however, it turns out that a few young people in the Stockholm sample have relatively many XSV sentences compared to the rest of the project sample as a whole. Still, the similarities in the pattern of variation among the three cities are greater than the differences, although there are also indications that link this variation particularly to Stockholm. It was difficult to isolate a category of young people who would be likely to be frequent users of XSV.

Even more interesting for our purposes here are a number of important factors that seem to have to do with the immediate context of the speech situation. Ganuza has shown that speakers who otherwise tend to follow the V2 rule consistently can use XSV if they are talking in a group with one or more speakers who more frequently use this word order or when the conversation is about certain topics, such as in group discussions about a literary text partly using features associated with RS. The number of non-inversions also tends to increase when the style is very involved or the speaker holds the floor for a longer period, e.g., with a narrative. Male speakers use non-inversions slightly more often than female speakers, but the difference is not significant; both sexes use non-inversion and one of the female speakers, Bushra, is among those with the highest number of non-inversions. Ganuza finds those speakers with a strong identification with their neighborhood and the language use of their communities tend to non-invert somewhat more often.

These observations might lead a traditional variationist to consider XSV to be a feature of the vernacular of these young people, quite simply, when speakers pay minimal attention to how they speak (Labov 1972). But to Ganuza and to us, the pattern of variation in word order seems instead to be a resource actively used by young people to create a certain style of speech, which expresses solidarity, strong identification with one's own community and one's multilingual network. But even here, there is not a simple relationship between use of the variable and a particular meaning. The meaning attached to it also seems to vary with the particular situation in which the XSV variable is used (cf. Auer 2005). Like the non-standard pronouns studied by Tingsell, XSV word order seems to be used sparingly in very specific contexts by young people in all three cities (indeed, in similar contexts, even in other Scandinavian countries). Unlike Tingsell's pronouns, this feature is, as noted, strongly stigmatized.

## 3.5. Perceptions of variation within the linguistic space of young people from Stockholm

As may already be evident from the brief reports of some results from four of the SUF sub-studies, much of the linguistic variation found in contemporary multilingual contexts cannot be accounted for simply in terms of new varieties or language acquisition. Still, reified entities such as RS play an important role in people's thinking and in debates about language and education. This is the focus of another sub-study within the SUF project. In an on-going series of listener experiments, Ellen Bijvoet and Kari Fraurud investigate lay peoples' perceptions and constructions of young Stockholmers' ways of speaking (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2008, to appear). Their main research question is how people of different linguistic and social backgrounds conceptualize the linguistic space of (young) Stockholm, e.g., how language users with different sociolinguistic experiences divide this linguistic space, as reflected both in their labeling and description of different ways of speaking and in their attitudes towards speakers. An important point of departure for this series of studies was the observation − from interviews and informal discussions as well as from media discourse − that labels such as RS have very different extensions and connotations for different language users (including linguists). This observation is the reason for the exploratory nature of the experiments and motivated a choice

of open questions about labeling and descriptions of the speech stimuli (rather than multiple choice or *yes/no*- questions).

The results reported here come from a pilot study conducted within the SUF project, and involve some of the participants in the Stockholm part of the project as speakers or listeners. Seven speech stimuli of about 30 seconds were judged by several listener groups with different backgrounds, two of which are focused on here: (i) sixteen participants in the larger project, adolescents attending a suburban senior high school with a large proportion of bilingual students (BIL); and (ii) 24 monolingual first-year language students at Stockholm University of a median age of 28 (MON). Subjects listened to the speech samples and were asked to judge the speakers using semantic differential scales and to label and describe the speech samples and make guesses about the speakers' background (place of residence in Stockholm, length of residence in Sweden and mother tongue).

The open question about how the listeners label the various ways of speaking produced a wide diversity of labels and characterizations, the well-known label RS being only one of numerous suggestions. What interests us here is the way this label is applied very differently by different listeners, i. e., to how many and which of the speech samples it was applied. The speech samples that most frequently attracted the RS label come from two girls in lively discussions with their friends. But, rather than only considering these conceived "typical cases" of RS, it is instructive to compare listeners' labeling of two of the speakers for whom listeners *diverge* most: Bobby and Ashur, who were very dissimilar from each other in background and lifestyle or attitude. Bobby came to Sweden at the age of 15. He is an ambitious learner of "proper" Swedish with a negative attitude towards RS, which for him represents "bad" language mainly because it includes slang words, so he tries to avoid using it. Ashur is born in Sweden and was pointed out by classmates as a proficient speaker of RS. But in this particular speech sample he gives a presentation in class demonstrating his high proficiency in Swedish along with certain non-standard features mainly at the phonetic level.

Despite the differences between these two speech samples, both are labeled RS by some listeners. One listener considers Bobby's speech to be RS "proper" (in contrast to other speakers' label of RS "light"), while another remarks that his use of RS is "unconscious". That Ashur's way of speaking is not always seen as typical RS is acknowledged by modifications such as in "intellectual" RS, but it is nevertheless still RS for listeners who use such modifications. Not too surprisingly, the tendency for such broader constructions of RS is stronger among the listeners in the MON group, with less experience of multilingual contexts. Listeners in the BIL group tend to use the label RS more restrictively. First, they more often distinguish RS from "broken", "learner", "new arrival" or "immigrant" Swedish, here represented by Bobby − thus discriminating between (involuntary) learner language and the (voluntary) use of linguistic features associated with multilingual youth. Secondly, Ashur's speech is more often characterized as ordinary or good Swedish, e.g., "Standard Swedish; 'normal' pronunciation etc.", "Stockholmian; he tries to speak clear Swedish without using slang words" (in sharp contrast to one of the MON listeners' characterization of Ashur's speech as "immigrant Swedish; strong accent, large vocabulary but [it is] used 'incorrectly' according to the Swedish standard model").

Similar lines of differences between the two listener groups in dividing up examples drawn from the linguistic space of (young) Stockholm can be seen in the data from other

parts of the study as well. But there was also divergence within each listener group that might be attributed to individual preferences and attitudes towards language use, as well as different degrees of mobility in the city.

The results suggest the existence of many diverse constructions of different ways of speaking associated with different combinations of geographical, social, age related and ethnic spaces – and sometimes with particular speech practices within these spaces. The label RS is for example alternatively tied to multilingual suburbs, immigrants, learners, youth, informality, intimacy and humor, or a combination of some of these elements. When it comes to the guesses about where in Stockholm the speakers live, however, listeners tended to show a higher degree of agreement, although somewhat modified by their different local experiences. The results of this pilot study thus offer an empirical illustration both of the notion that varieties/languages are social constructions that – albeit to different degrees – may take different shapes for different language users as well as linguists, and also illustrate our contention in the introduction to this article that lay people (and linguists?) are inclined to identify a speech sample with a place, such as in our case the well-known multilingual suburb of Rinkeby.


## 4. Discussion

Sociolinguistics and dialectology strive to describe and analyze variation in language within and across various social settings or spaces. Traditionally, sociolinguistics has focused on urban settings and vertical variation and change, dialectology on rural settings and horizontal variation and change. Both strands of research tend to concentrate their studies on monolingual speakers of (varieties of) the majority language of the country or region under study, commonly excluding speakers considered non-native from the sample. (In his classic study of language variation in New York City, Labov [1966: 174–175, 187–188] excluded nearly half of his original random sample of Lower East Side residents on the grounds that they were not clearly native speakers of English). Multilingualism, both as a social and psychological phenomenon, has traditionally been treated separately – primarily in studies of language maintenance and shift (e.g., Fishman, Cooper and Ma 1971), language contact and change (e.g., Thomason 2001) and second language acquisition (SLA, e.g., Doughty and Long 2003).

The homogeneity assumption and the related language–space tie and dichotomies of nativeness criticized in the introduction to this article are deeply rooted, even within fields of linguistics devoted to the study of heterogeneity. Despite the existence of both early and more recent critical work within these and neighboring fields, we believe that the influence of classical studies such as those of Labov (1966) and Fishman, Cooper and Ma (1971) is still strong in much contemporary research – including at least the early stages of the SUF project reported here. Speakers in multilingual urban spaces have often either been excluded from samples of informants as non-native or non-authentic speakers, or studied solely in ascribed roles such as language shifters, language learners, or speakers of alleged new varieties of majority languages. These roles tend to be contrasted with native speakers as norms or controls. (Conversely, in studies of multilingualism, individuals assumed to be monolingual native speakers tend to be either excluded or used as a control group.)

The importance of handling such essentializing categorizations of speakers with care was emphasized in an earlier sub-study in the SUF project, based on analyses of the background interviews (Fraurud and Boyd 2006). This study clearly showed that a large majority of the 222 participants did not fit neatly into dichotomous categorizations such as native/non-native speakers or first/second language users. Most of these young people are in a broad sense multilingual in terms of both their background and their language proficiency and language use, but few of them would, according to prevailing definitions, qualify as native speakers of Swedish nor of their heritage language, nor would they be considered typical non-native speakers or learners. This observation is in itself an important challenge to paradigms presupposing comparison between learners, shifters or bilinguals and a native control group. In the SUF project, the results of our studies led us to begin to see the variables associated with nativeness as parameters that did not necessarily have the expected effects on the language variation studied. It turned out that for several of the studies within the project it did not make sense to conceive of a selected group of "native" participants as a "control group". Neither was it possible to isolate a number of homogeneous groups within a "non-native" segment of our sample.

The different sub-studies of the SUF project each contribute a piece of insight into the overall picture of language and language use among young people in contemporary Swedish urban spaces. In addition, an evaluation of both the results of these studies and the journeys that the individual researchers and students have made during their research can also be instructive for an assessment of what theoretical and methodological frameworks suggested by earlier studies of language and language use have had to offer in relation to these multilingual contexts.

When the SUF project was initiated in 1999−2000, previous studies of the language and language use of young people similar to those in our project had either taken an psycholinguistic/SLA perspective, focusing on advanced or near-native second language use of Swedish (e.g., Stroud 1988; Hyltenstam 1992; Ekberg 1997), or a descriptive one, focusing on alleged new "foreign sounding" varieties of Swedish not necessarily spoken only by young people with immigrant background (e.g., Kotsinas 1988, 2000). Both of these perspectives were also present at the outset of SUF, but most of the project members felt a need after a time to integrate several approaches, in some cases also including folk linguistic or ethnographic ones.

Four of the sub-studies of contemporary language variation briefly described above focused on particular features at different linguistic levels, examining how these variable features are located in time and space. Even these brief glimpses may provide at least an impression of the complexity of the variation found.

As mentioned, the features studied represent four different possible combinations of associations with alleged new varieties and/or learner language. Both the word-order (section 3.4) and the phonetic features studied (section 3.1) are − in contrast to the other features − highly stigmatized and indexical of "foreign-sounding Swedish", often labeled RS. Variation in word order, as well as in pronoun choice (section 3.3), is also found in second language acquisition, which is not the case with the other features studied. The grammaticalized lexical items (section 3.2) cannot be connected with either perceived new varieties or learner language.

As regards variation in space, some linguistic features turned out to be confined to "micro" or local spaces, others appear at a national level (although with possible differences in frequencies in different cities), and some might even be perceived as having

transnational character (although we do not yet know enough to be able to distinguish structurally motivated similarities from contact phenomena possibly conveyed by media).

As regards variation related to parameters associated with nativeness, none of the features could be ascribed solely to language acquisition, and no features were found exclusively among young people with multilingual backgrounds, or exclusively in multilingual settings − although all these factors influenced the frequencies of use of some features.

It is furthermore important to note that even linguistic features with a similar (if not identical) distribution in our sample may have widely differing meaning potentials and are likely to be more or less available as resources for speakers and listeners due to, among other things, different degrees of salience. For all the linguistic features studied there was also a considerable intra-individual variation, affected by a number of sociopragmatic factors in ways that we have only begun to understand.

Importantly, the linguistic variation found among the young people in the SUF project cannot be reduced to manifestations of near-nativeness, nor could it adequately be accounted for in terms of homogeneous and delimited speech communities or varieties. The latter conclusion is further emphasized by the fifth sub-study described above, delineating the widely diverging constructions of speech communities and language varieties among language users. For example, while some listeners distinguish RS from learner language, others perceive all foreign-sounding Swedish as one and the same thing, RS. In fact, for a speaker to be judged to speak RS, just one manifestation of a single salient stigmatized feature (e.g., use of certain slang words, "staccato" prosody, non-inversion), *or* some other "foreign-sounding" feature, *or* even just careless speech may suffice.

To the extent that, in working with our data, we need to speak in terms of language varieties (or styles or practices), we believe that these notions can best be approached as social constructions conceptualized as "pools" of linguistic resources (cf. Eckert 2000), which are employed to different extents by different speakers in different situations for different purposes and that are accessible at different levels of awareness.

This said about the need to acknowledge heterogeneity among speakers and in their language, we want to add a word about the need also to recognize a pragmatic and political aspect of language discourses. While criticizing the essentialization of speech communities and language varieties, Bucholtz (2003) suggests that a total rejection of essentialism is not always desirable. Despite her criticism, Bucholtz suggests that *strategic* essentialism can function as an important intellectual and social tool in certain contexts and at certain points in time, in particular "when the group under study is seen by the dominant groups as illegitimate or trivial, or when a stigmatized group forms an oppositional identity to counter such negative ideologies" (Bucholtz 2003: 400−401). The Swedish linguist Ulla-Britt Kotsinas' "defense" − which she has advanced since the 1980s − of RS as a youth language rather than as some popular opinion would have it, just "bad" Swedish, is perhaps an illustration of this dilemma. Given the potential intellectual and social usefulness of strategic essentialism, many researchers studying new ways of speaking may feel the need to use various descriptive labels such as "multiethnolect" (Quist 2000), "multiethnic youth language" (Fraurud and Bijvoet 2004) or "suburban slang" (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2006). But, again, it is important to remember that, when using the tool of strategic essentialism, "researchers must remain mindful of the assumptions it brings along with it concerning 'real' language and 'authentic' speakers"

(Bucholtz 2003: 403, cf. also Auer 2005; Jaspers 2007; Wolfram 2007: 16). We now be-
lieve we have good reason to be very restrictive and aware if and when using strategic
essentialism in talking about the language of young people in these environments. Nei-
ther the groups of speakers nor the variation fulfill the criteria required by the traditional
notions of speech community and language variety. To continue to talk about a category
of young people (however defined) using a particular variety (however described) tends
to reify their ways of speaking, hiding important complexity.

## 5. Conclusions

We would like to conclude by making three specific practical points about the sampling
and methods used in the SUF project, which have helped us approach the complexity
of our object of study.

First, the sample of participants is *all-inclusive;* in our case a cluster sample consisting
of all (willing) students in the selected school classes. We did not select or exclude indi-
viduals according to (often dubious and always difficult) distinctions such as monolin-
gual/multilingual and/or first/second language speakers of Swedish; neither did the no-
tion of a control group make sense in our study. It should however be noted that our
participants do not constitute a random sample of young people in the cities as a whole,
nor in the selected schools or their neighborhoods. The choice of schools and of the
program of study were made in order to increase comparability between cities, not to
provide the possibility for broad generalizations about the language of various categories
of young people in Sweden.

Second, our database includes a *broad range of settings* for recording the young peo-
ple and a number of different genres, both spoken and written. No particular style of
speech is assumed beforehand to be more authentic or genuine than another (cf.
Bucholtz 2003, Eckert 2003). Furthermore, we expected there to be interesting and im-
portant style shifting in the young people's language in different situations, and we were
also curious as to the relationship between the use of the perceived spoken varieties such
as RS and contemporary literary versions or stylizations of it (see Källström 2003, 2005).
Our assumption that important differences exist between the spoken languages of these
urban settings and the literary versions or stylizations was borne out.

Third, a *multi-methodological* approach was employed, motivated both by the com-
plexity of our object of study and the exploratory character of much of our research.
Some of us used rather traditional sociolinguistic and sociophonetic methods, others
followed more closely methods used within second language studies, or analyzed tran-
scriptions with the help of functional grammar or cognitive semantic approaches; one
of the graduate students carried out an ethnographic study, etc. Both quantitative and
qualitative methods have been used, sometimes by the same researcher. At least some of
this variety in approach may reflect the fact that we had somewhat different ideas about
what the object of study was when we started out. Importantly, we believe that all the
project members have benefited from working in a context where several different ap-
proaches were represented.

We hope to have shown that the complexity of the linguistic practices among young
people in contemporary multilingual urban spaces invites a number of different research
approaches, all possibly contributing to but not providing the whole picture. We are

reminded of the saying "as the question, so the answer". If you approach contemporary urban spaces as a sociolinguist looking for variation along class lines, you will find social stratification (among the informants not excluded from your sample for being "non-natives"). If you are interested in on-going language change as reflected in contemporary language variation (possibly more vivid in multilingual contexts), you are likely to find some tendencies toward that. If you approach it as a sociologist of language, you see "second generation immigrants" carrying out language shift. If you approach it as an SLA researcher, you see second language learners at different levels of proficiency. If you are looking for young people's language or slang, you'll find evidence for that as well. We believe that all of these aspects, and perhaps more, are notable in the language of these young people. To put a single label on these linguistic practices, however, essentializes both the language and the speakers, and simplifies their complex linguistic realities. A multitude of theoretical and methodological approaches will be necessary to do justice to the linguistic experiences of these young people we would like to argue.

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# 39. Variety complexes in contact: A study on Uruguayan and Brazilian Fronterizo

## 1. Introduction: Language contact in pluridimensional dialectology

Pluridimensional dialectology (explained in more detail in Lameli in this handbook) means not only the methodological fusion of traditional dialectology and sociolinguistic principles. It additionally involves aspects and techniques of language contact analysis. This expansion seems particularly necessary in the New World, where the linguistic landscape has, since the arrival of the Europeans, been shaped by manifold contacts between cultures and languages. Unlike classic studies on linguistic contact (like Weinreich 1970), which tend to reduce the contact configuration to the mutual influence of two languages considered as homogeneous systems, we propose analyzing the contact configuration as an approximation of two or more variety complexes, each of them an architecture of more than one more-or-less homogenous system (see Coșeriu 1967). The following survey is intended to demonstrate the utility of this complex approach in the case of Portuguese varieties spoken on both sides of the border separating Uruguay and Brazil.