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What's in a name? Language ideology and social differentiation in a Swedish print-mediated debate[1]

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This paper investigates a recent print-mediated discussion about linguistic phenomena that are perceived by many commentators to be 'deviant' from 'standard Swedish.' The aim of the paper is to illustrate how this language debate is built on two closely entwined discursive processes: a struggle to define the name, meaning, and value of a specific linguistic phenomenon; and the indexical processes through which such a phenomenon is bound up with a multifaceted image of its purported speakers, in which gender is imbricated in age and ethnicity. Essentially, the argument is that the metalinguistic pronouncements in this debate are ultimately the outer manifestation of deeper social concerns about what it means to be a 'non-Swedish' young man.

KEYWORDS: Age, gender, ethnicity, identity, language ideology, media discourse

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a growing body of sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that in a late-modern time of dislocations and diasporic communities, there are many examples of linguistic phenomena that do not easily fit with conventional forms of sociolinguistic categorization. To mention one well-known example, Rampton (1995) has convincingly illustrated how structuralist notions of language, dialect or code-switching are badly suited to capturing the complexity of meanings encoded in the seemingly 'hybrid' linguistic practices of a group of adolescents in London. What is perhaps most remarkable is that the interest in these apparently new linguistic phenomena has transcended the realm of academic inquiry, giving rise to intense media firestorms in several socio-political contexts. And these are debates that have become themselves the object of current sociolinguistic investigation (see e.g. Androutsopoulos 2009; Jonsson and Milani in press; Milani 2007; Stroud 2004).

Taking Sweden as a case in point, Stroud (2004) examines a range of public discourses dealing with what he defines as a 'potential, imagined,

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"pan-immigrant" variety of Swedish' (2004: 197) called *rinkebysvenska* (lit. 'Rinkeby Swedish'). Stroud's concern is rather less about offering a typological or sociolinguistic account of this variety in terms of its lexical, morphological, and syntactic features or contexts of usage (however, see Fraurud and Bijvoet 2004; Kotsinas 1998). Instead, focusing on pronouncements about *rinkebysvenska* in a range of media texts, the author shows how public metalinguistic discourses function as proxy for broader processes of social differentiation defining the boundaries between what counts as Swedish vs. ethnic Other in an increasingly heterogeneous Swedish society (Stroud 2004: 197).

In line with this scholarly work, the present paper aims to provide insights into more recent print-mediated discussions about linguistic practices in Sweden that are perceived by many commentators to be 'deviant' from 'standard Swedish.' For this purpose, I will analyze a debate that unfolded in April – May 2006 in one of the most widely read quality Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*. The debate opened on 19th April 2006 with an op-ed article in the art and culture section written by Ebba Witt-Brattström – a well-known academic in the Swedish media landscape, not simply because she holds a professorship in comparative literature at Södertörn University College outside Stockholm, but also because she is one of the key figures in Swedish feminism.

In her opinion piece, Witt-Brattström was reiterating in written form a statement made a few weeks earlier during a panel discussion at the yearly congress of the Swedish Liberal Party (*Folkpartiet Liberalerna*). During that discussion, which was also broadcast on a national television channel (SVT 24), Witt-Brattström voiced strong criticism of the (then) newly-taken decision of the Social Democratic government to increase financial support for mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education[2] in a few Swedish municipalities. By strengthening mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education *instead of* Swedish language instruction, she argued, 'the Government is signalling to our new Swedes that it will suffice if they learn just about enough *blattesvenska* [lit. immigrant Swedish] for them to be able to put up a stall and sell bananas in *Rosengård*'[3] (reported in Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 19 April 2006). This statement caused an immediate reaction from the editors of the magazine *Gringo* who published an advertisement in the free daily *Metro* satirically encouraging people to 'ring Ebba' because 'Witt-Brattström and company are looking for language fascists. You! Yes, you. It's you we need, provided that you want to preserve Sweden Swedish in the most Aryan connotation of the term [. . .]' (Gringoredaktionen, *Metro* 3 April 2006).

Clearly, by granting Witt-Brattström the opportunity to publish an op-ed article, and subsequently allowing other social actors to articulate their positions in the matter, the editorial staff of the culture section of *Dagens Nyheter* opened up a new discursive space for an ongoing exchange of opinions. Whilst it is perhaps unsurprising that other media also became involved to some extent, *Dagens Nyheter* remained the *key site* in which the debate took place. Accordingly, if viewed from the perspective of a Braudelian *courte durée* or 'short time'

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(Blommaert 1999a: 3; Braudel 1958: 45), the contention that unfolded in the columns of *Dagens Nyheter* is worth investigating *on its own*, not least as an example of how a national daily succeeds in constructing a nearly self-contained 'conversation' on a particular issue. However, if measured against those 'slow processes that are beyond the reach of individuals' (Blommaert 1999a: 3), this public discussion cannot be taken as an isolated phenomenon, but rather as another manifestation of those broader societal anxieties about language, migration and ethnic diversity in Sweden already investigated by Stroud (2004), and now surfacing under new guises and different conditions. The novelty does not simply lie in the use of the label *blattesvenska* instead of *rinkebysvenska*, but also pertains to the fact that Witt-Brattström went on to characterize this linguistic phenomenon as sexist.

With hindsight, it is fairly uncontroversial to argue that the issue of sexism, together with the concern about enhancing mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education, were the topics in Witt-Brattström's opening article that were picked up as *relevant* by subsequent contributors, thus generating two thematic strands within the debate. Whilst it is undeniable that these two strands are interconnected, the focus of the present article will centre rather less on the arguments advanced about mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education (however, see Milani 2007) than on other aspects of the debate that have remained unexplored thus far:

1. the struggle to define the *name*, *meaning*, and *value* of a specific linguistic phenomenon; and
2. the indexical processes through which such a phenomenon is bound up with a multifaceted image of its purported speakers, in which *gender* is imbricated in age and ethnicity.

In other words, the paper will seek to tease out the ideological underpinnings of linguistic labelling at the same time as it will illustrate how these metalinguistic pronouncements are ultimately the outer manifestation of deeper social concerns about what it means to be a *'non-Swedish' young man*. Before delving into detailed textual analysis of relevant excerpts, however, I will now move on to present a framework that will allow me to theorize the links between representations of language(s) and discursive constructions of gender and other forms of social categorization.

INTERSECTIONS: GENDER AND OTHER SOCIAL CATEGORIES FROM A LANGUAGE IDEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Cameron (2003, 2005, 2007), language and gender research has recently undergone a major theoretical re-appraisal in two directions: (1) a move from dominance and difference towards diversity; and (2) a thrust to go beyond *reality* – how men and women talk – and engage with the domain of *representation* – how individuals are talked and written *about*, or even visually

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portrayed, as gendered subjects. As Cameron (2005) underscores, this paradigm shift has less to do with a will to dismiss reality as an inadequate object of inquiry than to provide a more nuanced picture of how reality and representation are closely wedded to one another.

In practice, an approach that takes into account the relationships between reality and representation has entailed a progressive abandoning of a view of gender as a pre-existing social category that may explain differences in linguistic performances (e.g. women use more hedges than men; men do report talk whilst women do rapport talk; etc.). Instead, priority is given to investigating how individuals *do* gender in *different* ways by creatively deploying linguistic means which will allow them to orient themselves to available images or models of masculinity and femininity in a specific socio-cultural context. Yet, Butler (1993) reminds us that creativity should not be conflated with free choice. Or to put it another way, aligning oneself with different 'gender types,' notwithstanding one's biological sex, may certainly give rise to a variety of co-existing and often conflicting gender identities for one and the same individual. But, doing gender – like any other form of identity performance for that matter – is always constrained within a 'rigid regulatory frame' (Butler 1999: 43). Hence, if we want to grasp fully the intricate relationships between gender and language, we cannot limit ourselves to studying how individuals index or perform gender through language. Rather, it is the *shared representations* of what counts as masculine or feminine in a particular socio-cultural context that are themselves important objects of empirical exploration. This means that we need to unravel the discursive formations (cf. Foucault 1978) – together with their rules and constraints of production – that enable certain images of gender (but not others) to come into being, become available, and thereby get reproduced and normalized or negotiated and contested.

Having said that, an important question that constantly needs asking both in terms of reality and representation is: 'Yes, but is it gender?' (Swann 2002), not least if researchers endorse a poststructuralist stance that treats identities as fluid and multisided constructs accomplished in discourse. According to a poststructuralist perspective,

> identities are constructed at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation and social status, whereby each aspect of identity *redefines and modifies* all others. (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 15, emphasis added)

What is striking is that scholars grappling with this Gordian knot of identity work strongly disagree on how to theorize the links between gender and other forms of social categorization. Whilst Baker proposes that 'the interaction between gender and sexuality is special' (2008: 8), McElhinny argues that to 'suggest or assume that there is a closer relationship between sexuality and gender than between either of these and any other aspect of social identity [. . .] [is] a question which itself deserves empirical investigation' (2003: 26). This leads her to suggest that,

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> The ways in which gender is imbricated in other axes of identity, the ways in which certain notions of gender can reinforce or challenge other notions about class and ethnicity, is part of what we must begin to investigate more closely. (McElhinny 2003: 26)

In my view, however, a commitment to unravelling how gender is inflected by other forms of social differentiation cannot exclude the fact that language itself may be the *object of representation*, the topic of text, talk and images (cf. Cameron 2003; Johnson and Ensslin 2007b). This is insofar as discourses *about* linguistic phenomena are not epiphenomenal to processes of social classification and differentiation; quite the reverse, they are themselves key discursive mechanisms in the production, reproduction or contestation of social (stereo)types, as the vast literature on language ideologies has illustrated during the last twenty years or so.

In a nutshell, a language ideological approach argues that 'What we think about language will be related to how we perceive ourselves and eventually how others perceive us' (Lanza and Woldemarian 2009: 189). This belief system is *inter alia* the precipitate of discourses that create indexical links between: (1) perceived or presumed features, genres, styles or varieties of language; and (2) broader images of their purported speakers in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, aesthetics, morality and so forth (see e.g. Woolard 1998). From a language ideological perspective then, we cannot ignore the unpacking of those very processes through which linguistic phenomena are invested with names and values in discourse, and become over time *culturally scripted* in conventional ways, such as, say, code X is believed to be an icon of 'masculinity,' 'heterosexuality,' 'sexism,' 'immigrantness,' or the sum of all these.

Although studies of language ideologies have employed a range of very diverse theoretical and methodological tools, I follow other scholars (see Androutsopoulos 2009; Blackledge 2005; Horner 2007; Johnson and Ensslin 2007b; Nakamura 2008; Stroud 2004) in emphasizing the heuristic potential of Irvine and Gal's (2000) model, which is built upon the notions of *iconization*, *fractal recursivity* and *erasure.* On the one hand, iconization describes how linguistic phenomena are portrayed as if they flowed 'naturally' from a social group's biological or cultural essence. This is realized through 'the attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection [. . .] that may be only historical, contingent, or conventional' (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). Through iconization, not only are different individuals *essentialized* as a more or less homogenous social group on the basis of allegedly shared linguistic features, but an apparently 'natural' opposition is also created between that social group and other groups that are not perceived to give evidence of the same (linguistic) characteristics. Fractal recursivity, on the other hand, captures the fact that the dichotomy constructed on linguistic grounds through iconization is simultaneously salient on different coexisting and interrelated *semiotic tiers* (Milani 2008) – gender, ethnicity, race, social class, morality, aesthetics. In this way, fractal recursivity

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creates a chain of *entwined* binary oppositions – man vs. woman, Swede vs. immigrant, Rinkeby Swedish vs. standard Swedish – in which the poles of each dyad are not mutually equal in terms of power and value (cf. Baker 2008: 12). Finally, erasure refers to the processes in which ideology simplifies the complexity of sociolinguistic reality by obscuring or effacing its inherent diversity, so that 'any facts or behaviour inconsistent with the previous two processes [i.e. iconization and fractal recursivity] [are] ignored or explained away' (Johnson and Ensslin 2007b: 232).

Overall, a language ideological approach that takes into account the semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity and erasure provides us with a fine-grained discourse analytical apparatus that allows us to tease out how social boundaries and inequalities are enacted through an *ideological matrix* where representations of language intersect with images of age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, etc. What remains to be demonstrated is how such boundaries and intersections may become conventionalized and naturalized, or, conversely, are turned into battlegrounds of negotiation and contestation. As Agha points out,

> cultural value is not a static property of things or people but a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices, including discursive practices, which imbue cultural forms with recognizable sign-values and bring these values into circulation along identifiable trajectories in social space. (Agha 2003: 232)

Accordingly, a print-mediated language debate can offer us a useful vantage point on an ongoing discursive struggle for, and circulation of, cultural values at a particular time in a given society.

Before proceeding further, however, it is necessary to make a few observations about the choice of the texts on which the following analysis will be based. Whilst the present paper aims to account for the dissonance of viewpoints voiced by the main 'ideological brokers' (Johnson 2005: 4) that publicly intervened on the issue of sexism, a large portion of the textual deconstruction provided in the following sections is based on a few extracts taken from Witt-Brattström's interventions. In this regard, one could raise a common critique advanced against qualitative research methodologies, namely the researcher's bias in relation to the choice of the texts to be analyzed. Directly targeting Critical Discourse Analysis, Widdowson (1995, 1998) has argued that an arbitrary selection of samples of texts is strategic to presenting 'findings' that buttress the researcher's preconceptions on a specific issue. To this type of critique, language ideology scholars would respond that all research is ideologically laden. Or, as Irvine and Gal suggestively put it, 'there is no "view from nowhere," no gaze that is not positioned' (2000: 36). Therefore, it will be clear throughout the paper that I disagree with Witt-Brattström's arguments. It will also be obvious that their deconstruction is itself a political exercise making this paper a token of academic, albeit belated, intervention in the debate, and this is, according to Blommaert, 'nothing to shy from' (1999b: 436). That said, the preference accorded to Witt-Brattström's texts does not stem purely from my own ideological premises. On

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the contrary, this choice has been mainly dictated by the central role played by Witt-Brattström in opening and *upholding* the Swedish debate, coupled with the insight that her arguments are key to understanding how this debate ties in with other discussions in the Swedish media dealing with the (re)production of the cultural images of the *sexist 'non-Swedish' male*.

THE POLITICS OF NAMING: *BLATTESVENSKA* VS. *MILJONSVENSKA*

Blommaert (1999a) and Heller (2002) propose that texts can be compared to geological formations, in the sense that they embody a multilayered historicity consisting of elements from the 'here and now' (Heller 2002: 212) conglomerated with deposits from more enduring processes. As already alluded to in the introduction, this multiplicity of discursive histories is clearly present in Witt-Brattström's opening article. This is insofar as she was not just criticizing the government proposal of enhancing financial support to mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education; nor was she only reacting to what she felt was a personal attack from the editors of the magazine *Gringo*; but she was also taking a stance within a more durable discussion about languages in Sweden. However, what is most significant from a language ideological perspective is to try to understand what pronouncements about language(s) reveal about their speakers, whether real, perceived or presumed. Therefore, in what follows, I will begin by teasing out what Witt-Brattström means by the term *blattesvenska*, and to which individuals this linguistic phenomenon is said to pertain. For this purpose, it is helpful to start with Witt-Brattström's most controversial statement that set the debate in motion (see Extract 1 below).

Extract 1

> the [Swedish] Government is signalling to our new Swedes that it will suffice if they learn just about enough *blattesvenska* [lit. immigrant Swedish] for them to be able to put up a stall and sell bananas in *Rosengård.* In other words, I am criticizing the Government for taking a racist attitude by not investing in consolidated Swedish language instruction (but in more home language instruction instead). This measure may be interpreted as not wanting new Swedes to be able to compete with ethnically Swedish young people in an increasingly tough labour market.
>
> (Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 19 April 2006)

The use of the label *blattesvenska* instead of, say, the more popular *rinkebysvenska* (see Stroud 2004) is highly significant. In fact, the word is a compound that derives from *blatte*, a colloquial word for 'immigrant,' and *svenska* (Swedish [language]). It is important to mention that the translation of the word *blatte* as 'immigrant' fails to render the complexity of its referential and social meanings. According to *Svenska Språknämnden* (the Swedish Language Council), the word is attested in written form as a derogatory synonym of *invandrare* (immigrant) or *utlänning* (foreigner) from 1986 (cf. Jonsson 2007: 10). However, Lacatus (2008) explains that *blatte* does not simply index ethnicity

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in the sense of anyone who is (perceived as) non-Swedish, but is a fluid concept encoding the link between *particular* ethnicities, social class, and cultural background. Furthermore, Lacatus (2008) insists that the derogatory loading is not inherent in *blatte* but depends on who uses it, in what context and for what purpose.

Reasoning along similar lines, one could argue that the negative value attached to the label *blattesvenska* cannot be simply inferred from the connotations of the lexeme *blatte* per se. What imbues *blattesvenska* with negative value in the example above is the limited social mobility that this linguistic phenomenon is said to entail for its speakers. In fact, *blattesvenska* is portrayed as a form of interlanguage – a developing, not fully-fledged linguistic code – which affords its speakers limited communicative potential and thus precludes career opportunities (cf. Milani 2007). One should also observe how in Extract 1 *blattesvenska* is linked to a particular segment of the Swedish population, which is grouped together under the expression 'our new Swedes' (*våra nya svenskar*).

As critical discourse analysts and linguistic anthropologists have amply demonstrated, nomination strategies are important means, through which social inclusion and exclusion are performed through language (cf. Blommaert 1999a, 1999b; Wodak et al. 1999). Admittedly, 'new Swedes' (*nya svenskar*) has lately become a politically-correct substitute for the more contentious and more negatively-laden term 'immigrants' (*invandrare*). However, the example above illustrates how it is often unclear whether 'new Swedes' refers to: (1) those who have migrated to Sweden from another country and have become naturalized; or (2) all those who are *perceived* as the 'Other' on ethno-linguistic grounds, irrespective of their actual place of birth or citizenship (see Brune 2002; Hertzberg 2003; Jonsson 2007 for a similar line of argument about the ambiguity of the meaning of the term 'immigrant' in the Swedish context). Since Witt-Brattström's starting point is a critique of mother-tongue instruction/bilingual education, it is unlikely that in Extract 1 the referent of the expression 'new Swedes' is restricted to those who have actually moved to Sweden. Rather, it comprises all young people who, according to Swedish educational policies (*Grundskoleförordning*), have a language other than Swedish as their 'mother tongue' (*modersmål*) and 'daily means of interaction' (*dagligt umgängesspråk*), and are therefore granted the right to mother-tongue instruction.

In addition, the presence of the possessive 'our' (*våra*) is not irrelevant. In a sense, the use of this deictic could be understood as a way of enhancing the 'liberal credentials' (Blackledge 2005: 98) in Witt-Brattström's arguments. This is because the meaning of 'our' could be inclusive here, invoking a 'public' (Gal and Woolard 2001) – Swedish society – of which 'new Swedes' are *imagined* (cf. Anderson 1991) as being a part, together with the author and the reader of the article. Conversely, a more resistant reader could interpret the deictic as patronizing in a context where the commercial activity of selling bananas may also evoke cultural associations of race and colonialism (Rickard Jonsson,

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personal communication; see also Stroud 2004: 206). Either way, the adjective 'new' overtly signifies an element of ethnic differentiation from the other category 'ethnically Swedish young people.'

On the whole, in the extract above Witt-Brattström builds up an interesting, albeit highly controversial, 'chain of arguments' (Blackledge 2005: i) associating particular forms of educational provision with *blattesvenska* and 'our new Swedes.' It is in this respect that Irvine and Gal's (2000) notions of iconization and erasure offer us useful conceptual tools with which to tease out the ideological underpinnings of this connection. To begin with, Witt-Brattström's argument rests on a complex set of assumptions, of which the most central is that proficiency in the Swedish language is a correlate of ethnic background (see Androutsopoulos 2009 for a similar example in the German context). Put simply, the argument runs as follows: if you are a 'new Swede' – whatever this may mean – it is believed that you do not have advanced Swedish language skills before schooling. This view, in which non-nativeness is envisaged as directly linked to ethnic Otherness, is further complicated by the assumption that instruction in languages other than Swedish, coupled with too little focus on the Swedish language, would lead 'new Swedes' to *learn* 'non-standard' language varieties. Taken together, these assumptions are instrumental in iconizing *blattesvenska* as if it were the collective linguistic outcome of the interplay between non-nativeness, ethnic Otherness, and a specific educational programme. Inherent in this form of misrecognition is the *erasure* of the complexity and diversity of the processes that underlie multilingualism and second-language learning. Moreover, the label 'new Swedes' itself is strategic for iconization to work powerfully in this context. Whilst the lack of proficiency in Swedish might be true of a particular group of migrants, the semantic ambiguity of the expression 'new Swedes' allows Witt-Brattström to extend this purported linguistic deficiency to encompass those who, despite being born and raised in Sweden, are nonetheless perceived as not 'ethnically Swedish.' And these are speakers who, regardless of their ethnicity, may have advanced Swedish language skills.

Quite a different picture emerges in a later section of Witt-Brattström's article (see Extract 2 below).

Extract 2

> The truth is that there cannot be a '*blattesvenska*' that is shared by Sweden's 12.2 percent immigrants. Most of them were born in Finland and other large groups come from Serbia, Montenegro, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iran and Norway. For the majority of these, it can hardly feel natural to speak Gringo's '*miljondialekt*' [Million-Programme dialect].
>
> (Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 19 April 2006)

The use of the word 'immigrants' instead of 'new Swedes,' together with a rather accurate statistical figure (see Statistiska Centralbyrån 2006), suggests that Witt-Brattström is now referring only to those who have actually migrated to Sweden. What is most relevant, however, is that *blattesvenska* is invested with a different

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meaning here. Whilst in Extract 1 it was envisaged as a linguistic by-product that potentially characterizes 'new Swedes' who undergo a particular type of educational provision, in Extract 2 it is argued that *blattesvenska* is not 'shared' by all 'immigrants.' One should note in particular the way in which the indefinite article 'a' (*en*) does important ideological work in this context. By arguing that there cannot be such thing as *a blattesvenska* common to 'immigrants,' Witt-Brattström is defying the ontological status of this linguistic phenomenon as a sociolinguistic variety in its own right – a *miljondialekt* (lit. 'Million dialect'). Whether conscious or not, this shift of meaning can be interpreted as a linguistic trace of a move from a general critique against the Swedish government towards a textual blow (cf. Bakhtin 1984: 195) directly aimed at the editorial team of the magazine *Gringo*. At this juncture, however, it becomes increasingly more difficult to understand Witt-Brattström's arguments without, at the same time, presenting the notion of *miljonsvenska* (lit. 'Million Swedish') or *miljondialekt*, as spelled out by the editors of *Gringo*.

Extract 3

> We chose *miljonsvenska* because a dialect is more geographically-bound than anything else. It's not only spoken in Rinkeby nor indeed only by 'immigrants.' Over the years, the people who've been living in the rows of concrete houses have developed a dynamic culture running the gamut of art, literature, music and film. [. . .] We use *miljonsvenska* because it is our language – what we have been brought up and like to express ourselves with, but only a few years ago we were obliged to wash it away from our lips in order to have a place. We don't want to impose it on anyone, we do not hold it up as an ideal that everyone should aim towards. What's important to us is that *miljonsvenska* gains a respectable status so that those who wish to can use it both in speech and writing just like any other dialect, preferably without getting funny looks. [. . .] *Miljonsvenska* is the perfect example of how something beautiful can come into being when different people from every corner of the Earth meet and create things together.
>
> (Gringoredaktionen, *Dagens Nyheter* 2 May 2006)

In order to appreciate fully the meaning of the label *miljonsvenska*, it should be clarified that *miljon* (lit. 'million') alludes to a social and architectural project which took place in Sweden in the mid-1960s – the so-called *Miljonprogrammet* (lit. 'Million Programme'). Pressed by the needs of a growing population, the Social Democratic government of the time set out to construct one million dwellings within a period of ten years (1965 – 1974), with the aim of providing good housing conditions at reasonable prices. Notably, rising immigration rates, together with particular housing allocation policies and practices, led to an increasingly high concentration of migrants living in the high-rise buildings of the Million Programme.

In the light of this contextual background, it is possible to understand how, through the label *miljonvenska*, the editors of *Gringo* are trying to uncouple a set of linguistic practices from an actual *space*, the Stockholm neighbourhood of Rinkeby (cf. Stroud 2004), and, instead, discursively construct a sense of *place*

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(cf. Feld and Basso 1996). In other words, they are seeking to imbue a larger section of the urban landscape 'with [. . .] social, cultural, epistemic, and affective attributes' (Blommaert 2005: 222). Such meaning-making enterprise is realized through the creation of an iconic link between a linguistic phenomenon and specific living conditions. As is suggestively presented at the end of the extract, *miljonsvenska* is the linguistic epitome or *icon* that mirrors the multiethnic and multicultural encounters in the suburbs. In particular, the strong emphasis on a shared experience not only contributes to creating a collective sense of belonging to the blocks of flats of the Million Programme, but is also strategic for imagining *miljonsvenska* as a '*lect*' spoken by all those who have been brought up in these suburbs. Crucially, the dissociation of a set of linguistic practices from a specific locality, together with a strong focus on a sense of collective experience, causes a collapse of social class and ethnicity in *miljonsvenska*. In this way, the editors of *Gringo* can deflate the ethnic markedness (cf. Jaspers 2008) typically attached to the practices which are the object of this media debate – in their words, this linguistic variety is not purely spoken by 'immigrants.' Notwithstanding this problematization of the relationship between language and ethnicity in *miljonsvenska*, it should be emphasized that the extremely multifaceted and, at times, problematic social reality in the suburbs is *erased* in this representation. As a corollary to this, the cross-fertilization of languages and cultures in these urban areas assumes quasi-mythical tones. This is a point that was challenged by Witt-Brattström in a later article of the debate (see Extract 4 below).

Extract 4

> But a '*miljonsvenska*' [consisting of] a hundred immigrant languages [that] melt together into one wholly comprehensible dialect does not exist, cannot exist, and never will exist. A dialect has an agreed vocabulary and standardized usage for each area of life. A dialect is spoken and understood equally by people of all ages, from three-year-olds to hundred-year-olds. What is sometimes spoken by youths in the immigrant-heavy suburbs of Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm are different variants of a multiethnic lads' slang, which will pass its best-before date as soon as a new generation of male teenagers (girls are in the minority) emerges with its own local synonyms.
>
> (Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 13 May 2006)

This conceptualization of what counts as a 'lect' clearly differs from *Gringo*'s viewpoint on the matter. According to Witt-Brattström, a dialect, in order to qualify as such, requires a standardized language usage which covers all social domains and is comprehensible across different age groups of speakers. Undoubtedly, such a definition is highly controversial from a sociolinguistic point of view, and it lies beyond the scope of this article to counter it in detail. Suffice it to say, however, that Witt-Brattström employs various discursive strategies through which she seeks to *inauthenticate* and *delegitimize* (Bucholtz 2003; Coupland 2003) *Gringo*'s demand for recognition of a language variety spoken in the suburbs. First, the statement of fact ('does not exist'), twice repeated

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with different markers of high epistemic modality (cf. Fairclough 2003: 167ff) ('cannot' and 'never will'), forcefully conveys the author's standpoint as if it were an unquestionable truth, the word of gospel (cf. Kiesling 1997: 76). Second, the use of the term 'slang,' together with a representation of its ephemeral life-cycle, belittles the value of the linguistic practices it refers to. Third, the qualifiers 'multiethnic' and 'lads' allow Witt-Brattström to oppose *Gringo*'s argument that this linguistic forms characterizes everyone in the suburbs of the Million Programme.

If compared to one another, Extracts 3 and 4 are interesting instances of two very different ways in which modernist understandings of language can be mobilized in order to grapple with the complexity of late-modern linguistic practices. On the one hand, the proponents of *miljonsvenska* attempt to extend the boundaries of what counts as a *lect* in such a way as to enable them to subsume under such a notion forms of linguistic creativity that exceed ethnic boundaries. In contrast, Witt-Brattström espouses a more rigid and conservative conception of a (dia)lect which allows her to dismiss *blattesvenska* altogether as a linguistic variety in its own right.

To conclude, these examples illustrate how the struggle for the names *blattesvenska* vs. *miljonsvenska* is not a terminological triviality, but is a dispute about the construct of language itself. That said, Cameron (2003) reminds us that pronouncements about language belong to 'a "double discourse" in which language is simultaneously both itself and a symbolic substitute for something else' (2003: 448–49), such that concerns about 'proper' language are ultimately refractions of a deeper need or desire to impose order on other social issues. It is such *projections* that I will investigate more closely in the following section.

UNTYING PROBLEMATIC LINKS: *BLATTESVENSKA* AND 'NON-SWEDISH' YOUNG MEN

As already sketched in the introduction, one of the two main issues that fostered the debate under investigation in this paper is the argument that *blattesvenska* is a sexist linguistic phenomenon. This argument was first advanced in Witt-Brattström's inaugural article (*Dagens Nyheter* 19 April 2006) on the basis of a phonetic similarity between the lexical item *guzz* (from the Turkish *kız*, 'girl'), and the Farsi word *gooz* ('fart'). It should be mentioned that the word *guzz* is indeed part of the linguistic practices which were the object of the debate. In addition, this word was included in the wordlist of the Swedish Academy in 2006, and thereby officially recognized as part of the Swedish language. Accordingly, by highlighting an allegedly sexist connotation inherent in the sound form of *guzz*, Witt-Brattström was not just criticizing *blattesvenska*, but was also wondering whether 'the Swedish language needs even more disparaging words for women' (*Dagens Nyheter* 19 April 2006). The issue of sexism in suburban slang was magnified by the feminist journalist Åsa Mattsson who claimed that,

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Extract 5

> '*Guss*' is not the only [word]. The Swedish Academy can pick and choose if they want disparaging slang expressions for women in SAOL [Swedish Academy Word List]. One need only count in Dogge Doggelito and Ulla-Britt Kotsinas' [book] *Suburban Slang*. I would argue that at least a third of the words are sexist or homophobic. [. . .] There are many things that can discourage you about this word list. One of them is that emotionally charged words with a negative connotation are so much more prominent than those with a positive connotation. But ignoring sexism is like reading with a jock strap over your eyes.
>
> (Mattsson, *Dagens Nyheter* 28 April 2006)

Witt-Brattström's and Mattsson's standpoints did not go unchallenged, as is evidenced by the reaction of the writer Alejandro Leiva Wenger (see Extract 6 below).

Extract 6

> In reality the word '*guss*' has never meant anything else but 'girl,' which is something that many young people of the Million Programme have known for two decades or so. It shouldn't be forgotten either that girls as much as boys have taken part in the creation of this language. '*Guss*' is used by both genders. To represent girls as passive victims of the youth language in the suburbs as Witt-Brattström does is to devalue their creativity and deny the fact that suburban slang also belongs to them.
>
> (Leiva-Wenger, *Dagens Nyheter* 27 April 2006)

In a subsequent article entitled 'Where are all the creative sisters?,' Mattsson conceded to Leiva-Wenger that

Extract 7

> Yes, if you admit that sexism exists even in suburban slang and shouldn't be waved aside, I can admit that the word '*guss*' is the least sexist word I've found in that slang book. Perhaps that's why the term appears in the wordlist of the Swedish Academy – as a gift of charity in a harsh discriminatory reality – a pat on the head from men in mainstream Swedish society to the up-and-coming men in the suburbs. [. . .] Can't you ask all your creative sisters to write a couple of debate articles instead, Alejandro? or *gussar* [girls]? [It] must be swarming with them [i.e. young women] considering how creative and non-sexist that linguistic environment is for women. Strange that they are not seen more often.
>
> (Mattsson, *Dagens* Nyheter 3 May 2006)

In response to this, the playwright Farnaz Arbabi argued vehemently that,

Extract 8

> The debate, which began as a discussion about bilingualism and the poor quality of the teaching of Swedish in schools, now revolves around whether the so-called suburban slang is sexist. The answer is clear: Yes! It is just as sexist as any other form of Swedish. [. . .] It is presumptuous and arrogant to blame the suburbs for using a more oppressive language towards women than the rest of Sweden. The suburbs are no exception, but rather a result and an extension of the rest of society. The male

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heterosexual norm prevails there as well. Why does Mattsson choose to specifically highlight the sexist in the so-called suburban slang?

(Arbabi, *Dagens Nyheter* 8 May 2009)

Witt-Brattström's following reply was no less forceful (see Extract 9 below).

Extract 9

The standard language is Swedish, and its importance as a means of communication among new Swedes is fundamental. Multi-slang is not an alternative. It has few areas of use – mainly sex, sexualized violence, homophobia, machismo, drugs and crime. It has no words for homework or a litre of milk, but it has at least seven incomprehensible words for the frequent insult 'I fuck your mother's/sister's cunt' (Suburban Slang). As Åsa Mattsson points out (28/4) it is not completely accidental that '*bassa*' means to fuck/have sex, give a beating, or don't give a shit about someone. We are dealing here with a sexual-political, class-divided rift with no historical parallel. Sorry Farnaz Arbabi, who has missed the point that there are also degrees of sexual oppression in the heteronormative linguistic inferno! Suburban slang is, basically, an aggressive cry for help, a see-us-before-it's-too-late pointed at us outside the [block of] concrete: to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Integration, the whole of Adult Sweden.

(Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 13 May 2006)

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the argument about a phonetic similarity between *guzz* and *gooz* is hardly tenable, because of a difference in the length and quality of the vowels in the two words. As Alejandro Leiva Wenger points out, it also makes little or no sense because 'according to the same logic, the Swedish word *kock* [cook] is then a derogatory job title because it resembles the English "cock"' (Leiva Wenger, *Dagens Nyheter* 27 April 2006). By the same token, Mattson's standpoint on the slang lexicon is no less spurious. Of course, I do not dispute that sexist and homophobic practices do occur in the Swedish suburbs, as well as elsewhere (cf. Jonsson 2007). However, Baker points out that 'while lexicon may tell us about the preoccupation or taboos of a particular group, taken out of context [. . .] they serve to *exoticise* the group, again focusing on the ways that its members differ from "mainstream society"' (2008: 52, emphasis mine).

The question then arises: Why are Witt-Brattström and Mattsson so adamant in postulating that the word *guzz* is sexist? On what basis can they attribute such sexist connotations to *blattesvenska* more generally? As I will illustrate below, this is possible through a meaning-making process that involves two discursive moves:

1. the creation of an indexical tie between *blattesvenska* and the gender and ethnicity of its purported speakers; and
2. through iconization – the projection on to *blattesvenska* of the belief that its speakers are male chauvinists.

First, it is nearly an axiom among sociolinguists and discourse analysts that speakers constantly make *choices* when representing the world through

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language, choices which involve *inter alia* the selection of particular lexical items and grammatical strategies as well as the inclusion or omission of information. Admittedly, in another article in the debate, Witt-Brattström shows familiarity with current sociolinguistic research on what Fraurud and Bijvoet (2004) call 'multiethnic slang' usage in Swedish suburbs (see Witt-Brattström, *Dagens Nyheter* 20 May 2006). Nevertheless, one fundamental insight ensuing from that research is *omitted* throughout, namely that 'multiethnic slang' is part of the linguistic repertoire of adolescents of both sexes (see also Ganuza 2008). By contrast, in Extract 4 Witt-Brattström authoritatively states that *blattesvenska* is a 'multiethnic lads' slang.' Through the word 'lads' and the parenthetic clause 'girls are in the minority,' the author is not only employing linguistic means to create an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) of speakers, but is also foregrounding the *gender* of those speakers. Whether or not intentional, suggesting that *blattesvenska* is an almost exclusively *male* linguistic precinct is not irrelevant, not least because it would not be as compelling to claim that this linguistic phenomenon is sexist unless the role of female voices were downplayed or even erased. Indeed, we could go so far as to propose that anything contrary to this logic would entail suggesting that young women in the suburbs are *actively partaking* in sexual oppression through their linguistic behaviour. But such an allusion would be inconsistent with a view of these women as male-dominated, passive and invisible (see Extract 7). Gender, however, is not the only social category that is overtly mobilized in the description of the speakers of *blattesvenska*. Ethnicity is also explicitly thematized through the qualifier 'multiethnic.' Whilst this adjective foregrounds the diversity and multiplicity of heritages that characterize the youth in question, it also conveys the idea that these adolescents are *not* Swedish. In sum, Extract 4 clearly illustrates the indexical process through which an imagined community of language users is created by invoking gender and ethnicity. And it is precisely the intersection between these two forms of social categorization and their link to *blattesvenska* that allows the second discursive move to take place, namely the association to sexism.

We have noted earlier how iconization involves:

1. the downplaying of the role played by historical and contextual conditions in affecting actual sociolinguistic practices; and
2. the representation of these practices as if they *transpired* from their speakers' biological or cultural essences.

In this sense, iconization is at work in Extracts 5, 7 and 9 because Witt-Brattström and Mattsson attribute sexist and homophobic connotations to *blattesvenska* through the assumption that its purported speakers ('multiethnic lads') are sexist. Put simply, the logic runs as follows: *guzz* and other words are part of the speech of 'multiethnic lads'; these are misogynist bigots; therefore, these words are discriminatory against women. In this respect, one could raise the objection that Witt-Brattström and Mattsson do not *explicitly* pronounce that 'multiethnic

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lads' are male chauvinists. However, utterances only have meaning in relation to what remains *unexpressed* – the 'background information' (Verschueren 1999: 26) of assumptions and presuppositions underlying what is overtly pronounced. This means that the domain of the unsaid offers a reader indispensable tacit cues through which to 'make coherent sense' (Talbot 1997: 175) of what is said. Following Talbot, it is my contention that we cannot 'make coherent sense' about the sexism of *blattesvenska* in the extracts above without a 'presupposed common representation' (Chilton 2004: 181) of its speakers as male chauvinists. This is not simply because Witt-Brattström and Mattsson ignore that 'meaning cannot be inferred by words alone' (Litosseliti 2006: 21), and consequently designate some words as sexist without accounting for their situated use and function in precise contexts of interaction (see also Leiva Wenger's argument in *Dagens Nyheter* 2 May 2006). As it will be illustrated in the next section, it is also because the image of the threatening and misogynist young 'immigrant man' is not exceptional but has been widely circulated by the Swedish print-media for the last thirty years or so.

Finally, Extract 9 provides us with a clear example of how the indexical value of *blattesvenska* gains force through more or less overt representations of standard Swedish. In this context, 'multi-slang' is explicitly represented *ex negativo* as 'not an alternative' to 'standard Swedish.' In turn, this linguistic opposition *recurs* in other semiotic dimensions. We saw earlier in Extract 1 that *blattesvenska* is imbued with negative connotations related to the unfavourable effects of this linguistic phenomenon on the social mobility of its speakers. In contrast, the learning of standard Swedish is assumed to open up career opportunities. Similarly, in Extract 9 'multi-slang' is portrayed in grim tones, this time though as a violent malaise (an 'aggressive cry for help') with deep social consequences in terms of female sexual oppression and heteronormativity. More specifically, in countering Arbabi's claim that sexism is not limited to the suburbs and the language practices therein, Witt-Brattström relies on a powerful Dantesque image of circles of Hell. In this representation, an opposition created at a linguistic level (multi-slang vs. standard Swedish) is *projected* on to a different semiotic tier, namely the domain of sexual discrimination. And this is a level in which standard Swedish, and by extension Swedish men, are opposed to the ethnic and linguistic Other in their (lesser) degree of sexism and heteronormativity.[4] Whereas Mattsson (Extract 7) acknowledges that male domination is a broad and complex social issue, standard Swedish is neither debated nor problematized in Extract 9, but is the default benchmark against which Otherness is measured (cf. Androutsopoulos 2009: 197–198 for a similar case in the debate on 'ethnolectal German'). In other words, it is through the downplaying of the (hetero)sexist components in standard Swedish and Swedish men that Witt-Brattström can put forward their *marked* character as iconic features of *blattesvenska* and its speakers.

What should not be overlooked is that the opposition between good 'standard Swedish' and bad 'multi-slang' is also indexical of a generational cleavage:

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they ('non-Swedish' male youth) vs. us (adults). A closer investigation of the expression 'us outside the blocks of concrete' can help us explain this point better. Since 'us' is the recipient of the 'aggressive cry for help,' unpacking its meanings will also allow us to understand more clearly which adults in particular, according to Witt-Brattström, should take action against the sociolinguistic problem of 'multi-slang.'

As noted elsewhere (e.g. Fairclough 1989; Wodak et al. 1999), the personal pronoun 'we/us' is of particular analytical relevance not simply because of its potential in creating social inclusion or exclusion (see Extract 1 above), but also because of its fluidity and ambiguity. As Fairclough explains it, 'there is a constant ambivalence and slippage between exclusive and inclusive "we"' (2000: 35), whereby the deictic expression may 'wander' (Petersoo 2007) so as to index different referents *at the same time*. The expression 'us outside the blocks of concrete' emphasizes the spatial and social location of its referent, pointing to *all* those who do not live in the suburbs of the Million Programme, including the writer of the article. This referent, however, is further qualified by the subsequent list: 'to the Minister of Education, the Minister of Integration, the whole of Adult Sweden.' In this regard, Fairclough observes that 'Where one has lists, one has things placed in connection, but without any indication of the precise nature of the connection' (1989: 188). On the one hand, the reference to the ministers clearly points to the Swedish political elite, and their responsibilities for migrants and their education. On the other hand, the nominalized adjective 'Adult,' coupled with the non-standard orthographic choice of a capital letter, lexically and visually highlights the *age-dimension* of the toponym 'Sweden,' which in this specific instance metonymically stands for 'Swedish people.' In short, 'us' refers here to all adults in Sweden. What is remarkable however is the discrepancy between 'the whole of Adult Sweden,' and 'us outside the block of concrete.' This inconsistency can be taken as the textual manifestation of a tension between a view which includes the adults living in the suburbs and another which, instead, excludes them as the legitimate actors responsible for handling the troubles of the youth in question (cf. Jonsson 2007: 100 for a similar line of argument).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: *BLATTESVENSKA* AND OUR NEW SWEDES – NEW LABELS FOR OLD REFERENTS?

The main goal of this paper has been to trace the language ideological processes through which a particular linguistic phenomenon is invested with different *names*, *meanings*, and *values* in a Swedish print-mediated debate. In particular, it was argued above that some of the metalinguistic pronouncements in that discussion are based on the *covert* assumption that the speakers of *blattesvenska* are sexist male chauvinists. Following Foucault (1978), one could then ask: why is it that these statements (and not others) were uttered at a specific moment in time? The answer to this question lies in the fact that language

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ideologies and the social (stereo)types linked to them 'do not win the day just like that, they are not simply picked up by popular wisdom and public opinion' (Blommaert 1999a: 10). I want to admit that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make generalizations on the basis of a small sample of extracts taken from a single media debate, not least because of the idiosyncrasies of the few actors involved. This caveat notwithstanding, a diachronic comparison between this debate and earlier media firestorms in Sweden will allow us to speculate about *how* and *why* particular representations of language and identity are currently being reproduced or modified in Sweden. Ultimately, it remains a matter of further empirical investigation to see how such representations will become consolidated or contested in the near future.

Because of the focus on the linguistic forms of 'non-Swedish' speakers, there is little doubt that the debate under investigation in this paper is related to those public concerns about *rinkebysvenska* mentioned in the Introduction above. On the basis of his corpus of media texts, Stroud (2004) concludes that at a surface level media debates about *rinkebysvenska* may appear to be national arenas for the acknowledgement of linguistic and ethnic diversity in Sweden. Nonetheless, such contentions are geared to the reproduction of what Bourdieu (1991) calls *symbolic violence,* in that they uphold an allegedly homogeneous Swedish norm as the symbolic ideal at the same time as they dismiss 'heterogeneity by devaluing the linguistic capital of immigrants' (Stroud 2004: 210).

A similar conclusion could be drawn from a reading of Mattsson's and Witt-Brattström's claims presented above. Nonetheless, what makes these arguments peculiar *vis-à-vis* the pronouncements investigated by Stroud is a *shift* in which the production of new language constructs is inextricably bound up with changing views of the speaking subject. Clearly, in the debate under investigation in this paper, we are moving away from *rinkebysvenska*, a linguistic construct strongly rooted in conceptions of a bounded ethnic community and geographical locale. In its place, we are being offered a linguistic hodgepodge deprived of any right to be called a variety – *blattesvenska* – that reflects multiple layers of identity, of which gender emerges as particularly salient. In my view, this shift is not random but is the result of the convergence between:

1. discourses that had previously targeted the linguistic practices of the 'immigrant' in the broadest sense; and
2. prevailing media discourses about the 'immigrant young man' in particular.

It is to such discourses that I will now turn.

Through an investigation of a corpus of newspaper items spanning a period of over twenty years (1975 – 1997), Brune (2002) demonstrates how the Swedish print-media have been actively constructing dyads of binaries in which 'immigrants' – whether men, women, boys or girls – have been more or less explicitly opposed to their Swedish counterparts. Admittedly, Brune recognizes that it is difficult, nigh on impossible, to determine with certainty whether the notion of the 'immigrant' and its connotations had already become crystallized

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as a stereotype in the 1970s. However, it is argued that newspaper articles from that time 'were *in the process of* constructing prototypes' (Brune 2002: 148, emphasis mine), whose essentialized characteristics would recur in other media texts twenty years later. To illustrate this point, Brune begins by presenting a news report taken from an issue of *Dagens Nyheter* from 1976, dealing with the social conditions of Turkish adolescents in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta. In this specific instance, the (stereo)typifying process manifests itself textually in the description of a young man called Yilmaz as 'a rather typical representative of Turkish boys' (*Dagens Nyheter*, quoted in Brune 2002: 156). Whilst he is described as spontaneous and happy, albeit irresolute about his future career, an element of threat and danger is introduced into the description through an account of his love and hate feelings for his female Swedish peers, coupled with an inability to control his aggression towards them. Interestingly, this potentially antisocial behaviour is attributed by the journalist to 'the tough masculinity into which he has been socialized since he learned to walk' (*Dagens Nyheter*, quoted in Brune 2002: 157). In other words, Turkish culture – whatever this may mean – is held responsible for Yilmaz's potentially aggressive inclinations. By extension, since this adolescent has been elevated to being a paramount example of a social group, the threatening features attributed to him are implicitly projected on to the collective which he is said to represent, namely 'Turkish boys.'

As a comparison, Brune (2002: 165) takes a news article from 1997 reporting on the 'honour killing' of a 22-year-old woman by the hands of her brother. As in the article from 1976, the journalist does not account for the reasons underpinning this crime on the basis of the psychological and/or social conditions of the murderer, but explains it as the outcome of a 'traditional patriarchal culture, in which first the father and then the brother decide what the women in the family are not allowed to do' (*Aftonbladet*, cited in Brune 2002: 165).

Similar observations have been made by Bredström (2002, 2003) in her analysis of the media coverage of the rape of a young Swedish woman perpetrated by several young men 'with immigrant background' in the Stockholm suburb of Rissne. As was the case for the texts analyzed by Brune (2002), the reasons underlying this act of violence were not found in the psychology of the perpetrators by the journalists who reported on this case, but were attributed to the young men's ethnicity and culture. Analogous to the example of the female Swedish adolescents allegedly desired and hated by Yilmaz, the victim's Swedishness was made salient in the rape report as the key element that *triggered* the young men's brutal instincts. Bredström goes on to argue that, whenever ethnicity was not overtly invoked as the underlying cause of the young men's criminal behaviour, a 'misogynist ghetto-culture was often deduced from the youngsters' family relations, rather than society at large, blaming single mothers or fathers who had lost their authority' (Bredström 2003: 80). What is also important is that, whilst culture is taken as an independent variable that may explain individual or group behaviour of the 'immigrant young man,' the same

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does not seem to be applied in reports of sexual offences committed by Swedish or Scandinavian adolescents.

All in all, these studies give us a sense of the presence of a dominant discourse that has held sway in the Swedish print-media for the last thirty years – a discourse in which age, culture, gender, ethnicity/race, and sexuality have been *marshalled together* and *mobilized* in the creation of the image of the 'deviant Other' – the 'immigrant young man' (cf. de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005). Of course, as Woolard reminds us, a 'basic anthropological insight is that ways of talking about the "Other" are ways of talking about ourselves' (1989: 276). To this one could add that it is an 'old sociological truism that deviance functions to police the boundaries of normality' (Jackson 1999: 173). These theoretical observations are particularly pertinent here because Brune (2002) and Bredström (2002, 2003, 2006) draw attention to the subtle nationalistic undertones embedded in the image of the 'immigrant man' whose behaviour is said to be the result of his traditional, retrograde and patriarchal culture. This is because the attribution of aggressive masculinity to the ethnic Other and his purported culture *reinforces* at the same time a view of his opposite – the Swedish man and his culture – not only as modern, progressive and gender-equal but also as normal (see also Jonsson 2007 for a similar line of argument). This also means that gender equality seems to function as an *ethnic/national marker*, a way of delimiting we/Swedes from they/non-Swedes (cf. de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005).

Against this backdrop, it appears clear that the arguments advanced by Witt-Brattström about 'our new Swedes' and '*blattesvenska*' *vis-à-vis* 'ethnically Swedish adolescents' and 'standard Swedish' are not completely new. The parallels with the Swedish media discussions that target the 'immigrant young man' are perhaps most explicit in the portrayal of *blattesvenska* as a sexist and heteronormative linguistic phenomenon opposed to a more gender-equal standard Swedish (see Extract 9). Another similarity emerges in the issue of parental responsibility in relation to the social problems of the youth in question. A fundamental difference, however, can be found in the ways in which cultural essences are invoked as an explanation for social problems. Whilst culture was *overtly* mobilized in the media texts analyzed by Brune and Bredström, it is *covertly* couched in the claims that *blattesvenska* is sexist.

As Blackledge has pointed out with regard to racism, in democratic societies 'where explicitly racist discourse which describes particular groups of people in negative terms is no longer permitted, symbolic means of discrimination will be found' (2005: i). We could extend these observations beyond race and ethnicity so as to encompass the discursive constraints on all *explicit* forms of discrimination in Swedish public discourse (see Stroud 2004 and Milani 2008 for a more detailed discussion). In this regard, it is fair to say that it is not acceptable today to say openly that 'our new Swedes' are sexist young male chauvinists, whereas Swedes are not (to the same degree), because such statements would be perceived as overtly discriminatory. But this is precisely the unspoken assumption that

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gives coherence (cf. Talbot 1997) to the argument that *blattesvenska* is a sexist linguistic phenomenon. Why this is the case is a matter for speculation. The reasons for employing an unspoken form could perhaps depend on the sensitivity of particular actors of the debate to issues of political correctness. It could also be interpreted as a tangible manifestation of the fact that it is becoming increasingly more controversial to invoke culture as an overt explanatory category for a specific behaviour. Or it could simply mean that the social type of the 'immigrant young man' as culturally chauvinist has become so commonsensical that it no longer needs explicit explanation.

Whatever the actual reason, Johnson (1997) and Benwell (2002) have poignantly argued that the main strategy through which hegemonic discourses of masculinity can uphold their dominant and taken-for-granted character is their chameleonic ability to re-fashion themselves under new guises. In the debate presented here, this process of re-styling has entailed *deflecting* the blame for sexism from what are commonly perceived as stable and immutable conditions – culture and ethnicity – and projecting it on to what is learned and therefore potentially changeable – 'Their' language, *blattesvenska*. Overtly foregrounding 'Their' language, however, is by no means any more innocuous than invoking culture, ethnicity or race. In fact, the analysis above has shown that such metalinguistic discourses might indeed seem to be liberal and emancipatory, but they are key mechanisms in the political economy of language and identity in the sense that they synergistically define linguistic *as well as* social 'deviance.' This is because such discourses subtly reproduce a negative image of a group of people ('our new Swedes' and 'multiethnic lads') at the same time as they performatively bring into existence an equally negatively-laden construct of their linguistic practices (*blattesvenska*).

In conclusion, Foucault reminds us that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (1978: 95) as is manifested by the reactions of dissent to Witt-Brattström's and Mattsson's claims. This would support Johnson and Ensslin's observation that 'the media *mirror*, and hence implicitly *promote*, a dynamic set of ideological frameworks. Crucially, however, these are not necessarily restricted to dominant discourses but also enable marginal agencies to surface, and potentially alter, previous hierarchical relations' (2007a: 12 emphasis in original). Yet, we should be careful to infer that mainstream national newspapers are open arenas where equal contenders democratically vie for hegemony. It is true that dominant language ideologies are not necessarily given a privileged position in Swedish newspapers. However, neither are these dailies self-proclaimed conduits of the 'voices of the subaltern' (Spivak 1988). Quite the reverse, accounting for the language ideological brokerage operated by *Dagens Nyheter* in this debate may capture one fundamental aspect of mediatization in today's 'attention economy' (Gauntlett 2000), namely the fact that the 'marginal' may indeed be voiced and pitted against the 'dominant.' But this is part of a broader strategy which aims to enhance *newsworthiness*, thus catching and sustaining the readers' attention in a time ruled by the economic imperatives

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of circulation, readership figures, and subscriptions (cf. Johnson and Ensslin 2007a: 12).

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the AILA Research Network Symposium entitled *Thematizing Multilingualism in the Media: Representations, Identities, Ideologies* which was held at AILA, Essen, 24–29 August 2008. I would like to thank the audience there for their comments. I am also particularly indebted to Monica Heller, Lionel Wee and two anonymous reviewers for very helpful suggestions and critique. Finally, many thanks go to Kenneth Hyltenstam (Stockholm University) and to Rickard Jonsson (Stockholm University) for invaluable conversations on media representations of language. All remaining errors are my own.
2. As I have explained elsewhere (Milani 2007), the government proposal aimed at enhancing bilingual education, that is, the *parallel* use of minority languages and Swedish in, say, the instruction of mathematics, natural sciences, etc. Witt-Brattström, however, employs the expression *home language instruction*. Apart from the fact that the expression 'home language' was officially replaced by the no less controversial 'mother tongue' in 1997, mother-tongue instruction, unlike bilingual education, refers in the Swedish context to an educational provision in which minority language are the *subject* rather than the medium of instruction (cf. Hyltenstam 2005).
3. All translations from Swedish sources are my own.
4. One of the anonymous reviewers questioned my operationalization of the notion of fractal recursivity. Similar to fractals in geometry, 'the dichotomizing and partitioning process that was involved in some understood opposition [. . .] recurs at other levels, creating either subcategories on each side of a contrast or supercategories that include both sides but oppose them to something else' (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38). However, a review of the studies that have employed this concept illustrates how the *fractal* element has been downplayed whereas the *recursive* component has been foregrounded. For example, Blackledge (2004: 29–30) shows how oppositions at a linguistic level (proficiency in English vs. lack of English language skills) are projected on to other dimensions (e.g. presence vs. lack of social cohesion; social order vs. disorder). Similarly, Androutsopoulos (2009) outlines how the dichotomy between standard German and 'ethnolectal German' recurs at the level of nativeness and music aesthetics, thus creating a chain of oppositions: native vs. non-native, good taste vs. poor taste. In a similar vein, I argue that recursivity is present in my data in the way in which *blattesvenska* is pitted against standard Swedish, and this opposition recurs in the dimension of (hetero)sexism so that *blattesvenska* is envisaged as sexist/homophobic whereas standard Swedish is portrayed as less or not sexist at all; at another level, standard Swedish is presented as 'normal' whereas *blattesvenska* is 'deviant'.

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