

Urban Youth Language in Multicultural Sweden

MARIE-NOËLLE GODIN

ABSTRACT: This article is the result of interviews conducted in a gymnasium in Stockholm; the purpose of these interviews was to understand how immigrant youth use urban youth language as a means of creating an identity for themselves. It intends to demonstrate how the situation particular to modern Sweden—most importantly, the structure and conditions of the multiethnic suburbs that have been constructed under the *Miljonprogrammet* [Million Program]—have affected the lives of teenagers with an immigrant background, especially in their use of the Swedish language. The urban youth language is revealed to be more than just an immigrant dialect; rather it is an important tool in the creation of solidarity among the young population of suburbs who are touched by segregation and discrimination. Therefore, this paper does not only underline the characteristics of the urban youth language, but it also demonstrates the importance of the community in the development of an identity among the multiethnic youth.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article est le résultat de différentes interviews menées dans un collège de Stockholm afin d'analyser les mécanismes d'identification reliés à l'usage de la langue urbaine chez les jeunes issus d'un milieu immigrant. Il sera démontré de quelle manière la situation nationale, et plus précisément la structure et les conditions des banlieues multiethniques construites sous le Programme « Million » en Suède, ont affecté la vie de ces adolescents et leur usage de la langue suédoise. Bien plus qu'un dialecte d'immigrants, cette langue urbaine se révèle être un important outil de solidarité parmi les jeunes des banlieues touchées par la ségrégation et la discrimination. Ainsi, cet article ne s'attardera pas seulement aux caractéristiques de cette langue urbaine, mais démontrera également l'importance de la communauté dans le développement identitaire de la jeunesse immigrante.

Marie-Noëlle Godin has completed a masters degree in linguistics at the University of Linköping.

Sweden has for a long time been perceived by many as a monolingual and homogeneous nation. Throughout the centuries, the Swedish language has played a major role in the unification of the country and the creation of a sense of national identity (Oakes 67). However, twentieth-century globalization led this homogeneous Swedish society to welcome immigrant workers and refugees among its citizens, people from different cultures who did not necessarily fit into the traditional way of life, people who did not share the same native language as the majority (Jervas 11). Even as the newcomers tried to integrate themselves into their new society, Sweden had to adapt to its changing demography.

It is then not a surprise to find questions regarding language at the centre of the problem of integration in Sweden, as in many other places of the world. Should knowledge of the national language be a criterion for citizenship? Is national identity necessarily dependent on a shared language? Is competence in the national language primarily a discriminatory requirement for citizenship, or a right that would contribute to making the life of immigrants and refugees easier? These are some of the many questions that are still debated today.

As will be demonstrated in the following pages, the attitude of the minorities towards the Swedish language is embedded in larger mechanisms of power and domination, resistance and negotiation. This essay will try to highlight how the different political and social decisions aimed at achieving integration that have been taken after the Second World War in Sweden have influenced the use of language among the multiethnic population.

I have decided to concentrate my research on children with an immigrant background, who, born in Sweden or abroad, are nonetheless the first to be affected by language policies and by the different forms of social and geographic discrimination they can encounter in school or in their residential areas. More precisely this essay will concentrate on the use of multiethnic youth language by the young people living in the multicultural suburb of Botkyrka, in an attempt to demonstrate how this particular variety of Swedish reflects the impact that the current situation of cultural integration but spatial segregation has on the teenagers of multiethnic suburbs. It will also show how this variety of Swedish symbolizes a strong bond between the youth and their community, their suburbs possibly becoming more important than nationality in the process of identification.

Demographic changes in Sweden

Though recent immigration has had unusually dramatic effects on Sweden, immigration is a phenomenon that has been observed in Sweden as far back as the twelfth-century. The arrival of the Germans during the Middle Ages, the workers from Netherlands, France, and Poland hired into Sweden for their special

skills as well as the appearance of the Roma people during the sixteenth-century, the workers from Wallonia who escaped the wave of unemployment in Belgium in the seventeenth-century, the Danish, Russian, German, Jewish, and the massive Finnish immigration that followed wars and conflicts from the eighteenth to the twentieth-century, are just a few examples of the many immigrants that have entered Sweden over the years (Wigerfelt 63-76).

However, the end of the Second World War represents a turning point in Swedish history, as the face of the country was about to change drastically. The years following the war saw the wind of prosperity blowing over the country, as the economy of Sweden developed and flourished. Soon, the country welcomed many specialised workers from Europe, seeking jobs in the expanding industries (Jervas 11). If most of these workers came from neighboring Nordic countries and did not create a challenge of adaptation, they were followed a decade later by the massive arrival of less qualified manpower, as the need for more workers grew among industries. The newcomers originated mostly from the south of Europe, in particular from countries such as Greece and Turkey (Ohlsson 88). Sweden also welcomed an increasing proportion of African immigrants in the 70s, and later people from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and other Middle Eastern countries, as well as some asylum seekers from countries such as Kosovo or Somalia.

By the end of the 1950s, Sweden faced a serious housing shortage. Stockholm, which was then experiencing a great industrial expansion, had no place to house the thousands of new workers and their families. In order to put an end to the shortage and to provide every resident with better housing conditions, the Swedish government launched in 1965 the so-called *Miljonprogrammet* [Million Program], a housing program aiming at the construction of a million new apartments and houses in a period of ten years. Even though a portion of all the newly built housing units were small houses, the *Miljonprogrammet* is often associated with the image of a tall and grey building, a dull block of concrete in which dozens of families live. This architecture, added to the prejudices that tend to be associated with multiethnic neighbourhoods, has contributed to the bad reputation of those habitations in the media and among the Swedish majority (Bunar 4).

As a matter of fact, some of these multicultural areas face forms not only of physical, but also of socio-economic segregation. The high concentration of immigrants in the suburbs built under the *Miljonprogrammet*, as well as the predominance of the grey cement buildings, has helped to give a relatively negative image of those suburbs, stigmatizing them as “different” or “apart” from the rest of the country (Bunar 5). The way these areas are presented in the media to the rest of the nation also reinforces this idea of distance or difference. Such negative images, added to the growing heterogeneity of the suburbs, have caused many native Swedes to move from these areas (a phenomenon often referred as “white flight”), adding to the existing segregation (Otterup 30).

Besides the physical distancing brought about by the multiethnic suburbs, other cultural factors also accentuate the clash between the newcomers and the other citizens in their host country. The higher rate of unemployment, even among highly educated immigrants, clearly shows that citizens with a foreign background often have more trouble finding work than do native Swedes, or have to work at jobs below their qualifications (Kamali 76-77). The limits of language as well as the lack of familiarity with the various resources offered to residents of the country may be part of the explanation for this situation. A majority of the immigrant population has at one time or another been dependent on the social welfare system. This is even truer for the different refugees who have sought asylum in Sweden since 1985. As opposed to the workers who arrived earlier, they did not necessarily have a job waiting for them on their arrival, and they often depended on the state for their survival during the first years of their stay (Kamali 78). All these factors taken together have contributed to maintaining the marginalisation of the immigrant population.

Finally, as pointed out by Charlotte Haglund (87-99), the younger children and the teenagers of multiethnic suburbs also often suffer a form of dissociation from school. Their education, within a monolingual system, sometimes fails to give their multiple identities enough space of expression. Urged to master the Swedish language in order to be able to have the best chance in society, some of the students may feel that their origin should be taken into consideration in the education process, while others may feel that such consideration may become an impediment to the learning of good Swedish. By emphasizing the bad academic performance of their immigrant students or complaining about the lower status of schools with large immigrant student populations, and by disparaging certain behaviours in order to maintain their authority, teachers at multiethnic schools may unintentionally reinforce the negative discourse that is already present in the media and in the minds of the teenagers. This discourse ultimately advocates cultural assimilation and seems to focus on language as one of its main symbols. Some teachers adopt the idea that immigrant adolescents, by concentrating less on native languages of limited utility and instead focusing on Swedish, will be more successful in school and achieve a higher proficiency in Swedish (Haglund 93).

Language and integration in Sweden

More than a simple means of communication between the members of a nation, a language also embodies the literature, the common culture, the roots and the history that tie together the members of a single community. In part because of its association with religious conversion and military conquests abroad at the time of Gustav Vasa, Swedish language is still for many a source of pride and power, but most importantly, the expression of their identity.

In the 70s, measures were taken by the government to adjust to Sweden's changing demography. In contrast to the assimilationist ideology of the earlier twentieth century, which required some minorities like the Saami people and people from the Tornedal valley to speak their own language in school in order to protect national unity and security, the integration policy of the 70s proposed a more flexible and liberal approach, an integration policy inspired by three principles: *equality* (the immigrants and the Swedish citizens having the same rights and obligations), *freedom of choice* (the immigrants being free to choose between their culture and the Swedish one), and *cooperation* (where immigrants and Swedes should help each other to build an open society) ("Statens offentliga utredningar 1974", qtd. in Kamali 59). The role of this policy was to facilitate the integration of the immigrants in society, while respecting their identity and culture.

One of the most debated measures adopted to facilitate the integration of immigrants consists in "home language" teaching, that is, allowing children to receive education in the language of their country of origin in the public education system. While it is often argued that a good command of Swedish is only possible after the child has acquired a high proficiency in his own language, others maintain that the teaching of the mother tongue should be taken care of by the family alone, and that schools should rather concentrate their energies on the teaching of Swedish (Wingstedt 137). Thus public opinion seems divided between the will to allow immigrants to keep and promote their roots and their culture, and the fear that the existing segregation will increase and the pluralism thus encouraged will further divide Swedish society (Wingstedt 143).

An Analysis of Swedish multiethnic youth language

The municipality of Botkyrka is one of Sweden's most international areas. Located between Stockholm and Södertälje, it covers an area of 197 square kilometers, and is divided into seven districts, located in both rural and urban areas. As in many other multiethnic suburbs, the majority (65%) of the dwellings are apartments, a lot of them constructed under the Miljonprogrammet (Botkyrka official website). Botkyrka has a population of 76,500 inhabitants, half of whom have a foreign background. Together, the residents of the municipality of Botkyrka are estimated to come from 100 different countries and to speak 74 languages (Botkyrka official website). It is because of this exceptional variety of cultures, languages and backgrounds that I have chosen this area for my investigation.

The following discussion is the result of interviews conducted in November 2005 in a *gymnasium* [high school] of Norra Botkyrka, in which eleven teenagers aged seventeen to nineteen—Anna, Besart, Chinenye, Erik, Johan, Karl, Omar, Maria, Sofia, Tomas and Sebastian—participated. During these recorded interviews, the participants were asked to express their thoughts on a variety of language

spoken by the youth of Botkyrka, the multiethnic youth language, as well as on other topics such as their school, their suburbs, their roots, etc. The interviews were conducted in English, lasted from half an hour to an hour, and involved two students at a time. Within these semi-structured interviews, the students were free to interact with each other and to discuss whatever topics they wanted, while some general questions regarding their personal use of the multiethnic youth language and their life in the suburb were asked to encourage and orient the conversation. The students were selected in consultation with their English teacher who chose them for their knowledge of the phenomenon of the multiethnic youth language, but also their fluency in English.

Most of the students who participated in the interview came from Alby, Fittja, Hallunda and Norsborg, districts that constitute Norra Botkyrka and where most of the immigrant population lives. Only one of them, Besart, came from central Stockholm.

To preserve the anonymity of the participants, their names or any personal details that may disclose their identity have been changed, but the language used by the students has not been modified.

Mixed identities

The integration and language measures adopted by the government play an important role in the relation those teenagers have with Swedish society, influencing their choices of expression. As pointed out by Pavlenko and Blackledge:

in multilingual settings, language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views of their own and other's identities. Ongoing social, economic, and political changes affect these constellations, modifying identity options offered to individuals at a given moment in history and ideologies that legitimize and value particular identities more than others.

(1-2)

With this in mind, this paper not only attempts to understand the mechanisms of the language spoken by the multiethnic youth, but also tries to understand how the social situation in Sweden and the governmental measures mentioned earlier may be reflected within this use of language.

In order to replicate the ethnic situation in Botkyrka, I specifically chose students whose backgrounds differed (Africa, the Middle East, Southern Europe). While all of them were being educated at school in Swedish, almost all of them used one or many other languages in their daily activities and at home. Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Finnish and English were some of the main languages spoken in the private sphere. Although a third of the students interviewed were born in

Sweden and had lived there all their lives, none of them identified themselves simply as a Swede. When asked about their nationality, they all gave me the same answer: "I live in Sweden, but my roots are elsewhere." The nationality of their parents, or their nationality of origin, seemed to come first in the definition of their identity. Only one of them, Maria, said that she also felt Swedish. "Botkyrka Swedish," she said. As already noted by Mauricio Rojas and other researchers before him, immigrant teenagers and teenagers with an immigrant background have mixed feelings when it comes to identity. Born in Sweden or abroad, they still feel torn between their roots and the society they are supposed to belong to.

If they do not feel completely at home in Sweden, some of them point out that they are also perceived as strangers in their homeland. As explained by Besart: "If I go to Kosovo, I'm too Swedish. If I'm in Sweden I'm too immigrant, so I'm in-between."

Too different to be Swedes, yet not different enough to be true foreigners, the multiethnic youth of Botkyrka find comfort within the diversity encountered in school and in their area. A few students spontaneously expressed their appreciation for their school and its international atmosphere. Although most of the teenagers interviewed explained that they had chosen their school for its proximity to their homes, those who previously had been given the opportunity to attend a school with a higher proportion of native Swedes were happy to be back in a mixed environment.

Chinenye: I don't feel that I don't like [Swedes], I like them, but I prefer to be with people from other countries. Yeah, because we understand each other better and we speak in a special way so... I just feel like, more at home.

However, another girl, Maria, explained she would have liked to be surrounded by more Swedes, so she could learn the language and culture better. These responses are consistent with those reported by Mauricio Rojas and Charlotte Haglund, who also conducted research among the young people of multicultural suburbs, and who similarly observed a distance from citizens of Swedish background among the teenagers they interviewed, especially when these were referring to other more homogeneous parts of the capital, like the inner city. The eastern suburbs and the western side of Stockholm therefore appear as two separate societies, a phenomenon of which teenagers are totally conscious:

Johan: We are not mixed with the Swedish here, Swedes. Segregation, you know? There is a lot of segregation here in Botkyrka.

Omar: It's not many Swedish people who live in Fittja or Norsborg ... They are afraid you know, 'cause they think we are bad people. They see us, like, different from others.

Surrounded by multiplicity, and stigmatized by the bad reputation of the multiethnic suburbs, the adolescents I interviewed did not feel that they totally belonged to Swedish society, nor did they feel that they had the same opportunities as other young adults. The gap that separates their suburbs from the rest of the country pushes them to develop an identity that is rather local than national. One of the expressions of such identity is their particular use of language, which often manifests a cultural resistance towards the system of the majority, but also a strong sense of belonging to their community.

Multiethnic youth language in Sweden: an overview

Opinions differ as to what the variety of language spoken by the multiethnic youth should be called. Names such as *fitjtjaspråket*, *invandrarvenska*, *svenska på mångspråkig grund* (SMG) or, most commonly, *Rinkebysvenska* are variously used when people talk about the phenomenon. Although the term *Rinkebysvenska* [Rinkeby Swedish] (coined by Ulla-Britt Kotsinas after the Rinkeby borough, which is located in the north-west part of the city) is now used by the general public for any variety of language spoken where a high concentration of immigrants can be observed, I have decided, like Fraurud and Bijvoet (401), to use the term “multiethnic youth language” for this research, a term that has gained acceptance among researchers and linguists today.

In these areas of Stockholm, inhabited by immigrants from around the world, where children of immigrants and native Swedes live together, the trained ear could probably distinguish dozens of different languages. In school, younger children and teenagers are therefore not only in contact with a standard form of Swedish, but also with dozens of different languages.

As a form of slang, the multiethnic youth language has some features in common with other kinds of youth language spoken in the suburbs of Stockholm, for example the use of contractions in spoken language, reducing for example *har inte* to *ha'nte* [have not] (Kotsinas 2004 144). The same small words are also widely used among teenagers from every suburb, for example *ba*, *liksom*, *så här*, *va*, *exakt* [only, like, like that, what, exact] etc. Similarly, slang words such as *farsa*, *morsa* or *häftig* [father, mother, trendy] are commonly used, as well as swearwords like *skit*, *fan* or *jävla* [shit, damn], to name a few (Kotsinas 2004 144).

But multiethnic youth language also has characteristics of its own, distinguishing it from the other varieties of slang used in Stockholm. Regarding pronunciation, some speakers of the multiethnic youth language can be recognised by their realisation of the *sj*- sound as distinctly velar and with strong friction, in contrast to other Stockholmers who use a “softer” sound (Kotsinas 2004 145). It has also been noted that there is little, or no difference made between the long and short Swedish vowels, and that the delimitation of each spoken word is usually clearer (Kotsinas 2004 145).

When it comes to grammar, since Swedish is rarely the dominant language spoken at home for those teenagers with an immigrant background, one is not surprised to see some recurring irregularities in multiethnic youth language. Speakers of the urban youth language, but also many young Swedes, may for example switch common prepositions such as *på* or *i*, use double comparison markers (e.g. *mer tuffare än* [more tougher than]) or fail to choose the right gender (e.g. *en bord* instead of *ett bord*) (Kotsinas 2004 146-47). Reversed word order can also be observed (e.g. *då han är* instead of the correct *då är han*) as well as incorrect word use (e.g. *gå till Grekland* [to walk to Greece] instead of *åka till Grekland* [to go to Greece]) (Kotsinas 2004 147).

The vocabulary used in multiethnic youth language is also particular, as it mixes loanwords from different languages, old and modern Swedish slang words, as well as words from the standard language to which the speakers have given a different meaning. Languages which have influenced the vocabulary of the multiethnic youth language are, for example, Turkish, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Kurdish, Spanish, Greek, and Romany. Some of the most frequently used words include: *guzz* [girl], *aina* [police], *keff* [bad], *fett* [good/cool], *jalla* [hurry], *chilla* [chill out], *shuno* [guy], *Ey len* [hey you] etc. Some suffixes (such as *-ish*) can also be added to existing Swedish words, like in *grymish* or *hårlish* (Kotsinas 2003 215). Multiethnic youth language, like most slang languages, is a lively and changing language to which new words and expressions are regularly added.

Finally, a few short stories and novels have also been published, where multiethnic youth language is used in various ways. These include *Till vår ära* (2001) by Alejandro Leiva Wenger and *Ett öga rött* (2004) by Jonas Khemiri. A member of The Latin Kings, Dogge Doggelito, in collaboration with the linguist Ulla-Britt Kotsinas, has also recently published a slang dictionary *Förtrotsslang* (2004).

Mechanisms of the language

When asked about the function of multiethnic youth language in their lives, most of the students interviewed described it as a way of speaking and relaxing among friends, as something to have in common with them. Some of them reported inventing words that were only going to be used by their close circle of friends. Emphasis was put on the playful function of the language, usually used for joking and simply “having fun.” As some students pointed out, it is something that sometimes comes to your mind naturally, that you do not even have to think of. Tomas sometimes used slang to replace Swedish words he forgot, or to give more strength to expressions or *bad words* that would sound *too soft* in the Swedish language. For others, like Sebastian, it is also a way to make themselves understood by the people who still struggle with the Swedish language. Accordingly, Ulla-Britt

Kotsinas has referred to the multiethnic youth language as a *kamratspråk*, a language of camaraderie (2004 154).

As a matter of fact, the multiethnic youth language is not used for interactions with young people from other parts of Stockholm, nor with authority figures like parents or teachers; with such speakers it is usual to switch to a more standard form of Swedish. Furthermore, teenagers with an immigrant background who do not live in multiethnic suburbs do not seem to feel the need to use the multiethnic youth language. At least one of the teenagers interviewed, Besart, who grew up in a more homogeneous part of Stockholm, did not use this variety of language. The influence of the suburb is once again a key in understanding the emergence and role of multiethnic youth language.

Bijvoet reports that teenagers have mixed feelings about the multiethnic youth language. This is confirmed by my interviews. While most of my informants thought that it was a form of “bad” or “improper” language, Sebastian did not seem to see anything negative in it and was rather proud to use it. Adolescents are, however, conscious of the bad image it projects among others. “My parents don’t allow me to speak it ... They, they say that, they feel that I’m a street child when I talk slang,” said Johan. Multiethnic youth language is perceived as the sign of low status, deficient Swedish or poor education. A few teenagers also pointed out the lack of maturity such language revealed. For the girls as well as for Besart and Erik, slang is something one grows out of and stops speaking as one becomes an adult. “You don’t grow when you speak that language. Really bad ... It stops you from growing,” explained Anna. The bad reputation of the language may be one of the reasons why some teenagers with an immigrant background decide to not speak it at all. The need to grow closer to the Swedish society, as Maria pointed out, is another.

Exclusion, Inclusion

As a strong indicator of identity and membership, every language functions on a system of inclusion-exclusion. Swedish multiethnic language is no exception. All the students interviewed agreed that multiethnic language was limited to youth, and that adults should not try to speak it. A few teenagers also explained that multiethnic youth language sometimes functioned as a sort of secret code, when they did not want to be understood by Swedes or the authorities. “This is good, like a code language when you go to Swedish people,” confessed Sebastian. “And if we mock the Swedish. We speak it just to irritate them,” continued Johan. As pointed out by Johan’s latest comment and by Ellen Bijvoet (315), this language can also express a form of protest against Swedish society, an alternative way of communicating in a country dominated by Swedish language and culture.

Nowadays, the slang of the suburbs is being demystified through dictionaries, magazine articles, television programs, books, etc. Although they appreciate the

fact that their culture is gaining in popularity among the rest of society, the teenagers I interviewed did not necessarily want people outside their suburb to speak their language, or copy their lifestyle. It is a feature that belonged to them alone, and they wanted to preserve that identity:

Johan: It's not a good thing that people copy this language. I mean, people who haven't grown up with it...

Omar: Just listen

Johan: And enjoy our culture.

But it would be false to think that multiethnic youth language is only reserved to the teenagers of immigrant background. As a matter of fact, some native Swedish teenagers of the area also use that way of expression, a phenomenon generally well accepted among the immigrant youth I interviewed. It seems normal and acceptable for a Swede who has been living in Botkyrka or has friends in Botkyrka to speak multiethnic youth language. The teenagers stressed that it is not where you come from that matters, but where you live and grow up.

Karl: Many Swedish people are born like us you know

Tomas: With us

Karl: In Botkyrka. And they are raised up with us. And we are...

Tomas: They are melting in the group. It's natural to talk [multiethnic youth language]

A similar phenomenon has been observed and mentioned by Ulla-Britt Kotsinas (2004), when writing about *Svenskinvandrare*, Swedish teenagers from the suburbs who have adopted the lifestyle and language of immigrants teenagers. The slang these native Swedes decide to speak despite their knowledge of standard Swedish seems to indicate a solidarity with their peers and the culture they grew up with.

I många fall känner de sig mera solidariska med sina kamrater i området än med ungdomar från andra mera homogent svenska områden. Det blir också naturligt för dem att närma sig invandrarungdomarnas ungdomskultur.

[In many cases, they feel more solidarity with their friends from the area than with teenagers from other more homogeneous Swedish areas. It also becomes natural for them to be closer to the immigrant youth culture.] (My translation)
(Kotsinas 157-158)

The area where one grows up, in this case Botkyrka, is a strong contributor to identity—an identity that goes beyond ethnicity. As a matter of fact, Ove Sernhede,

although referring to black culture, has tried to explain why some teenagers would feel a need to identify with an immigrant or minority culture. Sernhede points out that even if they don't have an immigrant background, the adolescents of the suburbs where different kinds of discrimination can be observed feel a strong bond with the ghetto culture because it proposes a new kind of identity, far away from the society that looks down on them (82). Through a certain rebelliousness and provocativeness towards the culture of the majority, they may try to find the respect they had lost, or find identity in a "tougher" attitude.

Ungdomskulturerna utmanar de dominerande livsmönstren. Den svarta kulturen representerar då ett alternativ eller en lockande "otherness" på t.ex estetikens, politikens och sexualitetens områden.

[The youth culture challenges the dominant life standards. The black culture then represents an alternative, or an attractive "otherness" in, for example, the esthetic, politic and sexual areas] (My translation)
(85)

It is then not impossible that the native Swedes adopting a multiethnic lifestyle are looking for something other than the model proposed by Swedish society or by their parents. Another reason could be their need to fit in the group, and not be labelled as *svenne* [a derogatory term to designate a typical or native Swede, i.e. different].

Once again, the desire to fit into a group, in this case the multicultural youth of Botkyrka, is shown to be an important reason for the native Swedes to change their language and habits to suit those of the community.

Norra Botkyrka: source of pride

Youth, by the bonds they have with the school they go to as well as the neighbourhoods in which they hang out daily, can be seen as those who are the closest to the local community. As opposed to their parents or other adults, who might work and study outside the suburb, teenagers spend most of their time inside their community, and are the first to be affected by its negative reputation (Arnstberg 201).

Consequently, the students I interviewed also seem to have strong feelings about their community, Botkyrka, or to be more precise, Norra Botkyrka. Apart from the feeling of belonging to their community and the need to explain that the area was not as bad as its depiction by the media, these teenagers also showed a lot of pride when referring to their suburb. "I think people look up to us. We have like a very strong bond with all the people living here... And it feels safe to be here," said Maria.

Another source of pride among the students I interviewed comes from The Latin Kings, a popular Swedish hiphop band from Botkyrka which has decided to rap in multiethnic youth language. As in many other multiethnic suburbs of the world, the youth of Botkyrka feel a strong connection with the hiphop music and culture that seems to represent them. “People feel a connection here, they feel like they live in the same situation” (Johan). Although some of the students mentioned the marketing reasons that would lead such a band to rap in multiethnic youth language, they all agreed that hiphop music, by promoting their language and culture, tried to reach them in their daily life and circumstances. For the teenagers and perhaps for other inhabitants of multiethnic areas, the pride of seeing the attention given to their culture now exposed in the music feeds the feeling of local belonging that was mentioned earlier.

Conclusion

As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and linguists have pointed out, language practices and attitudes reflect unequal power relations within a community. As soon as measures are taken to reinforce an official language, minor varieties and dialects lose their legitimacy and cannot help but constantly measure and compare themselves to the linguistic standard (Bourdieu 27-28).

In the past decades, Sweden has gone through important demographic changes that led the government to adopt new policies regarding integration and language. No matter how open those policies might sound compared to those of other European countries, we have seen that they still create an imbalance between the different institutions of the state and the members of groups with different ethnicities. Focusing on multiethnic youth language, a variety spoken by the youth in the multiethnic suburbs of Stockholm, this paper has tried to outline the role played by the current Swedish social situation in the creation and use of such language.

As has been demonstrated, multiethnic youth language is not a language adopted by immigrants for lack of “proper” Swedish. It is a language some members of the multiethnic youth have decided to use for their relations with their peers. If some might think it is the result of many languages and cultures interacting with each other, I believe the use of multiethnic youth language goes beyond any ethnic explanation. Meredith Doran talks of a “third space” (120), in which youth can position themselves along an alternative identity continuum, outside the fixed categories available in the standard language. I will go further by asserting that the community, in this case Botkyrka, plays a key role in the use of such language, allowing the teenager to identify with the suburb and to be an active participant in the elaboration of a culture. As Ellen Bijvoet explains:

Some of the adolescents living in these segregated suburbs have difficulties in identifying themselves with the majority society, including the majority language. Instead they express a strong loyalty with their own suburb, where new cultural patterns are developing, among others new norms for linguistic behaviour.

(315)

As the reduction of the gap between the immigrant suburbs and the more homogeneous parts of the country leads to a deeper understanding of each other's culture and reality, one might reasonably expect that this kind of research may be the first step towards a more tolerant and harmonious relationship between both parties.

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