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Contemporary language practices : discourse analysis and attitudes towards adolescents' new speech style in multiethnic areas in Oslo, Norway

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Contemporary language practices : discourse analysis and attitudes towards adolescents' new speech style in multiethnic areas in Oslo, Norway



Place and time of the Ph.-D project

- Center of Linguistics in Sorbonne (CeLiSo), University of Paris-Sorbonne, France
- Affiliation with the Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan (MultiLing), University of Oslo, Norway
- Started in November - Defended on 26th November 2016



Summary of the dissertation

This thesis provides a sociolinguistic analysis of Norwegian contemporary language practices among 41 adolescents all raised in multilingual and multicultural environments in the Eastern parts of Oslo. Based on a series of examples from the UPUS/Oslo-project (Utviklingsprosesser i urbane språkmiljø – Linguistic Development in Urban Environments), this work discusses social and individual motivations, which lead speakers to use innovative lexical (including non-European loan words) and syntactic features in Norwegian. I argue that heterogeneous features do not result from a lack of language skills but rather are a part of a speech style that speakers activate depending on discursive settings. I also take into account the social and historical dimensions of Oslo in order to contextualize the language practices and to demonstrate how speakers during the life stage of adolescence make themselves heard on the local and global society. I suggest that this new speech style is not restricted to Oslo and adolescents speakers, but rather is a common resource for whoever wants to show solidarity toward the contemporary urban reality.

Keywords

Urban sociolinguistics ; multiethnolect ; contemporary urban vernacular ; heterogeneous speech style ; language attitudes ; contact language Scandinavia ; youth language Norway ; contemporary Norwegian practices.

Committee members

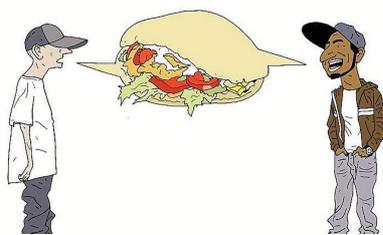
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 Paul KERSWILL – University of York
 Lars Anders KULBRANDSTAD – Høyskolen i Hedmark
 Bente Ailin SVENDSEN – University of Oslo
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Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of 5 chapters the first of which presents current research status about contemporary language practices and their ideologies (enregimentation). The second chapter positions the study in Oslo historically and geographically. The third chapter elaborates on the demographics of Oslo and the social and cultural practices among adolescents in multilingual urban spaces in Oslo. The fourth presents analyses of Norwegian slang studies. The fifth chapter finally presents results from the Norwegian UPUS/Oslo-project

Aims of the dissertation

1 => Examine the linguistic practices of adolescents and young adults people who live in linguistically and culturally heterogeneous urban spaces in Oslo.



The main focus is lexical, analysing slang and loan words used by the adolescents during the UPUS-project, particularly with regard to slang and loan words originating from non-European languages.

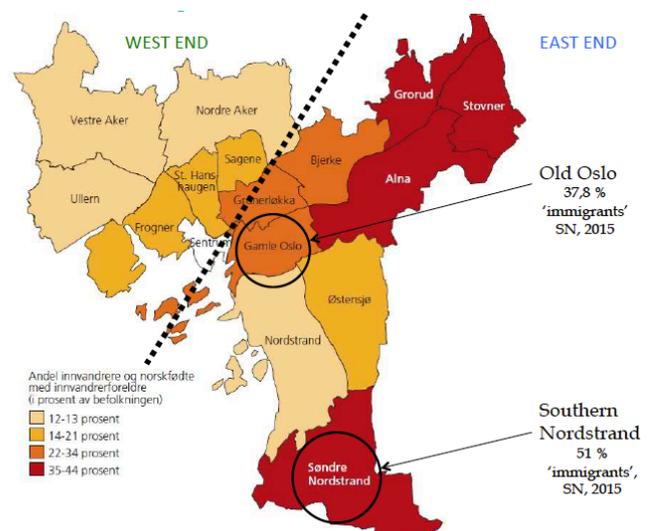
The thesis, moreover, addresses syntactical aspects of their talk.

The slang and loan words used by the adolescents in the UPUS/Oslo-project are then compared with other Norwegian slang studies diachronically and synchronically.

2 => Discuss the impact of multilingual and multiethnic criteria on the way speakers both from majority and minorities groups (en)register their language practices both at an individual and a collective scale.

The common denominator for the activation of heterogeneous features is not based on ethnic factors, but on the degree of local place identity and the feeling of belonging to a local place. In my case study, the local belonging comes from a social stratification of Oslo which consolidated itself in the 19th century between the working class in the Eastern parts and the upper class in the Western parts of the city. With later immigration, population settlements have become more complex but people still feel proud to come from the Eastern parts because they estimate they can learn from each other and from the fact people have different cultural backgrounds.

Hip hop culture and ideologies also offer a good understanding of why some respondents are more proud to come from the Eastern parts than to come from Norway (national perspective). They consider that the rules of the street carry positive values such as: to be tough, have street credibility, have experience of the real life, to be authentic and respectable.



3 => From the French research perspective, make Norwegian data available for researchers who do not speak Norwegian.

Data and methodology

For the purposes of my linguistic analysis, I mostly use examples from the UPUS/Oslo corpus (Linguistic development in urban environments) which has as its goal to study linguistic practices among adolescents in multilingual and multicultural communities of practice in Oslo. Even if I did not collect the data myself, I was given the opportunity by my Norwegian mentors to freely exploit their very rich database, and to collaborate with them during two foreign research study periods.

The corpus consists of video-taped interviews and peer conversational data from adolescents born and raised in the Eastern parts of Oslo. The two recording modes allow us to see behavioral differences among adolescents.

The 41 adolescents have various backgrounds, but the majority consider Norwegian to be their mother tongue, either as their sole mother tongue or in addition to another language (see Svendsen 2009) which means that they are all native speakers of Norwegian. The data were collected between 2006 and 2008. During this period, adolescents were between 13 and 19.



Theoretical frame

My first intuition has always been that what is called « Kebab Norwegian » in public contexts can be an active choice by speakers, and that it doesn't result from a lack of competence in Norwegian.

In my data it is obvious that this way of speaking is a group language which is just one of the languages in the repertoire of its speakers. That is why I look at the data from the perspective of the « Third wave » in order to understand what is going on today.

The stylistic perspective, what Eckert (2012) calls the « Third wave », offers the opportunity to consider the **linguistic fact as total**. This means that it is crucial to take into account not only the linguistic features (for example the non-European loan words) but also the general context in which the feature occurs, and its social meanings. As Silverstein (2003) or Agha (2007) argue, language is neither ideologically neutral for speakers nor for the audience. That's why it is important to take into consideration what « Kebab Norwegian » means for every speaker in its language community but also for people from the outside.

Concerning the labellisation, there are a lot of discussions to determine linguistically the nature of the phenomenon (variety, speech style, new dialect, etc). However, three features are always put forward :

Contemporary

- 21st century
- Post- modern development

Urban*

- Social stratified places
- Super diverse places
- Contact mixed culture & language

Vernacular

- « A linguistic something » (Quist, 2008)
- Neutral terminology without normative value
- Parallel developp of national language

* Because only few studies have been conducted in non-urban environments, we can also use the labellisation :

Heterogeneous

- Different types of linguistic features
- Depending on speakers, situation, etc.

Speech

- Active
- Not fix
- Evolving during the lifespan/from one situation to another, etc.

Style

- Resulting from a choice
- Consciousness
- Can involve social, aesthetic, ideological dimensions