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### **WHEN THE WORLD MEETS THE SUBURBS: MULTIETHNIC YOUTH SLANG IN SWEDEN**

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The following article deals with a relatively new variety of the Swedish language, the so-called multiethnic youth language spoken by young people in multicultural and multilingual urban settings in Sweden. Due to several waves of immigrants and refugees, this country has become incredibly ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, which, in turn, has led to the fact that young people growing up in multicultural areas of big cities, such as Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö, hear and use a variety of different languages and styles every day. This melting pot of languages has reflected in a rather unusual variety of Swedish called the multiethnic youth language, which differs from common Swedish vernacular in such aspects as pronunciation, grammar, syntax and vocabulary, more specifically, slang. The following article analyzes the multiethnic youth slang in comparison to the common Swedish one and describes it in terms of vocabulary, various sources of loanwords and ways of using its elements in the so-called “immigrant literature” and song lyrics written by the Swedes with an immigrant background. It also deals with some of the concepts that are richly represented in the multiethnic youth slang, as well as some morphological aspects of this variety. Such sociolinguistic factors as reasons for young people using this particular style of the Swedish language are also considered in this article.

**Keywords:** slang, multiethnic youth language, style, sociolinguistic variation.

One of the most distinctive features of any language variation is slang words because they instantly allow the audience to distinguish it from a variety of different language styles and make it stand out from the rest. In his work *Svensk språkstil: stil & stilanalys* («Swedish language style:

style and stylistic analysis”) K. Möijer defines slang as a *partially creating new elements, highly informal and nonnormative group language, that can often be found among young people, especially in big cities, or people with similar professional interests* [Möijer, 1989, s.60]. According to one of the most acclaimed researchers of Swedish slang, U.-B. Kotsinas, slang words are *not always appropriate in the written language, and are not a part of a literary language* [Kotsinas, 2003, s.7].

Slang can also act as disguise for something a speaker wants to address or as a way of expressing one’s creativity. Most importantly, it allows a speaker to identify with a certain group, be it a social, ethnic, age or any other one. Sometimes a person can feel like a slang word is a better fit for something he or she wants to express and choose it instead of something that is typical for the common vernacular. Slang can even be used when a speaker feels strongly about something or is emotional, it can also express irony or criticism. Last but not least, slang can be a way to protest against society and its norms, something that allows an individual to use language as a tool.

The Swedish language is no exception, and although its vernacular is very rich in slang, the following article deals with the slang that is a part of a specific language variation used by young Swedes in multilingual and multicultural urban settings. This variation can be heard in the areas densely populated by first and second generation immigrants, mainly in such Swedish cities as Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö.

Throughout the years Sweden has become a home to several waves of immigrants and refugees, which has resulted in the fact that this country is incredibly ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, especially when it comes to big cities. This, in turn, has led to an emergence of a variety of different variations of Swedish that many people in such areas hear and use every day. Their speakers have different native languages, backgrounds and levels of language proficiency, ranging from various stages of interlanguage to native speakers using different styles. As a result, some young people that live in urban areas densely populated by first and second generation immigrants have developed a specific variation of Swedish that is often called “multiethnic youth language” in modern linguistics. Common Swedes may know it as “Rinkeby Swedish” or “immigrant Swedish”, and even “blatte Swedish”, which is a derogatory term for a person with an immigrant background.

Various features of the multiethnic youth language (hereinafter referred to as the MYL) can also be found in some works of the so called immigrant writers, poets and artists, whose texts act as a source of material analysed in this article. These include literary works and songs produced by the first or second generation immigrants that mainly focus on the immigrant experience and identity issues in Sweden and contain many examples of multiethnic slang words and expressions. Slang elements for the analysis given below were taken from the following works of Swedish writers and songwriters:

- 1) Khemiri J. H. *Ett öga rött* (“One eye red”): a novel about adolescence written from a perspective of a young boy with an immigrant background;
- 2) Anyuru J. *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* (“Only the gods are new”): a collection of poems about modern Sweden and life in the urban multicultural settings;
- 3) Bakhtiari M. *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (“Call it whatever the hell you want”): a novel about multiculturalism and various ethnic and cultural identities in modern Sweden;
- 4) Sattarvandi H. L. *Still* (“Still”): a novel about life in modern urban settings from perspective of young people with different ethnic backgrounds;
- 5) Wenger A. L. *Till vår ära* (“In our honor”): a novella about double identity issues experienced by a young boy with an immigrant background;
- 6) Lundin E. *Abiat* (“Abiat/Cocaine”), *Annie Lööf* (“Annie Lööf”), *En dag* (“One day”), *Suedi* (“Suedi/Swede”): songs that mainly focus on the immigrant experience in modern Sweden.

Before going into the actual analysis of the examples of slang found in the texts listed above it can be worth giving an overview of the MYL and its key linguistic features. The MYL cannot be called a dialect, because it is not used by a vast majority of inhabitants of a specific area. Nor is it a sociolect, because young people often use it as a register, which means that it is only a temporary switch between variations caused by the same motives as speech accommodation (change of situation, audience etc.). In this article the MYL will be therefore defined as style — a way the speaker constructs his or her identity by choosing specific language features. The following definition of style given by N. Coupland in his

work *Style: language variation and identity* appears to be very useful for defining such kind of variation as the MYL: "...semantic organization of linguistic choices taking account of communicative purposes or circumstances" [Coupland, 2007, p.13].

Defining the MYL as style can be additionally supported by the reasons as to why young Swedes choose to use it. First and foremost, it is their way to express their identity and identify with a certain group, it being a multicultural and multilingual one that often includes individuals with an immigrant background. The MYL can also be used for the following reasons:

- 1) To express linguistic creativity and create new words and expressions;
- 2) To hide or disguise information from individuals, whom the speaker does not consider as recipients;
- 3) To show how cool, tough and modern the speaker is, how different he or she is from the "ordinary" or "boring" people;
- 4) To express how proud the speaker is of his or her background, it being culture, language, ethnicity etc.
- 5) To show solidarity and respect to the parents or peers who may have recently immigrated to Sweden and have not yet acquired a high level of proficiency in the Swedish language;
- 6) To express irony or sarcasm in relation to stereotypes towards linguistic features of the varieties of Swedish spoken by immigrants in multicultural and multilingual urban settings;
- 7) To show protest against society that does not identify the speaker as a Swede because of his or her appearance, ethnicity, name or background, even if the speaker was born and raised in Sweden. This ties in with the fact that society can sometimes view these young people as members of a specific group ("others"), no matter what variety of Swedish they speak, even if it is common vernacular.

Some studies have shown that the communicative situation can also be a contributing factor when it comes to the frequency of usage of the MYL features. According to N. Ganuza, it tends to be higher in informal conversations with peers or long monologues [Ganuza, 2008, s.70], and it can also sometimes be caused by a lack of concentration or tiredness [Ekberg, 2013, s.262].

The MYL has a number of phonetic, grammatical, syntactical and lexical features that distinguish it from common Swedish vernacular. When it comes to phonetics, it can be a “choppy” prosody and a different kind of pronunciation of loanwords ([*tʃ*] instead of a fricative [*ʃ*] and [*z*] instead of [*s*]), because those sounds are traditionally absent in most Swedish dialects).

The MYL grammatical features include various deviations from the formal rules of the Swedish grammar, such as confusion between neuter and common gender (that includes both feminine and masculine genders); definite and indefinite forms of nouns and adjectives; plural forms; conjugation of regular and irregular verbs; pronouns, especially possessive; prepositions etc.

One of the most distinctive features of the MYL is the subject-verb order variation that can occur in young people’s speech. From a syntactic point of view Swedish has a so called V2 word order, which means that the finite verb in a main clause is placed on the second position, so whenever a main clause begins with something other than the subject, an inversion occurs (which results in a XVS word order). This feature has traditionally been rather difficult for second language learners and can indeed be used incorrectly by young people using the MYL when they do not apply the inversion where needed and use the XSV word order instead.

Other linguistic features of the MYL include code-switching, since many speakers have more than one native language; various partially modified conventionalised word combinations and novel word combinations; and, finally, some of features that can also be found in more “traditional” Swedish vernaculars. These include common slang words, prefixes and suffixes; discourse particles; excessive use of emphatic words; swearwords; ellipses, repetitions, pauses, corrections etc.

As stated above, the MYL slang is a very outstanding part of this variation. It is extremely rich and includes loanwords from a variety of languages, such as Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, Greek etc., which makes it different from the common Swedish slang that traditionally loans words from dialects, widely spoken languages and the so called “secret languages” like *knoparmojet* (chimney sweepers’ language), Romani, argot languages and *månsing* (Swedish merchants’ language). The fact that the MYL speakers use slang words from a much bigger variety of languages (including not the most spoken ones) stems from linguistic diversity

surrounding these young people in their everyday life. Sometimes it can be difficult, or even impossible, to determine from which language the word was taken from, however, it is not always the case.

One of the most famous slang words loaned by the MYL from Turkish is *guss*, which means “girl” or “chick”: *Varken gussen eller aina synes* [Khemiri, 2006, s.179]: “Neither the chick, nor the cops could be seen”<sup>1</sup>; *Nu guzzarna kallar mig baklava* [Lundin, 2015, Annie Lööf]: “Now the chicks call me baklava”. *Shunne*, *shuno* or *shino* is another example of a word loaned from Turkish to define something that slang generally refers to very often — a “guy”:

- 1) *Shuno kutade efter oss en bit* [Wenger, 2015, s.17]: “This guy was running after us for a bit”;
- 2) *Valfri solig dag, trettio shunos rullar upp som Tour de France* [Lundin, 2015, Suedi]: “Any sunny day, thirty guys come cycling like it’s Tour de France”;
- 3) *Blev testad, shuno var tunnväxt* [Lundin, 2016, Abiat]: “Was tested, the guy was thin”.

Arabic has given the MYL such words as *habibi* (“friend, pal”) or *jalla* («hurry up, come on”): *Jalla, det är dags att gå hem* [Khemiri, 2006, s.34]: “Come on, it’s time to go home”.

Just like almost any other slang, the MYL one is no exception when it comes to hiding information from potential listeners. That is why it includes a variety of different words connected with different illegal things like drugs, theft and criminality in general:

- 1) *Här fans grällmish och braj och vårt pris var ajaib* [Lundin, 2015, Suedi]: “There was weed and cannabis and our price was sweet”;
- 2) *Typ medans andra gick och baxade och zuttade* [Wenger, 2015, s.15]: “Like when everyone else was going around stealing stuff and smoking weed”;
- 3) *...en jävla småtjuv som går runt och becknar skit* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.38]: “...this damn little thief going around and selling shit”;
- 4) *Tabanjan den är fet som en blåval* [Lundin, 2016, En dag]: “The cap (“gun”) is as fat as a blue whale”.

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<sup>1</sup> All of the quotations in this article were translated from Swedish into English by its author.

Police is also something a speaker would prefer to call differently — such words as *aina* or *gris* are very common in the MYL:

- 1) ...*och sen hon står redo med aina i kuliss och arresterar?* [Khemiri, 2006, s.175]: “... and then she’s gonna stand backstage with the cops and arrest me?”;
- 2) *Så fort det luktade gris, blev hela stämningen stel* [Lundin, 2015, Suedi]: “As soon as we felt the pigs coming, everything went still”;
- 3) ...*men Bollen sprang inte så snabbt, två grisar bakom honom...* [Wenger, 2015, s.17]: “... but Bollen wasn’t running so fast, two pigs on his tail”;
- 4) *Det gjorde till och med aina helt sjösjuk* [Lundin, 2016, Abiat]: “It even made the cops completely seasick”.

Money is also something that can be expressed differently in the MYL, with loanwords from Turkish (*para*), Romani (*lover*), Spanish (*pesetas*) etc.:

- 1) ...*Vi säljer dem till skitbra pris och sen — när vi har tillräckligt med lover...* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.50]: “We’ll sell them for a fucking great price and then, when we have enough dough...”;
- 2) *Fatta len, sen kan vi beckna och få fett para jao* [Wenger, 2015, s.20]: “Look dude, we can sell it and get a ton of cabbage”;
- 3) ...*och får feta respekten och maxade flousen* [Khemiri, 2006, s.104]: “... and get real respect and a ton of cash”;
- 4) *Jagade para från sommar till sommar* [Lundin, 2015, Annie Lööf]: “Hunting for dough from summer to summer”.

The MYL slang also includes various forms of compellation, such as *len*, *län*, *bre*, *jao*, *mannen* etc., used towards male recipients:

- 1) ...*fan är det jao, har du blivit fin?* [Wenger, 2015, s.12]: “What the hell is this, dude, are you posh now?”;
- 2) ... *ey, lyssna mannen, sa Foggy skrattande...* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.13]: “Ey, listen, man, Foggy said laughing”;
- 3) *Ey Fällan, vakna len* [Wenger, 2015, s.10]: “Ey Fallan, wake up, dude”.

A word *abou* can be used in the beginning of an utterance to draw the listener’s attention: ...*abou, armarna rätt ut, ansiktet en svart kny-*

*näve*... [Anyuru, 2003, s.34]: "...about, hands right up the sides, face as a black fist"; *Abou, du dödar min skalle toooooootalt* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.83]: "Abou, you toooooootally fuck up my brain".

Just like every other slang, the MYL one includes various words that are used to express something very positive (like *soft*) or negative (*keff*, *beck* or *bull*):

- 1) *Jag försökte tänka allt som fanns runtomkring var soft*... [Khemiri, 2006, s.99]: "I tried to imagine that everything around was cool";
- 2) *Och han sa att jag skulle be om cigg... Han va helt bull* [Bakhtiari, 2012, s.203]: "And he said I should've asked for a cigarette... He was totally lame";
- 3) *...sängen var keff baddad* [Wenger, 2015, s.21]: "...the bad was made quite shitty";
- 4) *...ni är inte ihop och du vet ju redan hur keff hon är* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.115]: "You're not together and you already know that she sucks".

It can be worth mentioning that *keff*, just like the Turkish word *guss* ("girl, chick") mentioned above, have become so popular that they were included in the thirteenth edition of the *Svenska Akademiens ordlista* (2006) — "The Swedish Academy glossary" that traditionally includes words currently used in the Swedish language.

The majority of Swedish obscene slang words and swearwords are based on the concept of religion, but the MYL, on the other hand, loans such words and expressions from other languages, where they are often connected with sexuality and genitalia. Words like *fibra* or *koto* are used as derogatory terms for female genitalia, *kahpe* or *putana* — for women involved in prostitution: *Du ställer dig bakom en jävla putana*... [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.119]: "You're protecting this fucking whore". Some of the expressions are used to offend the recipient by insinuating a sexual intercourse with his or her mother: *mamagende*, *mammaknullare*, *gå och knulla din mamma/din mamma*, *anani sikejam*: *...mammaknullare, vad säger du nu?* [Wenger, 2015, s.21]: "What are you saying, motherfucker?"

Some loan translations or calques can also be used for such emotionally loaded expressions as *jag svär på min mammas död/jag svär* («I swear on my mother's death/I swear»):

- 1) *Men jag svär, de e övergott* [Bakhtiari, 2012, s.202]: “I swear, it’s super good”;
- 2) *Jag svär på mammas död, du vet att jag menar allvar när jag svär på henne...* [Sattarvandi, 2008, s.21]: “I swear on my mother’s death, you know I’m serious when I say so...”;
- 3) *Jag sa jag svär på min mamma är hemma nu det är här jag vill stanna* [Lundin, 2016, Välkommen hem]: “I said I swear on my mom I’m home now and that’s where I wanna stay”;
- 4) *Din mader gende, jag svär på allt, ska ta revansch* [Lundin, 2015, Annie Lööf]: “You motherfucker, I swear on everything I’m gonna take my revenge”.

When it comes to slang affixes, the MYL has developed a unique one, which is quite similar to the slang suffix used in the common Swedish slang, *-is*. In the MYL, it has taken a form of *-ish* and can be added at the end of the word:

- 1) *Här fanns grällmish och braj ...* [Lundin, 2015, Suedi]: “There was weed and cannabis...”;
- 2) *...så direct jag väckte alkot och sa han skulle gittish* [Khemiri, 2006, s.98]: “... so I woke this drunk up and told him to get lost”;
- 3) *Jalla abi låt oss ta en snurrmish, brorsan var botaniker han cutta upp skurrmish, hitta oss i garaget dom cornish över en bubblish* [Lundin, 2016, En dag]: “Come on, dude, let’s smoke, bro was a botanist, he made real good shit, find us in the garage smoking real good weed”;
- 4) *Eh shu len, vad händish...* [Wenger, 2015, s.12]: “Hey dude, what’s up...”.

Slang is indeed something that is rich, creative and interesting to study, it can also be a reflection of the current social and cultural environment in the society. The multiethnic youth slang gives linguists an opportunity to research quite a unique variety of Swedish that is relatively new and includes words from an extremely big amount of languages, both widely spoken and not. Among languages that have massively contributed to the MYL slang one can name Turkish, Spanish, Arabic, Greek etc., however it can sometimes be impossible to define the source of a particular loanword because of the sheer amount of languages spoken in multicultural urban settings in Sweden.

Just like almost any other slang, the MYL one includes a number of words to define people, various illegal things, different forms of compellation and ways to draw the listener's attention, words that are used to express positive and negative attitudes, swearwords (mostly connected to sexuality), slang affixes (like *-ish*) etc.

The MYL analysis reveals the reasons why young people may feel the desire to use this particular register, their wish to show pride in their cultural or ethnical background, express creativity, sarcasm or even protest against society. It also reflects various ways of incorporating these words and phrases into vernacular speech and using its features in real life, fiction and songs — something that truly depicts modern multicultural and multilingual Sweden.

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## МИР НА ОКРАИНАХ: ШВЕДСКИЙ МУЛЬТИЭТНИЧЕСКИЙ СЛЕНГ

**Для цитирования:** *Aseeva N. A. When the world meets the suburbs: Multi-ethnic youth slang in Sweden // Скандинавская филология. 2018. Т. 16. Вып. 2. С. 208–218. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu21.2018.202>*

Описывается относительно новый вариант шведского языка — так называемый мультиэтнический язык молодежи, на котором говорят молодые люди из мультикультурных и многоязычных районов шведских городов. Наличие нескольких волн иммиграции и потоков беженцев сделали эту страну крайне разнообразной в этническом, культурном и языковом отношении; данное обстоятельство, в свою очередь, привело к тому, что многие молодые люди, проживающие в мультикультурных районах таких крупных городов, как Стокгольм, Гётеборг и Мальмё, каждый день слышат и используют в своей речи различные языки и стили. Подобная языковая среда нашла отражение в достаточно необычном варианте шведского — мультиэтническом языке молодежи, отличающемся от традиционного разговорного стиля в области произношения, грамматики, синтаксиса и сленговой лексики. Проводится анализ мультиэтнического сленга в сравнении со шведским и анализируется его словарный состав, источники заимствований и способы использования элементов данного варианта в так называемой «иммигрантской литературе» и текстах песен, авторами которых являются носители шведского языка иностранного происхождения. Отражены некоторые понятия, для обозначения которых в сленге используется большое количество лексических единиц, а также отдельные морфологические особенности данного варианта. В качестве социолингвистического аспекта приводятся причины, по которым молодые люди используют в своей речи шведский мультиэтнический язык.

**Ключевые слова:** сленг, мультиэтнический язык молодежи, стиль, социолингвистическая вариативность.

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