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Turning talk into text: the representation of contemporary urban vernaculars in Swedish fiction

Abstract: This article examines the literary representation of contemporary urban vernaculars (CUV) in fiction. It focuses specifically on four Swedish novels published in the last ten years, whose narratives are set in the urban and increasingly multilingual, migrant-rich and class-stratified peripheral areas of Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. The analysis centers on how they are situated in these urban peripheries, using written representations of spoken, non-standard Swedish CUV as symbolic resources to give authenticity to the narratives. We examine the distinctive linguistic features that are employed to evoke the imagination of CUV, and how these are used to build the fictional characters and to create certain recognizable social personas and practices. We also discuss the linguistic features that are available but are not exploited to represent the fictional characters' ways of speaking, and possible reasons why this is so. Finally, we examine how the novels exploit contrasts between registers, particularly between CUV and adult second-language speaker styles and between CUV and standard Swedish, and with what effects. The findings are discussed in the context of the broader social discourses about language, migration, CUV and adult second-language speakers in present-day Sweden.

Keywords: fiction; sociolinguistics; literary representations of spoken language; non-standard varieties; contemporary urban vernaculars; adult second-language speaker styles

1 Introduction

The representation of accents, registers and dialects in different mediums of fiction has attracted increased attention from sociolinguistic scholars in recent years

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(e.g., Androutsopoulos 2010, 2012; Clark 2019; Djenar and Ewing 2015; Jonsson et al. 2020; Stamou 2018). This research brings to the fore interesting questions about the interplay between authenticity and aesthetic creativity in the fictional representation of non-standard ways of using language, and about the ways in which fictional representations contribute to construct value-laden discursive links between certain ways of speaking, and certain ways of acting and being.

In this article, we examine the written representation of spoken registers in contemporary Swedish fiction. In particular, we focus on the representation of "contemporary urban vernaculars" (henceforth CUV, Rampton 2011). Rampton (2011, 2015) uses this term to refer to styles that have emerged in and are perceived to be distinctive of urban neighborhoods shaped by immigration and class stratification. He also stresses that the styles are "connected-but-distinct from the locality's migrant languages, its traditional non-standard dialect, its national standard and its adult second language speaker styles" (Rampton 2015: 39). In media and political discourse, however, these fine-grained distinctions are not always upheld, and CUV and second-language speaker styles are often lumped together and categorized as non-standard and deficient (e.g., Stroud 2004).

While there are some studies on the representation of CUV in media outputs such as commercials, YouTube videos, TV and radio shows (e.g., Jonsson et al. 2020), and rap-music (e.g., Staehr and Malai Madsen 2017; Young 2021), there has not been much previous research on the representation of CUV in literature (but see, e.g., Beschnitt 2013; Källström 2005, 2010; Smalley 2015), especially not in literature published in Swedish in the last ten years. This motivates our focus in this article. Here, we analyze four current Swedish novels, whose narratives are set in multilingual and multiethnic neighborhoods in the peripheries of Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. The protagonists of the novels are depicted as having grown up in these settings as children of migrant parents. The aim is to examine which semiotic resources that are used to position the stories and their protagonists as authentically belonging in these urban peripheries, and to discuss how and why certain resources are used when turning talk into text, while others are omitted. To this end, we have formulated the following three research questions:

(1) Which linguistic features, or clusters of semiotic resources, are employed in the novels to evoke the idea of Swedish CUV, and which available resources are not exploited?

(2) How are the CUV features used to characterize the protagonists and to create certain recognizable social images and indexicalities?

(3) How are contrasts exploited between CUV and other speaker styles (in particular standard Swedish and second-language speaker styles), and with what effects?

It could be argued that written language is not well adapted for representing the complexities of spoken language, or for capturing the subtle differences that can exist between different registers (e.g., Bublitz 2017; Bucholtz 2000). For this reason, it is of sociolinguistic interest to examine the semiotic resources that are used in the novels to represent the fictional characters' ways of speaking, and also which resources that are available but not exploited, and possible reasons why this is so (Simpson 1993: 8).

In the following, we begin with an overview of previous research of Swedish CUV. We then situate the study in the areas of literary representation and register formation. Subsequently, we introduce the four novels, our selection criteria and our methods for analysis. In the following section (Section 4), we present the findings, which focus on the novels' use of certain emblematic CUV features, how these are used to lend authenticity to the novels, and how they are employed to construct the characterological figure of the young CUV speaker. We also analyze the novels' use of contrasts between CUV and other speaker styles, and discuss their effects. The article concludes with a discussion of the overarching social implications of our findings.

2 Literature review

2.1 Swedish contemporary urban vernaculars

In Sweden, migration began to increase rapidly in the second half of the 20th century, during which time the country also underwent a rapid process of urbanization. This led to growing housing shortages in metropolitan areas (e.g., Hall and Vidén 2005). In 1965, the Social Democratic government therefore decided to launch a large-scale national housing program, which came to be popularly known as the "Million Homes Program," because of its mission of building a million new homes over the course of ten years. The label is still used today to refer to the housing areas that were built during this era, often in the urban peripheries, with ultramodern high-rise buildings as their trademark (e.g., Ericsson et al. 2000). Over time, due to the housing policies and practices in Sweden, these areas have become increasingly migrant-rich and class-stratified (Hübinette and Lundström 2020). In the media, they are often stereotypically associated with social problems and used as a projection screen for criticizing migration (e.g., Milani 2020).

In the 1980s, the linguist Kotsinas (1988; see also 1994) began to investigate the language practices of youths growing up in Rinkeby, a Million Homes area in northwest Stockholm with a large migrant population. She was mainly interested in their use of certain innovative, non-standard language features. Two decades later, a large-scale research program was launched aiming to gain a deeper understanding

of the typical ways youths from these areas used Swedish (e.g., Källström and Lindberg 2011). Around the same time, similar projects also emerged in other parts of Europe (for an overview see, e.g., Kern and Selting 2011; Nortier and Svendsen 2015; Quist and Svendsen 2010).

The early research mainly focused on describing linguistic features perceived as "typical" of the spoken registers of youths from these settings, for example their frequent use of certain lexical register emblems, such as slang words and expressions originating in different migrant languages, their use of the nominal and verbal suffix –ish (e.g., "gärish" ['girl-ish'], "händish" ['happens-ish']), as well as extensive use of certain discourse markers (e.g., "du vet," ['you know']) and (masculine) vocative address terms (e.g., Bijvoet and Senter 2021; Ganuza et al. 2020). Foreign-accented speech and XSV word order (in contexts requiring subject-verb inversion in standard Swedish) were also described as "typical" of Swedish CUV. Furthermore, perception studies and attitudinal studies found that the use of emblematic CUV register items was negatively evaluated by most listener groups and indexically linked to perceptions of youth, toughness, and masculinity (for an overview, see Bijvoet and Senter 2021).

In 2006, the former Swedish magazine, *Gringo*, tried to launch the label "miljonsvenska" (lit. 'Million Swedish') to refer to Swedish CUV, in order to emphasize the geographical boundedness of CUV to the Million Homes areas. This attempt gave rise to a heated debate in one of Sweden's larger daily newspapers (e.g., Milani 2010), but the label never really caught on.

While the linguistic practices associated with CUV have mainly been viewed by researchers as signs of creativity and innovation, they have often been linked to discourses of deficit in other contexts. In the Swedish media, CUV are often positioned in opposition to standard Swedish, being described as "bad," "deviant" and "worrisome" language practices, indicative of deficits in Swedish (e.g., Stroud 2004). Million Homes areas and the use of CUV have also frequently been linked to stories about criminality, sexism and educational failure (e.g., Jonsson et al. 2020; Milani 2010; Milani and Jonsson 2011). In these accounts, CUV tend to function as icons of ethnic otherness, which are associated with various sorts of social problems.

Nevertheless, the Million Homes areas and CUV have also attracted increased attention and interest over the years, not least in popular culture. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Swedish literary field was eagerly awaiting new authors who would be able to narrate stories about Sweden as a multicultural nation-state and depict the "new" ways of speaking Swedish associated with the multilingual urban settings (Nilsson 2010; see also Beschnitt 2013; Källström 2005, 2010). Debut authors such as Leiva Wenger (2001), Khemiri (2003), and Bakhtiari (2005) published their first novels during this time. They were commercially successful, won high critical acclaim, and their innovative use of language was lauded by many critics.

2.2 Literary representation

In this article, we focus on the literary representation of certain spoken registers. Even if the authors might be striving for orality and authenticity, we view their representations as selected and constructed images of language use (see also Ganuza and Rydell 2023). In comparison to spontaneous oral communication, literary representations, for example, are always more ordered and tidied up (Bublitz 2017: 238). Authors tend to select only a subset of the features that they associate with orality and with specific registers, and written language is rather underdeveloped in its capacity to represent the subtle differences that can exist between registers (Bublitz 2017; Bucholtz 2000). In agreement with Lopez and Bucholtz (2017: 4), we view authenticity as a "jointly produced semiotic effect," that is, as the result of an interplay between the author's attempt at depicting language in a realistic way and the audience's presumed ratification of it as successful.

Here, we are interested in identifying the linguistic features that are employed to evoke the idea of Swedish CUV, and how these add to the creation of symbolic authenticity of the novels. For instance, the narratives of all four selected novels are grounded in explicit and specific configurations of time and space, which are anchored in the biographical time of the protagonists. The novels also use first-person narration and are largely dialogue-driven (see Section 3). All of these aspects increase the perception of the novels reflecting reality in a realistic way (Bakhtin 1981). Furthermore, both the dialogue and the narration are characterized by extensive use of colloquial language, including certain features associated with orality, which contributes to blurring the division between the dialogue and the narration, and to aligning the narrator with the fictional characters' perspectives (Djenar and Ewing 2015: 110). Källström (2010: 150) describes these strategies as typical of literary performances aimed at indexing realism and authenticity.

2.3 Register formation

Agha (2007) views register formation as a result of repeated co-occurrence of linguistic elements and patterns, which are paired with certain social practices, roles, places and value attributions. He uses the notion of *enregisterment* to describe the processes through which "performable signs," for example certain linguistic features, come to be grouped together and recognized "as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population" (Agha 2007: 81). Through repeated practice, a register can thus become intimately tied to a particular social persona, or "characterological figure" (Agha 2003). The latter refers to the idea of an

"imagined typical user" of the register, which is linked to value-laden ways of being and acting (Agha 2007; see also Ilbury 2019).

According to Agha (2003, 2007), mass media and literature play important roles in the production, circulation, uptake and resignification of registers, and in making characterological figures recognizable to larger audiences. Jonsson et al. (2020) have, for example, illustrated how the young male CUV speaker involved in criminality has become a popular and widely recognized characterological figure in Swedish popular culture. For authors, depicting specific linguistic traits can be an efficient way to build up characters and make them identifiable to readers (see also Ganuza and Rydell 2023). Through the characters' and the narrator's metapragmatic comments about language, the author can also influence how readers interpret the depicted language practices. Moreover, in fictional accounts, registers often acquire important social meanings by being contrasted with other registers (Androutsopoulos 2010, 2012). The reader's ability to recognize registers and their semiotic displays and differences, however, also depends on prior familiarity (Agha 2007: 15).

Agha (2007) also speaks of *indexical icons*, which arise when individual linguistic features or behaviors come to be perceived as individual semiotic signs of a register. At this point, it may be sufficient to deploy one or only a few icons to evoke a range of indexicalities linked to that register (see also Ilbury 2019). In spoken language, this is evident, for example, when speakers use *stylized language* for symbolic and rhetorical effect. Rampton (2009: 149) defines *stylization* as

> reflexive communicative action in which speakers produce specially marked and often exaggerated representations of languages, dialects and styles that lie outside their own habitual repertoire.

In the fictional accounts studied here, it is interesting to examine how spoken language is represented in writing so that it will be perceived as *authentic* and part of the character's *own* language repertoire, in contrast to how it is depicted when not forming part of the character's habitual language. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, analyses of language variation in fiction need to consider not only the linguistic features that are employed, but also the available linguistic options that the authors choose not to exploit, and the possible reasons why this is so (Simpson 1993: 8).

3 Data and method

The present study is part of a larger ongoing project called "Multilingualism and Migration in Contemporary Swedish Fiction," in which we have assembled a corpus of 65 Swedish novels, biographies, and short-story collections published over the last twenty years (Ganuza and Rydell 2023). Common to all the works is that they depict

protagonists with multilingual, migrant backgrounds in present-day Sweden. In this context, both first and second-generation migrants are referred to as having "migrant backgrounds." The primary focus of the project has been to examine fictional representations of *migration-related ways of using Swedish* (e.g., Bijvoet and Senter 2021), and how *lived experiences of language and migration* (Busch 2017) are narrated and structured.

In a similar way as in earlier sociolinguistic research on the representation of language variation in fiction (e.g., Androutsopoulos 2010, 2012; Stamou 2018), we have conducted in-depth, micro-level text analyses of the representation of language variation in these works of fiction, and then linked our findings to macro-level discourses about language and migration.

The books included in the larger corpus often deal with topics of identity, belonging, alienation and criminality (Ganuza and Rydell 2023). Many of them could be described as *coming-of-age* novels (Millard 2007, cf. *Bildungsroman*), which focus on young protagonists' formative life experiences, how they encounter and over-come challenges, and how they learn and grow from these experiences. Novels of this kind often make extensive use of dialogue and inner monologue to move their stories forward (Millard 2007). Here, we focus on four such novels, which were chosen because their narratives are set explicitly in the Million Homes areas and because they employ different semiotic resources to situate them there, including linguistic features associated with CUV: *FTL*[1] (Agah 2013), *Inte din baby* (lit. 'Not your baby', Alsaati 2020, henceforth *IDB*), *Mizeria* (lit. 'Misery', Farshin 2018), and *Spelet är spelet* (lit. 'The game is the game', Hellman and Carmona 2017, henceforth *SPS*). The novels are described briefly below:

> *FTL* (2013) follows Khosro and Morad, two recently graduated high school friends who get involved in dealing drugs. When Morad goes to prison, Khosro attempts to change the direction of his life. Things do not go as planned, however, and at the end of the novel Khosro is shot to death.

> *IDB* (2020) focuses on friendships, love and how to deal with a toxic relationship. The novel follows Samira, a young girl still in secondary school, who falls in love with Nabil. At first, he seems to be everything that she has ever dreamed of, but soon he turns out to be deceiving and controlling.

> *Mizeria* (2017) follows the twins Aicha and Ali, who live with their migrant parents in a Million Homes area. The novel centers around their experiences, thoughts and perspectives. While Aicha tries to hide from Ali that she has recently fallen in love, Ali worries about a friend who is getting increasingly involved in criminality.

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1 An acronym for Fuck The Law.

> On the cover blurb, *SPS* (2017) is described as being based on the life of Leo Carmona, one of the founders of the Swedish hip-hop collective *Kartellen*, and also one of the authors of the novel. The narrative, however, follows the fictional character Carlos, who migrates with his family to Sweden from Chile in the 1980s. After moving to Jordbro, a Million Homes area south of Stockholm, he gets increasingly involved in criminality and gangster life.

To summarize, the four novels were selected because they are set in Million Homes areas, because these areas play an important role in the stories and in the characterization of the protagonists, and because they employ relatively many semiotic resources to position the stories and the protagonists as authentically belonging in these urban settings. Furthermore, the decision to include the four novels was based on the grounds that they were published in the last ten years, and they have not been the focus of earlier research. The fact that the novels center on young people, and that two of them were marketed as novels for youths and young adults (*IDB* and *Mizeria*), was not a criterion for selection, but may have bearings on the findings.

4 Findings

All four novels exploit the indexical nature of the Million Homes areas to situate their stories. This is reflected already on the book covers, which feature images of the high-rise apartment buildings typical of these areas.[2] *FTL* and *IDB* are explicitly set in *Husby* and *Tensta*, two Million Homes areas in northwest Stockholm which are often linked to discourses of migration and criminality in Swedish media (e.g., Ericsson et al. 2000; Milani 2020). *Mizeria* never reveals the exact location of the events, but from the descriptions it is clear that the two protagonists live with their parents in a Million Homes area in Stockholm. The protagonist of *SPS* ends up living with his family in *Jordbro*. In the novel, it is described as an "immigrant-dense and segregated Million Homes area" (Hellman and Carmona 2017: 24, our translation).

In three of the four novels, the characters' involvement in criminality is central to the storyline. In that sense, they reproduce and reinforce the image of the Million Homes areas as hotbeds of social problems and breeding grounds of criminality.

4.1 Indexical register icons

The protagonists of all four novels are depicted as frequent users of linguistic features that have typically been associated with spoken Swedish CUV (see Section 2.1).

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2 We refer to the paperback editions of the novels.

This adds to the novels' sense of location in the Million Homes areas, and to the impression that they represent reality in a realistic way. In particular, the characters are depicted as using certain CUV lexical *indexical register icons* (Agha 2007). For example, all of them use slang words and expressions originating in different migrant languages (for example, in Turkish, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Spanish, which are among the larger migrant languages spoken in Sweden). Example (1), from the novel *SPS*, features a short dialogue between the protagonist Carlos and his friend Vic. It illustrates how both characters employ CUV lexical icons in the depicted interaction, such as "bazz" ['fuck'], "siktelan" ['fuck off'], "guzz" ['girl, chick'], and "bax(a)" ['steal', 'hustle', 'snitch'].

(1)	Original	Our translation
	Vic log.	Vic smiled.
	"Du vill bazz henne, va?"	"You want to *fuck* her, right?"
	"Siktelan. Tror du jag utnyttjar fulla guzzar? Det är inte min stil. Vill bara lära känna henne. Hon verkar cool."	"*Fuck off*. Do you think I take advantage of drunk *chicks*? That's not my style. Just want to get to know her. She seems cool."
	"Men baxet då?"	"But what about *the hustle*?"
	"Knulla bax. Bax kan vänta."	"*Fuck the hustle. The hustle* can wait."
		(*SPS*, Hellman and Carmona 2017: 103)[3]

The protagonists in all four novels are also depicted as using the nominal masculine vocatives "bror,"/"brorsan"/"brosh" [~ 'bro,' 'brother,' 'bruh,' different variants are preferred in the different novels], and "mannen" [~ 'man']. Abundant use of these vocatives has been associated with Swedish CUV, and are sometimes used in humorous stylizations of CUV speakers in popular cultural outputs (e.g., Jonsson et al. 2020). They are often described as typical of spoken youth language, and important for creating rapport between speakers (e.g., Smalley 2015). The vocatives are particularly common in *SPS* and *FTL*, where they are used exclusively for depicting interactions between the male characters. One could accordingly argue that they contribute to reinforce the discursively constructed link between CUV and masculinity (e.g., Milani and Jonsson 2011), which is also reinforced by the thematic content of the depicted interactions, as in Example (1).

In *IDB*, however, "bror" is also used in dialogues between the female characters. The protagonists of *SPS* and *FTL* are furthermore depicted as frequently using the discourse marker "du vet" ['you know'], as well as the nominal and verbal suffix –*ish* (e.g., "beknish," ['push-ish'], *FTL* p. 163), both of which have been linked to Swedish

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3 Please note that the italics have been added in the English translation; they do not appear in the original.

CUV (e.g., Ganuza et al. 2020). The protagonist in *SPS* is also depicted as using the first-person pronoun "benim" on several occasions, a loan word originally from Turkish that has been described as a new ego-honorific pronoun in Swedish CUV (Young 2021). It occurs once in *Mizeria* as well.

The CUV lexical indexical register icons are used by the protagonists of all four novels, and by most other characters of the same age and social background. They are depicted as being mutually intelligible for these characters. They are not generally used by the older characters, such as the protagonists' parents. Hence, their use is indexically linked to youthfulness and in-group membership, and they are important for the construction of the characterological figure of the young person from the Million Homes areas. Importantly, the lexical register icons appear in dialogues and inner monologues, and sometimes also in the narration of the stories. They are not visually marked as non-standard, nor are they generally commented on. That is to say, they are depicted as forming part of the young characters' *authentic voices* (Rampton 2009) and their everyday Swedish.

Words and expressions of English origin are relatively common in the four novels as well. Contributions in English are also neither visually marked nor commented on. Hence, they are similarly depicted as forming part of the fictional characters' everyday Swedish (see Example (2)).

(2)   Original
        "Om hon var tyst hon var säkert scared as fuck", säger Amina. "Ska hon höja handen mot han så att han kan svara med att slå ihjäl henne istället? Hell no. Då det är bättre att ligga low key. Och även om hon sa ifrån. Vad!? Kommer han sluta bara sådär? På gud han kommer inte sluta. Han är fucked up och kommer inte sluta vara det bara för nån gäri säger åt han. Hon borde sagt ifrån … Bitch please!

        Our translation
        "If she was quiet, she was probably *scared as fuck*," says Amina. "Should she lift a hand against him, so he can beat her to death? *Hell no*. In that case it's better to stay *low key*. And even if she said something. What!? Do you think he's just going to stop? I swear to God he won't stop. He's *fucked up* and he's not going to stop being that way just because some broad tells him to. She should have said something … *Bitch please*!
                                    (*IDB*, Alsaati 2020: 45)[4]

In general, no explanations are given of colloquial slang or words and phrases in English, indicating that readers are expected to be familiar with them, or to be able to follow the narrative in spite of them.

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4 Note again that the italics have been added in the English translation; they do not appear in the original.

FTL differs in this regard, since it includes a two-page slang glossary at the end of the novel. The glossary implies that the author (or publisher) suspects that some readers might need the support of a word list to be able to follow the story. It constructs the language used in the novel as being in need of translation. Interestingly, the glossary contains only a selection of the slang words used in the novel. It does not contain several of the most commonly used slang words that have previously been associated with Swedish CUV, such as "guzz," ['girl'], "keff" ['bad'], "lack" ['angry'] and "chilla" ['take it easy'], perhaps because these are common in Swedish popular culture today and are also used by many individuals who do not come from Million Homes areas.[5] The glossary also omits older Swedish slang words that frequently appear in the novel, like "gola" ['snitch'], "knega" ['work'], or "polare," ['buddy], and slang words of English origin, like "bitch," "cash," and "stash." Above all, the glossary contains a variety of swear words (many related to sex), and street terms for drugs and drug dealing. Hence, the glossary has been created with a particular reader in mind, one who is familiar with some sorts of slang but not others. Through its selection of words and expressions, one could argue that the glossary contributes to create a rather stereotypical indexical link between CUV, sexism and criminality.

Word order variation is another stylistic resource employed strategically in three of the four novels. As mentioned in Section 2.1, the use of XSV has been described as emblematic of spoken Swedish CUV. Like other Germanic languages except for English, Swedish is often described as a "verb-second" (V2) language, due to its preference for placing the finite verb in the second position of declarative clauses. Accordingly, when a declarative clause begins with something other than the subject, subject-verb inversion typically occurs (Ex. "Då sprang dom" (XVS), lit. 'Then ran they'). It is also used to distinguish between declarative and interrogative clauses. In the Comprehensive Grammar of Modern Swedish (SAG 1999), the V2 rule is presented as robust, with only a few known exceptions.

Research on spoken Swedish CUV has shown, however, that Swedish allows for more word order variation than the descriptive grammar acknowledges (e.g., Ganuza 2008). In fact, some speakers from the multilingual urban settings produce relatively many examples of XSV (e.g., "Då dom sprang" (XSV) lit. 'Then they ran'), at least in their everyday Swedish with peers of the same age and social background (e.g., Ganuza 2008; see also Senter 2022). Moreover, research on Swedish second-language acquisition has shown that XSV is also a common feature of Swedish learner language (e.g., Ganuza 2008).

The four novels vary with respect to whether or not, and *how*, they employ XSV. In *Mizeria*, XSV does not occur at all. In *SPS*, the main protagonist Carlos is depicted as

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5 Since 2006, these words are even included in the National Swedish Academy Word List.

a frequent user of CUV lexical register icons, but is never depicted as using XSV. Instead, XSV is reserved for representing adult second-language speaker styles (see Section 4.3). In *IDB* and *FTL*, by contrast, XSV is used frequently in the representation of the protagonists' language. Both Samira, in *IDB*, and Khosro and Morad, in *FTL*, are depicted as switching between XVS and XSV throughout the novels, as do all of their close friends. Examples (3a)–(3c) illustrate how Morad switches between XSV and XVS in the same paragraph.

(3)   a.   Sen, vi gör upp en plan. [XSV]
           'Then, we'll make a plan.'
      b.   Om de har bil, tar vi upp jakten per bil. [XVS]
           'If they have a car, we'll chase them by car.'
      c.   Annars, Sasha får planka på T-banan. [XSV]
           'Otherwise, Sasha will have to dodge the fare in the metro.'

                                                                    (*FTL*, Agah 2013: 92)

In both *FTL* and *IDB*, the characters produce standard XVS more often than XSV, and XVS is found in all contexts. XSV occurs mainly in dialogues, and sometimes in the narration of the protagonists' inner thoughts. It rarely occurs in descriptive narration, however.

Descriptions of spoken Swedish CUV often include impressionistic observations of a distinctive "suburban-sounding"[6] staccato rhythm, which indexically links the speaker to the urban peripheries (Bijvoet and Senter 2021; Young 2022). In the four novels, however, pronunciation is rarely used to characterize the language of the speakers who are portrayed as having grown up in Sweden in the Million Homes areas. Their pronunciation is not visually marked as non-standard, and is seldom remarked on explicitly (the exception being a few occasions in *SPS* when a minor character is described as having "a real-Swede accent" (p. 103), "a ghetto-sounding accent" (p. 221), or "an exaggeratedly Swedish accent" (p. 259)). Instead, marked pronunciation, and explicit comments about pronunciation, tend to be reserved for the characters portrayed as immigrants and as adult second-language speakers of Swedish (see Section 4.3).

4.2 Metapragmatic comments about language

The narrator's and the fictional characters' metapragmatic comments about language are important dimensions in the process of attributing meaning and value to the depicted language practices, and in getting readers to pay attention to them and

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6 In Swedish, the term "förort" [lit. 'suburb'] is often used to refer specifically to Million Homes areas.

interpret them in certain ways (e.g., Agha 2007). Explicit comments about language are, however, relatively infrequent in the four novels (which stands in contrast to what we have found in the larger corpus, Ganuza and Rydell 2023). When they do occur, they rarely concern the protagonists' ways of using Swedish, but rather focus on other, minor characters' ways of speaking (see Section 4.3).

One exception is found in *SPS*, when Carlos moves with his family to Jordbro, after having lived in a mid-sized Swedish town for a couple of years. As he settles into Jordbro, he is depicted as going through a transformation that affects the way he talks, dresses and acts (see Example (4)).

(4)   Original

Det var en ny värld som öppnades. I början tittade folk i Jordbro snett på mig för att jag talade ren, klingande svenska med östgötsk dialekt. Men snart anpassade jag mig. (p. 46) Redan efter första skoldagen i Jordbro insåg jag att det bara var att slänga seglarskorna och seglarjackan […]. I Jordbro gällde det att ha gubbfinbrallor med mockakofta och finskor likt en äkta "artist". (pp. 46–47)

Det gällde att anpassa sig till Jordbro och bästa sättet att göra det var genom hustle. Hustle gav respekt. (pp. 76–77)

Our translation

A whole new world opened up. At first, people in Jordbro viewed me with suspicion because I spoke clean-sounding Swedish with an East Gothia accent. But I adapted quickly. Already after the first day at school in Jordbro, I realized I had to get rid of the sailing shoes and the sailing jacket […]. In Jordbro, you had to wear old-man fancy-pants with a suede cardigan and dress shoes, like a real "artist."

You had to adapt to Jordbro, and the best way to do it was to hustle. Hustle gave you respect.

(*SPS*, Hellman and Carmona 2017)

This example evokes several common stereotypes about individuals from the Million Homes areas (<u>not</u> speaking "clean-sounding Swedish," dressing like "true artists," and being hustlers) – that is, it calls upon a specific characterological figure, which contributes to enregistering ways of speaking, being and dressing associated with that figure (Agha 2007). This new characterological figure is built by way of contrast with Carlos's former self. Importantly, Carlos also seems to take pride in his quick transformation, that is, it is imbued with mostly positive connotations.

Another example occurs in *FTL*, when the protagonist Khosro starts dating a girl who lives with her family in the city center. She dislikes him hanging out with his criminal friends, and she sometimes remarks on his Swedish. For instance, she complains about his frequent use of "abuu," a multifunctional word typically associated with CUV, which she claims makes him sound "so ghetto" (see Example (5)).

(5)   Original   Our translation

            ”Aboo, va jobbig du är”, säger jag   "Aboo, you're so annoying," I finally

            till slut.   say.

            ”Sluta säg abuu hela tiden, det låter   "Stop saying abuu all the time, it sounds

            så getto.”   so ghetto."

                                                    (*FTL*, Agah 2013: 237)

Importantly, the girlfriend's way of pronouncing the word is depicted differently than Khosro's (abuu vs aboo), and later in the dialogue, Khosro even corrects her pronunciation. This marks her contribution as less authentic than his, and conveys to the reader that while "aboo" forms part of Khosro's habitual repertoire, it does not belong to his girlfriend's everyday Swedish. The distinction also contributes to accentuating the difference between the two characters in terms of one being from the suburbs and the other from the city center.

    At one point in *IDB*, the protagonist Samira and her friend Amina are in a meeting with their school principal. Unlike in the rest of the text, the way they address the principal is visually marked in italics (see Example (6)), and the first-person narrator remarks that the girls address the principal as "svennigt" ['Swedishly'] as they can.

(6)   Original   Our translation

            Vi bad rektorn så svennigt vi kunde   We asked the principal, as Swedishly

            att ta bort det. *Vänligen. Kan du*   as we could, to have it removed.

            snälla. Hon svarade med tomma ord.   *Please. Would you be so kind*. She

            Givetvis, vi ska titta på det, låt mig   answered with empty words.

            återkomma.   *Naturally*, *we'll have a look, let me get*

                                                back to you.

                                                (*IDB*, Alsaati 2020: 131)

This contrasts with how the characters are depicted as speaking elsewhere. The use of italics, together with the remark and choice of lexis, marks this as an instance of *stylization*, as a performance by which Samira and Amina put on *a voice of another* (Rampton 2009). The depicted interaction showcases their ability to adjust their language to accommodate the principal, but also illustrates how they distance themselves from the voice of the principal, and from how they speak more standard-like in interaction with her. The contrast with standard Swedish in this example thus mainly serves to attribute positive value to their everyday Swedish.

4.3 Contrasts with adult second-language speaker styles

In general, pronunciation is rarely used to characterize the protagonists' ways of speaking in the four novels. By contrast, the pronunciation of the characters who are

portrayed as immigrants and as adult second-language speakers of Swedish is often visually marked as non-standard, with the use of unconventional spelling to suggest their variant pronunciations (see (7a)–(7c) from the novel *SPS*).

(7) a. "Den killen är mikke hal." (p. 96)
         'That guy is very slippery.'
     b. "Barfö du skoja med mej hellattidden Victo, barfö?" (p. 209)
         'Why do you make fun of me all the time Victor, why?'
     c. "Jeg vill buuurja med att tacka för att niij kom." (p. 311)
         'I want to begin by thanking you for coming.'

                                                    (*SPS*, Hellman and Carmona 2017)

The examples in (7) typify aspects of Swedish pronunciation that are well known to be difficult for adult second-language learners (e.g., Abrahamsson 2009), such as the minimal contrast between the vowels "y" and "i" (Example (7a): "mikke" instead of "mycket"), and "ö" and "u" (Example (7c): "buuurja" instead of "börja"), the minimal contrast between the consonants "v" and "b" (Example (7b): "barfö" instead of "varför"), as well as the difference in duration between Swedish short and long vowels (Example (7b): "hellatidden" instead of "hela tiden"). Partly different unconventional spellings are used with the different characters, thus indexing their different foreign accents. For example, the character in (7b) is depicted as using final consonant deletion, while the character in (7c) uses elongated vowels. This impression is also reinforced by the characters' names (Vlatko, Bafetimbi Faal, and Stanislav) and the narrator's comments about their origins ("Yugo," "Gambian," and "Russian," respectively).

Representations of adult Swedish second-language speaker styles are most frequent in the novels *SPS* and *FTL*. In addition to visual representation of the characters' foreign-accented speech, the narrator of *SPS* repeatedly comments on their (deficient) Swedish: "despite his bad Swedish" (p. 55), "in his Yugo accent" (p. 113), "his Swedish got even worse" (p. 114), "He hardly spoke Swedish" (p. 188), "with his peculiar accent" (p. 209). This stands in contrast to the general lack of commentary about the protagonist's Swedish, except when he first moves to Jordbro (see Example (4)).

In addition to foreign accents, the characters who are positioned as second-language speakers of Swedish are often represented as using simplified morphology and syntax and non-idiomatic expressions. This is visible, for example, in *FTL* when Khosro's mother is depicted as speaking Swedish on the phone (see Example (8)). It contrasts with how she is depicted as speaking when using Farsi, which is textually represented by standard Swedish together with a remark that it is uttered in Farsi (a commonly used strategy for representing multilingualism in literature, e.g., Tidigs 2014).

(8)   Original
   ”Nej sluta du, jag blir skäms. Jag
   kommer igår eftermiddag och gjorde
   ringa till du men ingen svarar. Aaaa
   … jaaa … nej inte … mmmm … nej,
   nej nej det bryr sig ingen roooll, säger
   hon i luren. […] I vardagsrummet
   ligger mina syskon och vrider sig
   röda av morsans SFI-svenska.

Our translation
   "No stop you, I go embarrassed. I
   come yesterday afternoon and I do
   call you but nobody answer. Aaaah
   …. yeees … no not … mmmm … no,
   no no it doesn't anyone caaares, she
   says into the phone. […] In the living
   room, my siblings are on the floor
   roaring with laughter at our mom's
   SFI Swedish.

(*FTL*, Agah 2013: 298)

In Example (8), the mother's incompetence in Swedish is reinforced by the image of Khosro's younger siblings roaring with laughter at her "SFI Swedish" (SFI is an acronym for "Swedish for Immigrants," and refers to classes in basic Swedish for adult second-language learners). The comical framing of the mother's use of Swedish is an image that recurs in several other novels in our larger study. That is, adult second-language speakers are often represented as comical and laughable.

The marking of the characters' Swedish as non-standard, the remarks about their deficient Swedish, and the comical framing of their use of the language are thus semiotic resources employed to construct the characterological figure of the adult second-language speaker. This contrasts with the construction of the characterological figure of the young CUV speaker, who is depicted as competent, cool and street-wise. The juxtaposition of the two characterological figures contributes to indexing the CUV speaker character with positive values.

It is mainly secondary and minor characters who are positioned as second-language speakers of Swedish, often the protagonists' parents. These characters are never central to the storyline, but they represent an important linguistic contrast to the protagonists. While the parents, and other adult migrants, are depicted as struggling to learn and use Swedish, and as being comical when they attempt to use it, the protagonists are mostly depicted as competent with respect to Swedish. For example, in *SPS*, the narrator explicitly says that whereas Carlos' parents struggled to learn Swedish, he acquired it easily, becoming fluent in less than a year (p. 165). In *Mizeria*, the parents are described as always having to rely on their children to communicate with Swedish authorities, and therefore feeling inferior and outdone by them. Struggling with Swedish is thus enregistered as part and parcel of the characterological figure of the adult second-language speaker, but not with that of the young CUV speaker.

5 Discussion and conclusion

In the findings, we have shown that all four novels employ certain recurring indexical register icons to position the stories and their protagonists as authentic residents of the Million Homes areas. In particular, this is achieved through the use of lexical register icons but sometimes also syntactic emblems (see Section 4.1). These register icons serve as symbolic resources for lending authenticity to the novels (Androutsopoulos 2010: 744), while the novels also contribute to further enregistering them as belonging to Swedish CUV.

In comparison with many other novels in our larger study (Ganuza and Rydell 2023), the selected novels, particularly *FTL* and *SPS*, are characterized by extensive and varied employment of CUV register icons. A recurring strategy in other novels is to merely use a small subset of CUV slang words to indexically link fictional characters to the Million Homes areas. That is to say, many novels make use of only the most iconic and "spectacular fragments" (Rampton 1999: 423–424) of CUV to instantiate the readers' recognition of the register and its indexicals (see similar arguments in Culperer 2001; Stockwell 2020).

It is important to stress that the CUV register icons that are used in the four novels are not visually marked as non-standard, nor are they generally commented on. They appear in dialogues, inner monologues, and sometimes in the general narration of the stories. Hence, they are depicted as forming part of the protagonists', and their friends', everyday Swedish. In contrast to common media representations of Swedish CUV, which often position CUV as deviant and worrisome (e.g., Jonsson et al. 2020; Milani 2010, 2020; Stroud 2004), the fictional characters' language practices are not stereotypically positioned in contrast to more standard Swedish, nor are they represented as deficient or problematic. When contrasts with standard Swedish occur, they serve mainly to assign positive value to the main characters' use of Swedish (see Section 4.2). They contribute to indexing them as young and competent language users who are able to adjust their language according to the situation. In that sense, the novels challenge some of the negative discourses commonly associated with CUV and contribute to their resignification (Agha 2003, 2007).

In contrast to what we commonly find in sociolinguistic descriptions of spoken registers of youths from the Million Homes areas (e.g., Bijvoet and Senter 2021; Young 2022), and in stylizations of CUV in popular cultural outputs (Jonsson et al. 2020), non-standard pronunciation is rarely used to characterize the protagonists' language in these literary accounts. In the novels, depictions of non-standard pronunciation are mainly reserved for the adult second-language speaking characters. While this may partly reflect written language's lack of capacity to capture and represent subtle linguistic differences between registers (cf. Bublitz 2017; Bucholtz 2000), the contrast

serves to distinguish between the two speaker styles, and to make it available for constructing indexical meanings. The novels' representations of the adult second-language speakers embrace ideologies of deficit. Their Swedish is visually marked as non-standard and explicitly commented on negatively. Moreover, the adult second-language speakers are often depicted in humorous situations, which make them appear incompetent, laughable or pitiful. This differs from the portrayal of the CUV speakers. The juxtaposition of these two speaker styles contributes to position the protagonists as young and linguistically competent. The contrast also serves to accentuate the generational boundaries and fluctuating relations of power that exist between the protagonists and the adult migrants, particularly their parents.

While the way the novels depict CUV speakers ascribes them with certain positive values, the novels reproduce and reinforce images of the Million Homes areas as breeding grounds for criminality and other social problems. All of the extracts that we have presented in the findings show that criminality and sexuality are salient themes. By linking the representation of CUV to such themes, the novels discursively reinforce the indexical links that are often made between CUV, toughness, criminality and sexism (Milani and Jonsson 2011; Jonsson et al. 2020). Quite tellingly, the most frequent employment of CUV register icons appears in the two novels focusing on male protagonists and their encounters with criminality. As a result, the novels end up reproducing many of the common stereotypes associated with CUV, despite the positive values that they simultaneously assign to the protagonists' language practices.

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Bionotes

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