

CONTEMPORARY URBAN VERNACULARS IN  
RAP, LITERATURE AND IN TRANSLATION  
IN SWEDEN AND THE UK

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## Declaration

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I, Nichola Smalley confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Abstract

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This thesis explores the use of contemporary urban vernaculars in creative writing in Sweden and the UK. Contemporary urban vernaculars can be defined as varieties of informal speech that have emerged in urban areas with high ethnic and linguistic diversity, and have come to index social affiliation and identity. The thesis examines the form these varieties take when represented in selected examples of creative writing including rap lyrics, poetry, prose, drama, and translation. It also looks at the way such varieties progress from one form to another, arguing that there is a translation effect in operation as spoken language is codified through oral and written forms both within, and between, languages.

In order to do all this, the study progresses through a number of steps. First it describes the linguistic phenomena in question; identifying potential equivalences between occurrences of these phenomena in Swedish and English. It then investigates the ways these forms of spoken language have found their way into rap, and then literature, as well as exploring the connections and disparities between these creative verbal forms, both in terms of their formal qualities and their social ones. The main literary corpus consists of a small number of works in Swedish published from 2001 to 2008, including a play, poems, short stories and novels. In addition to this corpus, the thesis discusses UK novels from 2003 and 2011, and a range of lyrics by rappers in Sweden and the UK, spanning a period from the early 1990s to 2014. Subsequently, it looks at the way translators working between Swedish and English have dealt with contemporary urban vernaculars in some of these texts, as well as discussing translators' treatment of 'non-standard' language more generally. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the social implications of representing and codifying contemporary urban vernaculars in the ways described.



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## Introduction

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Men var finns då det Sverige som håller på att växa fram, det land som beskrivs på Latin Kings CD *Välkommen till förorten*, och där man talar Rinkebysvenska? Jag tror att den första romanen om den verkligheten kommer att dyka upp ganska snart – i varje fall före år 2000. Låt oss i alla fall hoppas det.<sup>1</sup>

(Altgård 1995, 17)

This thesis explores the use of contemporary urban vernaculars in creative writing in Sweden and the UK. Contemporary urban vernaculars is a term coined by Rampton (2011) to refer to linguistic practices that have emerged over the last half a century or so in urban areas with high ethnic and linguistic diversity, practices which have come to index social affiliation and identity. The thesis examines the form these varieties take when represented in selected examples of creative writing. For reasons explained in the thesis, these examples include rap lyrics, poetry, prose, drama, and translation. The thesis also looks at the way such varieties progress from one form to another, arguing that there is a translation effect in operation as spoken language is codified through oral and written forms both within, and between, languages.

In order to do all this, the study progresses through a number of steps. The early chapters describe the linguistic phenomena in question, and discuss the sociolinguistic studies that have brought them under the academic spotlight. In the course of this discussion, potential equivalences are identified between occurrences of these phenomena in Swedish and English. The second part investigates the ways these forms of spoken language have found their way into rap, and then literature, as well as exploring the connections and disparities between these creative verbal forms, both in terms of their formal qualities and their social ones. The main literary corpus consists of a small number of works in Swedish published from 2001 to 2008, including a play, poems, short stories and novels. In addition to this corpus, the thesis discusses UK novels from 2003 and 2011, and a range of lyrics by rappers in Sweden and the UK, spanning a period from the early 1990s to 2014. The final part of the thesis looks at the way translators working between Swedish and English have

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<sup>1</sup> “Where is the Sweden that is emerging, the country described on Latin Kings’ CD *Välkommen till förorten*, where people speak Rinkeby Swedish? I think the first novel about that reality will turn up soon – in any case by the year 2000. Let’s hope so, anyway.”

dealt with contemporary urban vernaculars in some of these texts, as well as discussing translators' treatment of 'non-standard' language more generally. The thesis concludes by reflecting on the social implications of representing and codifying contemporary urban vernaculars in the ways described.

When putting together the proposal for my PhD application in the summer of 2010, I saw an opportunity to enquire further into the way the written word can be used creatively as a way of challenging prevailing social structures. More specifically, I hoped to return to and build on research I had started as an undergraduate. This looked at how authors in contemporary Sweden had challenged assumptions about ethnicity, class and language use through their fictional representations of everyday language stereotypically associated with certain groups in society. Looking at the Swedish context, I felt a comparison with the UK context was justified, for reasons discussed below. Furthermore as a translator, I felt it was important to consider the way social structures could be challenged across borders, and how this process could best be facilitated by translators.

All this chimed with the specifications of the brief set by the funders of the research project. The PhD was designed to raise the profile of Swedish literature in the UK, and make UK publishers more aware of the broad range of exciting literature currently being produced in Sweden. In particular, the brief was to investigate the question of how works blending 'locally-specific language varieties' could be translated, by looking into the ways such texts functioned and drawing parallels with similar texts in other languages and national contexts.

As I began to engage with the project in greater depth, I became increasingly intrigued by the relationships between forms of creative writing, and the different ways in which each form captured the socially indexical language I was looking at. I felt that these differences and relationships were under-explored in the scholarly literature I was reading, and that this would be an interesting direction in which to take my own research.

I saw, in the literary works I was focusing on, a recurring interest in rap as a culture and a means of expression, and I started to look for research connecting the two forms. I started to explore the way forms such as rap acted to codify the spoken language of the streets on which rappers were battling out their rhymes. However, although I encountered a fair



amount of work looking separately at the sociolinguistic underpinnings and implications of rap and of literature, I found little interaction between the worlds of rap and hip hop scholarship and literary analysis. I was surprised by the lack of in-depth attention to the similarities between, say, rhyming verse and rap, or any discussions of the aspects that make the narrative structure of a tale told through rap different from one told in short story form.

I also noted the scarcity, in academic literature dealing with texts that represent contemporary urban vernaculars (CUVs)<sup>2</sup>, of detailed analysis of the translation process. Similarly, there was a lack of discussion of the impact on these texts of the transition to another linguistic and cultural environment. Even in sociology of translation, a burgeoning sub-field of Translation Studies, there seems to be little exploration of the impact of the translator's own identity on a text. In exploring the social implications of CUVs' crossing or non-crossing of borders, it struck me that the translator's identity, background and position in society could all affect the translation they produced in major ways. But I found little evidence to support this theory, and indeed, little or no attempt to even consider this issue in the academic literature I have had access to.

### Why Sweden? Why Now?

My decision to focus on Sweden and the UK was partly a response to practical matters, such as the fact that I speak Swedish and am based in the UK, that I am a translator from Swedish to English, and that the original project brief related specifically to a project looking at the translation of new forms of language from Swedish. However, it was also grounded in the fact that as a translator working from Swedish to English, I am interested in these questions in terms of my own professional practice within that realm. I have been personally and intellectually inspired by the way Swedish writers in particular have collectively (though not collaboratively) challenged prevailing discourses about ethnicity, language and the right to a voice in society. I was interested in looking in more depth at whether there were parallels in the UK, both from a professional perspective (i.e. could

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<sup>2</sup> See Section 1.1.9 for a definition/discussion of contemporary urban vernaculars

such parallels assist me if I were to undertake a translation of any of these texts?), and from an intellectual one (i.e. what would such parallels or the lack of them have to say about the way ethnicity and language are represented and understood in the UK and Sweden respectively?). This intersection of professional and theoretical interests comes into play in Part III of this thesis particularly.

There is another, more scholarly reason for considering these two contexts alongside one another. The history of migration to Sweden and the UK varies significantly, in ways that are related to the UK's colonial past, and Sweden's post-war openness to immigration for labour/industrial and humanitarian reasons. It could be argued that Britain became a multicultural society much earlier than Sweden did (although of course, this depends on how you define the term 'multicultural'). However, one thing that is common to both Sweden and the UK (and many other countries around the world) is the increase in geographical mobility over the past one hundred years. This increase in the movement of peoples has arguably led to an increase in contact between languages globally; in Sweden and the UK this has certainly been the case. The resulting linguistic changes are therefore highly topical. As discussed in Chapter 2, the first studies identifying CUVs in Sweden and the UK emerged at around the same time, during the mid-1980s (although the term itself was not used until later). It is interesting, therefore, to compare how researchers in these two contexts have viewed, discussed, and named the phenomenon. As far as I am aware, this is the first study in which this task has been attempted at length.

One product of this societal change has been increasing numbers of people addressing this mobility and its consequences in the Arts. Writers in Sweden and the UK have attracted particular attention for their treatments of migration and its linguistic consequences, something that has played a role in widening awareness of associated issues in the societies around them, and claiming more space on the public stage for groups that have been marginalised in society. Part of this process is also a developing awareness across national borders of the effects of migration and globalisation, something that can only truly happen with the help of well-informed, sensitive translators. It is unlikely that writers' interest in addressing these issues is going to wane as each successive generation deals with the issues faced by them, their families and the society around them. As a result, it is likely that the

need to understand, and to translate texts that feature representations of CUVs is going to increase, and that the translators of the future will need to be better equipped to do so.

Finally, although a focus on contemporary Swedish literature was the object of the project brief, there were other, more personal considerations that lay behind my specific choices. Analysing contemporary phenomena, whether social, linguistic or literary, is fraught with difficulties resulting from the fact that the ‘dust’ has yet to settle; that what appears interesting may not develop, or may not turn out to be as significant as it initially appears. This means it can be hard to achieve the requisite distance from the subject. Despite this, I was drawn specifically to looking at musical, literary and social phenomena that are still very much in progress. Although some of the primary sources I reference are from the mid-nineties (e.g. The Latin Kings’ lyrics), others are constantly being developed and updated (JME’s Twitter feed, for example). The reason for my interest in contemporary issues is partly the element of suspense: what form will Jonas Hassen Khemiri’s next play take, and will it add a new layer to my analysis? Are the young people living on my street still using the words I can trace in the books I am analysing? Do new terms they pick up appear in rappers’ verses? The time-span is also dictated by the timing of the emergence of these works. Prior to The Latin Kings’ first tracks appearing in 1993-94, very few attempts had been made to do anything similar to what they were doing, that is, rapping in Swedish about life in Stockholm’s post-war suburban estates. Likewise, prior to the publication of Alejandro Leiva Wenger’s collection of short stories *Till vår ära*, in 2001, no authors had attempted to represent the experiences of young people living in suburban areas in Sweden, or at least, none of these attempts had been published.

## Limitations of the Thesis

Although I have attempted to do justice to the UK primary sources in this thesis, there is necessarily something of an imbalance towards the Swedish sources, primarily as a response to the initial brief set for the project, and the fact that it was mainly concerned with finding strategies for the translation of Swedish literature.

This is also not a survey of all texts that represent contemporary urban vernaculars. My choice of rap and literary texts was based on:

- ∞ the extent to which they used CUVs – texts featuring CUVs to a greater degree providing more material for analysis,
- ∞ whether the text itself engaged with its own use of CUVs in a way that might be interesting for my analysis,
- ∞ the extent to which they engaged intertextually with other texts featuring CUVs – this applied primarily to the literary works, and
- ∞ whether they had been translated into English – again, in the case of the literary texts.

Finally, given that I would be working with these texts for a considerable length of time, I sought out works I enjoyed reading and listening to, and that I judged, from my subjective perspective, to reward further analysis. As a result, there are many texts I have not considered which would have been worthy of consideration.

A note on methodology: this project is interdisciplinary in nature, and as a result, I have adopted a range of research methods. Close reading/listening and interpretation of texts is coupled with qualitative analysis of survey results regarding translation practices. The texts selected for analysis are not strictly representative. Nor, I feel, do they need to be. The purpose of this study is to discuss the use of a particular kind of language in texts in two national contexts, and the ways in which translators have dealt, or could deal, with these. The texts selected represent a variety of examples where writers and rappers have used CUVs to varying extents and in different ways. I do not claim to present an exhaustive discussion of these various approaches to CUVs, and neither do I feel this would be beneficial to the discussion as a whole. There are undoubtedly many ways of representing CUVs that are not discussed here, but they are not found in the published works I have had access to, and are therefore, to my knowledge, not available to be translated – therefore discussing them would be beyond the scope of this study.

In an ideal world, this project would have paid much more attention to the use of contemporary urban vernaculars in other media, such as film and television. These are particularly fruitful spaces for enquiry, as the forms themselves offer the opportunity for

multimodal analyses. Both genres have also featured multiple and complex representations of linguistic and social environments that complement, and potentially have an impact on, the literary and lyrical representations I discuss. However, I feel that to have done so would have required a different set of theoretical tools, or a restriction to a single national context, and both of these options would have run counter to my project aims.

I made the decision to focus on rap, rather than other styles of song, for a number of reasons. First, rap is more frequently mentioned in public discourse in the context of CUVs than other styles of music. This does not mean that singers of other styles do not use CUVs in their performance at all, although I would argue that any such use is less accentuated. The fact that the use of CUVs in other forms is less accentuated therefore renders this use less visible. It is also not customarily remarked upon. It is difficult to say which of these two considerations gives rise to the other; perhaps they are mutually reinforcing, perhaps they are unrelated. But that is a topic for another project. Another reason for the focus on rap is its role as a medium through which under-represented communities have challenged existing social power structures. The connection with CUVs does not automatically follow from this, of course, but the fact that CUVs have generally been stigmatised in society (see Section 1.2.5) makes this association worth investigating. Thirdly, the primacy of form over content in rap (see Section 3.1.2 for a discussion of this) makes it an ideal site for verbal play and innovation. The emerging, mutating nature of CUVs also facilitates a great deal of creativity, and these two sites for innovation have often intersected, as we shall see during the course of this thesis.

One area that has close links with rap, but which does not feature to any significant extent in this thesis, is the spoken word/poetry slam format. Again, there are a number of reasons for this. Grime in the UK and hip hop in Sweden have both been major forces that have united and mobilised young people in areas where CUVs are spoken. Although grime artists could be said to have had limited commercial success on one level, I can personally attest to their extreme popularity among young people in the parts of London where CUVs have been documented. Take the fact that at one point, at the height of grime's popularity in the mid-2000s, you could regularly see groups of young people standing around 'battling' lyrics over beats played on their mobile phones. On a smaller scale, the same could be said of the hip hop scene in Stockholm's Kungsträdgården in the mid-1980s (Strage 2001, 77–83).

Spoken word lacks the commercial and popular reach that rap has – it does not produce best-selling albums or internet celebrities (Benjamin Zephaniah, one of the UK’s most famous ‘dub poets’ and spoken word artists has over 18,000 followers on Twitter, while JME, a well-known grime rapper, has over 275,000 (as of August 2014)). Likewise, spoken word does not have the youth appeal that rap has – for whatever reason, it has overtones of pedagogy – of getting young people to use their verbal skills ‘productively’, artistically. That is not to say these forms are not linked; on the contrary, they are deeply connected in the history of African and African-American oral tradition<sup>3</sup>. It is also not to say one form is better or worse than the other. Spoken word is generally (although not exclusively) performed without music, as the emphasis of the form is on storytelling, or on the ‘message’ of the words. The musical component of rap is fundamental. I believe that this gives rap a heightened appeal, greater relevance and urgency for young people who may think not only that they can impress their peers but also that they might build a future career for themselves as rappers. For this reason, I have restricted my research to rap, rather than including spoken word, though the latter form would be an interesting area for further study.

Another thing this thesis does not deal with is ‘immigrant’ or ‘migrant’ literature. There is a body of research that deals with writing by migrants about migration and the Otherness experienced by the migrant subject in Sweden (cf. Gröndahl 2002). However, I want to make a clear distinction here between migrant writing and the texts discussed in this study. The writers whose work I discuss are writing from within Swedish and UK society, societies they have lived in all, or almost all their lives. Although many of them deal with the marginality and Otherness they or others experience within this context, to view their writing as migrant writing would be inaccurate. In my opinion, it is even problematic to raise the issue of migrant writing in light of the work that writers such as Khemiri and Anyuru have done to reinforce their non-migrant status in Swedish society.

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<sup>3</sup> Though I am suspicious of asserting too close an association between a contemporary popular music form and traditions that developed thousands of miles away among the forefathers of some of the people now producing it. There are all kinds of other influences and factors that have shaped rap as it is today, some of which may have had equally significant, if less attention-grabbing influence.

It is an unfortunate fact that, except for a few brief mentions, the authors and artists discussed in this thesis are all men. I admit that I realised this only part-way through the thesis, when I had already done a greater part of the research. The preponderance of male writers is unfortunate in that it reaffirms a perception that men and boys are the primary innovators and users of CUVs – a perception that is not supported by my personal experience of language use at street level, but is a disappointing feature of (well-known) representations of CUVs in creative forms. While women do rap, and some are immensely successful, the overwhelming majority of popular rappers are men. And although many women in Sweden and the UK are successful in their writing in general, there is a notable scarcity of female writers representing CUVs in published literature. One prominent Swedish writer whose work I have not included is Marjaneh Bakhtiari. Her debut novel *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (Call It What You Damn Well Like), from 2005, has been compared with Khemiri and Leiva Wenger because of its sharp satire on identity and ethnicity and its deft play with language. However, although Bakhtiari's characters use colloquial language, I did not feel that there was sufficient evidence of CUV use in the novel to warrant including it in my research. In fact, I felt that to do so would undermine the study somewhat – by deviating from the text selection criteria I had set, I would potentially be opening myself up to including any text that was written in a slangy or informal style.

The Swedish corpus is largely made up of works by Jonas Hassen Khemiri. This could be viewed as limiting the applicability of the conclusions of this thesis – after all, his style is unique to him, and devoting too much attention to translations of that style could mean that other literary styles are not taken into account. However, all in all I do not feel that this presents too much of an issue. This thesis sets out to deal with a specific challenge: the use in texts, and the treatment in translations, of CUVs. Khemiri is a prominent proponent of this, making it a very useful source of material for analysis. Information gleaned from this analysis could usefully be applied to any writer using CUVs, as long as the person doing that applying was mindful of the fact that Khemiri's stylistic quirks manipulate the CUVs he represents in a way that may differ from those of another writer.

## Recurrent Themes and Key Definitions

There are certain themes that recur throughout the thesis, and it seems appropriate to outline them here so that the reader can follow them as they appear.

One is the notion of identity, an issue closely tied up with language use. As Coupland and Jaworski state, identity is a notion that tends to become overly simplified (Coupland and Jaworski 2009, 11). It is easy to imagine that someone who mixes in a certain social group, does a certain job or comes from a certain place would identify with that group, job or place to some extent. However, in reality, people's identities are often much more complex. Identities are subjective – what one person feels is an identifying feature of being a resident of a Stockholm suburb might seem insignificant to someone else. Identities overlap – someone can at once identify as a resident of that same Stockholm suburb, and also be an employee at a company in central Gothenburg, or a student at a university in London. Identities can be performed or constructed – if someone wants to appear to be or not to be a resident of a Stockholm suburb, they can adopt, or attempt to adopt, strategies in keeping with that wish. Pennycook discusses how the performance of identities through rap/hip hop can be read as “the production of newly imagined linguistic and cultural identities that transcend the boundaries of language, community and nation as commonly conceived” (Pennycook 2009, 337). I would add to this the idea that these identities can traverse boundaries of genre and form. Certain of the rappers and writers discussed in this thesis have made identity a core part of their verbal art. Certain of them borrow identities constructed by other verbal artists. With this in mind, the identities they choose to show or construct should not be taken at face value. This leads in to my next point.

The idea of authenticity, the second key theme in this thesis, is closely bound to identity in relation to language, to rap, and even, to some extent, to literature. Wahneema Lubiano writes that “the idea of authenticity – a notion that implies essence – can derive from the idea that a particular group and individual entities of the group can be recognized by the ways in which they are shown with some measure of the “real” or authentic or essential qualities of that group” (Lubiano 1996, 186). In the context of language use, Coupland states that “at least implicitly, sociolinguistics has made strong assumptions about authentic speech and about the authentic status of (some) speakers [...] But ‘real language’ is an



increasingly uncertain notion” (Coupland 2007, 179). This assumption that spoken language is necessarily authentic has been challenged by studies that have looked at ways in which language use in itself constitutes a performance (cf. Section 1.1.6), but it must be said that the relative spontaneity of spoken language represents a contrast with written language, and especially with fiction. Trotzig discusses the status of different kinds of writing in terms of the authenticity of their representation: “Att självbiografi är lågstatus i litterär bemärkelse råder det nog inga tvivel om. Men det finns också en styrka i det personliga vittnesmålet i självbiografin, som romanen saknar eftersom den inte kan uppnå samma aura av autenticitet, även om självbiografin också är ett utslag av subjektivitet”<sup>4</sup> (Trotzig 2004, 26). This contrast between fiction and autobiography in terms of the relative authenticity of each form has echoes in rap, where the link between personal experience and performance has been held up as paramount, even though this relationship is much more complex than appearances would suggest. Indeed, my understanding of authenticity in the contexts discussed in this thesis is somewhat counter-intuitive. I argue that authenticity, or the appearance thereof, can be performed by an individual or group in order to suggest belonging or allegiance to a culture/community, etc. This is explored in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Another question I would like to raise is whether in this context there is a broader sense of translation than the transfer of meaning from one language into another. Here I would like to call on the work of Roman Jakobson. He devised a theory of translation that involved three levels at which translation could operate: the intra-lingual, the inter-lingual and the inter-semiotic:

Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other verbal signs in the same language.

Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems

(Jakobson 2012, 127)

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<sup>4</sup> “There’s no doubt about the low status in a literary sense of autobiography. But there is also a strength in the personal testimony of autobiography, which the novel lacks because it is unable to attain the same aura of authenticity, even though autobiography is also a result of subjectivity.”

My argument is that the stages CUVs have progressed through can – if on something of a metaphorical level – be talked of as translations in these terms. For instance, the passage of CUVs from language of the street and the school playground into performed or recorded rap lyrics with their particular rhythm, cadence, and aural/oral qualities could be viewed as a form of inter-semiotic or even intra-lingual translation. The next stage, from there onto the written page or the dramatic performance, where there are whole new sets of conventions, would be intra-lingual (perhaps with elements of intersemiotic translation). The final stage is the inter-lingual phase in which the written word in one language is replicated in another language. Although I do not explicitly link the three stages to Jakobson’s theory throughout the thesis, the connection underlies my analysis of the mechanisms and consequences of the different uses of CUVs and the relationship between them.

Another consideration regarding the concept of translation is that I see it very much as a process of creative writing, which is why I have chosen to discuss it on equal terms with other forms. It would be disingenuous to claim that translation is the *same* as any other form of writing – it is (most frequently) not a process of invention in the strict sense – the translator works with pre-existing characters, plots, and even utterances, while the author or the poet is, to a great extent, responsible for inventing these. However, the translator is often required to be inventive in a linguistic sense – finding novel solutions for important but context-bound wordplay, or finding a way to reproduce the characteristic rhythm of a well-composed passage – and in this sense, it is very much a form of creative writing.

But what is creative writing? In this thesis, I use the term to refer to any kind of writing that involves a creative act of verbal communication. In that sense, it applies to rap, just as much as to poetry or to translation. My reason for referring to creative writing, rather than stretching the definition of literature to include rap, was to avoid eliding the musical aspect of rap – in my understanding of the term, creative writing allows for the text-based practices that contribute to performance, as well as those that stay on the page.

## Chapter breakdown

This thesis consists of three main parts, each of which looks at what I see as a key phase in the use of contemporary urban vernaculars (CUVs) – emergence, codification, and translation. Part I concentrates on descriptions of what CUVs are, or have been said to be by those documenting and analysing them (primarily in Sweden and the UK), be that in academic circles or in the media. Part II examines the creative forms in which CUVs have been represented and recorded – moving from the oral to the written, and discussing the contrasts between these forms. Part III discusses the translation of CUVs, with theoretical discussions from Translation Studies that look into the conventions of non-standard language translation providing the basis for more empirical examinations of translators' practice.

### Part I

Chapter 1 provides an outline of current and recent research into contemporary linguistic phenomena emerging in urban areas. It begins with a discussion of terminology, a complex topic given the social and ideological implications of naming language varieties. The main term I choose to use to refer to these varieties in the thesis is Rampton's term CUVs – my reasons for this are discussed in Section 1.1.9. This is followed by a clarification of certain other general factors that have frequently been discussed in relation to CUVs, and that must be clarified in order to provide a good basis for later analysis.

Chapter 2 uses the foundation established in Chapter 1 to summarise and discuss language varieties documented in Sweden and the UK, and linguistic ethnographic research into the use of these varieties. This analysis also takes into account debates about these varieties that have taken place in the media and in wider society. I also discuss the similarities and differences between the way these varieties have been documented and discussed in these two national contexts, primarily with a view to providing a basis on which to discuss the translation of literature featuring representations of these varieties. This chapter also features some discussion of equivalent or similar varieties in other national contexts, such as Germany, France and the USA.

## Part II

Chapter 3 explores the way in which rappers in Sweden and the UK use contemporary urban vernaculars. I look at the emergence and role of rap in areas where CUVs have emerged and try to establish the significance of rap for communities in these areas. This involves a consideration of the origins of rap and the significance of these origins for the communities in which it has been/is produced. I also discuss the role of community and geographic/local affiliation in making contemporary urban vernaculars desirable among rappers, as well as interrogating the implications of authenticity that potentially follow from this connection. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the way in which rap facilitates the use of such varieties through its rhythmic and musical components. These preliminary discussions lay the groundwork for an analysis of the use of CUVs by particular rappers in Sweden and the UK not only in their rapping, but also in their wider engagement with the public. I follow this in turn by asking to what extent this engagement constitutes a dissemination of CUVs beyond the communities that originated them, and an uptake of CUVs in other groups or in other geographic areas.

Chapter 4 moves on to look at the use of CUVs in literary texts. The texts featured include examples of poetry, plays, short stories and novels in Swedish, and short stories and novels in English. The chapter begins with a discussion of the linguistic concepts of stylistics, style and register and the way these can be used to understand the use of CUVs in literature. In this context I explore the possible purposes of using vernacular language in literature and whether some features of vernacular language are more likely to be selected than others to achieve the effects desired. As with the previous chapter, I discuss the question of authorial identity and authenticity in relation to the representation of CUVs and affiliation with communities or groups. With the help of these discussions, I then analyse Swedish and UK literary texts to uncover the ways in which CUVs are used in these examples, with a view to determining the role they play in the texts concerned. This discussion is further contextualised with examples from other national contexts.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the way rap and literary works have intersected or, more specifically, the way literature has featured references to and quotations from rap. This section draws on theoretical concepts such as intertextuality and intermediality to find out more about the

way in which these forms have interacted, and why this interaction has come about – what is it about rap that prompts authors working with more traditional literary forms to borrow from it? What do these borrowings add? I consider whether the work and the identity of the rapper, the literary author and the literary translator differ, and whether this has implications for their working relationship with the text, or for the social implications of their use of CUVs, coming back once again to the connection between authenticity and creative verbal expression. I also ask whether such intertextual relationships can be useful to the translator – does an understanding of actual or potential relationships between the literary work and its more formally ‘oral’ cousin provide a potential tool for the translator in finding terminology in the target language?

### Part III

Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which scholars in the field of Translation Studies have conceptualised the issues associated with the translation of non-standard language in literature, as a basis upon which to conduct my own analyses of English translations of some of the Swedish works discussed in the previous chapters. I explore a number of theories relating to the general tendency for language to become standardised in the translation process before considering more specific examples relating to the translation of non-standard language such as dialect, slang and CUVs. I look to a number of studies that offer analytical frameworks with which to structure my own analysis, and outline the key analytical approaches I will use.

Chapter 7 engages with political and ethical issues relating to the translation of non-standard language. It starts with a discussion of different theorists’ understandings of translator ethics and identity, and the impact these can have on a text. This provides a foundation on which to summarise and discuss the results of a survey I conducted into translators’ approaches to non-standard language in literature. The survey itself provides practical information about how translators themselves describe their strategies for working with non-standard language in literature. It also provides information about why these translators made these decisions and how their personal understanding of the non-standard language and its function impacted their translation strategies.

Chapter 8 continues this empirical line of questioning with a textual analysis of published English translations of some of the Swedish literary works considered earlier in the thesis. I analyse small samples of each translated text, comparing my findings with the source text (ST). This analysis focuses predominantly on lexical features, but also to some extent on morphosyntactic ones. The analysis draws on the discussions of translation theory and translation ethics in the previous two chapters, as well as on the various concepts discussed in the thesis as a whole.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I re-visit the main themes that have emerged throughout the thesis, tracking the relevance of these for each of the contexts – spoken, rapped, and literary language – that the thesis explores. In doing this, I bring together the theoretical threads running through my analysis. I also speculate on a number of potential areas for future research building on the content of the thesis.

#### Note about translations:

Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own. I have included the original in the main text of the thesis, with very short translations (one or two words) following the original term, and longer translations in a footnote. I foreground the original text in order to allow the reader to see the stylised nature of the texts at first hand.

## Published work that draws on this thesis

An early version of Chapter 3 was presented at the *Peripheral Visions* conference held at Kingston University in June 2011, and was later published as “‘MANS IS ON STAGE’”: Rappers as Disseminators of (Sub)Urban Language Varieties’ in the 2013 anthology *New Suburban Stories*, edited by Martin Dines and Timotheus Vermeulen, London: Bloomsbury (187-198).

An early version of material from Chapters 3 & 4 was presented at the *Fragile Realities* conference held at UCL in July 2012, and was later published as ‘Lost In Thought: Authenticity in Rap and Literature – A Swedish Case Study’ in a 2012 special edition of *Opticon1826*, entitled *Fragile Realities* (13: 33-44).

## Acknowledgements

This PhD would have been impossible without the generous support of the UCL Impact Studentship scheme, the hard work of Carl-Otto Werkelid and the sponsorship of Mr Stefan Olsson, London; the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, San Francisco; and the Swedish Academy, Stockholm. My sincere thanks for granting me this opportunity; I hope I have served you well. Furthermore, I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisors Claire Thomson and Geraldine Horan for all the insights and valuable criticism, but also for their faith and patience, even in the face of a steep uphill climb. I owe you Gammel Dansk! Thanks go too to my fellow climbers Agnes Broomé, Pei-Sze Chow, Anna Tebelius, Essi Viitanen, and many more, for indispensable conversation, support and criticism. Much-valued support has come from staff at UCL’s Department of Scandinavian Studies, as well as from all at the Culture Section of the Embassy of Sweden in London; staff and contributors of Swedish Book Review; and members of SELTA and the ETN. I would also like to thank my wonderful family and my friends, and finally, you, Robin, who made it seem possible, when I believed it was not.





**PART I: EMERGING LANGUAGE PRACTICES IN  
SWEDEN AND THE UK**



## Chapter 1 Describing and Naming a New Linguistic Phenomenon

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In the last thirty years, researchers across northern Europe have documented the emergence of new language varieties in urban areas of high linguistic and ethnic diversity. Many of these studies identify new hybrid vernacular forms that incorporate lexical and grammatical features of the various languages spoken locally. These new varieties are often referred to as youth varieties, although recent studies (cf. Cheshire et al. 2008; Rampton 2011) note important changes that transcend the transient nature of youth slang forms, instead suggesting that the new varieties constitute lasting language change.

In this chapter, I will discuss naming conventions, as these conventions have not yet become fixed, and each nomenclature seems to come with an attendant ideology that must be examined. First though, I will discuss the terminology used to refer to these language varieties. Many terms have been put forward as appropriate to sum up the linguistic phenomena being witnessed, and a portion of the debate (especially at an academic level) has been dedicated to finding terminology that takes into account the complexity of the cultural and linguistic environments in which individual and group speech is developing. In the context of his discussion of the Swedish urban language variety known as *rinkebysvenska* (Rinkeby Swedish, or RS as it is referred to here), Stroud remarks: “RS throws into stark relief the difficulties of using traditional taxonomies of language contact or acquisition to pin down and characterize contact varieties like RS that are drenched with sociosymbolic significance” (Stroud 2004, 200).

### Section 1.1 Naming Language

How can we describe these new ways of speaking? How did they come into existence? We are clearly talking about new contact varieties, though in doing so we are inevitably idealising, because they are less homogeneous than either ‘dialects’ or ‘sociolects’ are assumed to be, and they are, in any case, to varying extents context bound and (to the extent that they are ‘youth languages’) transient. That said, within any one location these varieties are recognisable to local people, even if naming practices are rather uncertain.

(Cheshire et al. 2011, 152)

A common feature of contemporary sociolinguistic debate is the discussion of terminology. The fluid character of language, and the relative lack of clear boundaries and undisputed ‘facts’, leave a great deal of room for dispute and uncertainty. Indeed, it is often easier to talk about what something *is not* than what it *is*. Naming new language phenomena that have emerged among young people in working class communities where much of the population is described as ‘ethnic minority’ adds an additional layer of difficulty. This is the case for a number of reasons. First, the ‘newness’ of the variety makes it difficult to know how lasting the changes will be – will they be passed on to a new generation of young people or are they merely a passing fad? Second, the fact that the phenomenon is documented as being used among young people raises the question of transience – is the phenomenon something that people grow out of? Third, most often the people doing the describing are doing so from the privileged position of academic researcher (a status also entangled with class, age or ethnicity). There are potential ethical issues associated with describing the speech of another, less privileged group, something highlighted by Stroud, as discussed in Section 2.1.2.

Cheshire et al. demonstrate the variety of terms and the variety of ‘routes’ these terms can take in becoming established as names for specific language phenomena, describing how the German term *Kiezdeutsch* was a ‘members’ concept’ adopted by Wiese (2006) to refer to multi-ethnic youth language in academic contexts, and later taken up by the media. They suggest that the term ‘Jafaican’ was coined by the UK media to refer to the language of young Londoners in multi-ethnic areas. It was probably not used or originated by the speakers of the variety in question; they argue that: “young people [prefer] the word ‘slang’ to characterise their way of speaking” (Cheshire et al. 2011, 152). Finally, they discuss the term *rinkebysvenska*, used by Kotsinas (1988) to refer to the linguistic practices of young people in multi-ethnic district of Stockholm, and named after Rinkeby, the area where Kotsinas did much of her research into those practices (Cheshire et al. 2011, 152).

All three of the terms mentioned above: *Kiezdeutsch*, ‘Jafaican’, and *rinkebysvenska*, are widely used by non-linguists today, regardless of the route the terms have taken to get to that stage. In addition, there is a range of more general terminology with which language is discussed and categorised, as hinted at by Cheshire et al. towards the beginning of the quote that opens this section. With such a wealth of potential taxonomies, it is worth deciding

which are going to be used from the outset in order to ensure clarity and consistency. This section gives an overview of a few key sociolinguistic concepts and terms, leading into a discussion of the terminology that has been used in recent studies of emerging urban language phenomena, and a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of these.

### Section 1.1.1 Language contact and creolisation

Language contact is a phenomenon whereby speakers of different languages inhabit the same or neighbouring areas, or otherwise come into contact with each other through, for example, trade. Sebba states that: “(p)idgins and creoles are two types of *contact language*, so-called because they come about through contact between two or more previously existing languages” (Sebba 1997, 2). Pidgins are of less interest to the current study. They characteristically have no native speakers and “result from the communicative strategies of adults who *already* have command of at least one language” (Sebba 1997, 14, orig. emphasis), in multilingual contexts with no shared language. However, creoles – languages which are spoken by the children of pidgin speakers in communities where no other common language exists, and thus become the native language of that new generation (cf. *ibid.*, 15-16)) – may be of greater relevance. Some scholars, including Kotsinas (cf. Section 2.1.1) have questioned whether the kind of language discussed in this thesis can be classified as a form of ‘creolised language’ (essentially, she finds that it cannot, as a result of “the strong influence of school and mass media”, which counteract the creolisation process (Kotsinas 2000a, 187)). Sebba discusses whether London Jamaican, a phenomenon he recorded in the 1970s and 80s, and which has been referred to as an earlier phase of the development of Multicultural London English (MLE - see Section 2.2.3), can be seen as a form of ‘re-creolisation’. Sebba describes this as “a movement by speakers towards the more ‘creole’ end of the linguistic spectrum” (Sebba 1997, 225). He describes how young people of Caribbean (but not necessarily Jamaican) descent used elements of Jamaican Creole phonology, grammar and vocabulary in their otherwise typically London English. This was the case even when (as in the case of British Caribbean/other Black British youths of non-Jamaican descent, and indeed some White British youths) their parents spoke no creole, or a wholly different creole (e.g. Bajan or Dominican). They were effectively

adapting Jamaican Creole to their own purposes, with attendant influence from London English (Sebba 1997, 228–232).

Sebba is not absolutely conclusive in his discussion of this ‘re-creolisation’ process, and it seems that scholars looking at contemporary changes in urban language (in Europe at least) are generally keen to steer clear of describing these emerging forms as creoles. The term creoloid describes:

A language which, as a result of language contact, has experienced simplification and admixture, but which has not undergone the reduction associated with full pidginisation (nor, therefore, the expansion associated with creolisation). Such a language will resemble in its linguistic characteristics a creole that has undergone decreolisation, but will be different in its history: a creoloid remains at all times intelligible to speakers of its source language if this remains separate to the creoloid, and it maintains throughout its development a community of native speakers.

(Trudgill 2003, 31)

Such a definition could feasibly be applied to the language forms discussed in this thesis, but for whatever reason, this does not seem to have been attractive to the sociolinguists whose research I am basing my discussion on, so I will not use it. A conceivable explanation is one put forward by Stroud, i.e. that:

In popular debate, the idea of RS [Rinkeby Swedish – see Section 2.1.2] as a creole or pidgin has run up against resistance, not so much on scientific grounds, but because of a deep-felt political unwillingness to entertain the traditional scenario for such contact languages with respect to speakers of RS; to do so, it was felt, would denigrate the RS community.

(Stroud 2004, 200)

Fennell mentions the idea of the ‘creole continuum’, which can be described as the range of contact language variants that operate in an environment in which language contact has taken place over time, in a similar way to that in which a range of language varieties are used in any given setting all the time. As Fennell states: “such continua are in fact part of all language use, and not merely limited to language-contact situations” (Fennell 1997, 81). Again, this term has not been directly relevant to the language forms I will be discussing, and since there is already such a wealth of terms to choose from, I will not use this term in this thesis. Additionally, the fact that the forms are frequently adopted in adolescence indicates that they can more aptly be described as group varieties or feature pools (see Section 1.1.3). For these reasons, I make no significant reference to creoles beyond

occasional mentions of Jamaican Creole (or Patois/Patwa) as a contributing factor in the development of MLE.

However, there are a number of other features of language contact that are worth looking at before moving on. Among his list of phenomena that arise as a result of language contact, Sebba includes two that are of particular relevance here: the ‘borrowing’ of grammar and vocabulary from one language into another; and code switching (Sebba 1997, 16). I discuss these in the next section.

### Section 1.1.2 Borrowing, code-switching and crossing

Llamas et al. define borrowing as: “when bilingual speakers transfer lexical items from one language to another” (Llamas, Mullany, and Stockwell 2007, 207). Sebba gives an at once more specific, and more general definition in describing borrowing as being closer to “‘adoption’ or ‘naturalisation’” (Sebba 1997, 11), whereby words or grammatical structures are ‘taken in’, and then are “no longer felt to be strange or ‘foreign’ and [are] adapted to the sound and/or grammatical patterns of the new language” (ibid.). Sebba states that this happens particularly where one variety has particular prestige in the context into which its features are borrowed. However, Sebba does note that borrowing at the grammatical level is unlikely to occur unless a large proportion of the ‘host’ language speakers “have knowledge of both languages and/or the contact continues over a very long period” (ibid.). The adaptation of borrowed vocabulary to the grammatical and phonological structures of the receiving language is something that Gumperz also highlights (Gumperz 1982, 67). He mentions occasional exceptions, such as the retained pronunciation of certain French phrases in English to “suggest refinement or ridicule” (ibid., 68), which can be classed as code-switching. As we shall see in the following paragraphs, code-switching carries an additional level of salience over borrowing, which may have no specific pragmatic function.

Heller defines code-switching as the ‘use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode’ (Heller 1988, 1). This wonderfully concise, simple definition is a great start, but it must be qualified somewhat to facilitate smooth progress in the rest of this section. Code-switching generally only occurs between bilinguals, or at least people

who have some level of fluency in more than one language (cf. Auer 2011, 460). Auer excludes from his definition of code-switching “other features of bilingual talk [...] such as interferences: for instance, a phonetic or a prosodic feature of language B may be used in a word from language A, or in a sequence of words from language A” (ibid.), although others have disagreed with this. Gumperz states that: “[t]he tendency is for the ethnically specific, minority language to be regarded as the ‘we code’ and become associated with in-group and informal activities, and for the majority language to serve as the ‘they code’ associated with the more formal, stiffer and less-personal out-group relations” (Gumperz 1982, 66), although these associations are generally symbolic, rather than being strictly observed in practice (ibid.). When these associations are observed, switches are often (though not always) made in order to indicate emotional or personal proximity to the subject of the switch, or to emphasise the contextual significance of the subject (Sebba 1997, 12). However, the key factor that differentiates code-switching from borrowing, according to Gumperz, is the fact that code-switching “relies on the meaningful juxtaposition of what speakers must consciously or unconsciously process as strings formed according to the internal rules of *two distinct grammar systems*” (Gumperz 1982, 66, orig. emphasis).

Code-switching occurs in the multilingual contexts this study focuses on, and the language of the people in these contexts is influenced by this code-switching in the long term, as they borrow or adopt features from the languages spoken around them (as discussed at the beginning of this section). This is despite the fact that people in these contexts do not speak all the other languages from which this borrowing and adoption takes place. What is happening is not simply a case of bilinguals code-switching between a ‘we code’ and a ‘they code’ – something else must be at work: the ‘crossing’ discussed later in this section. It is also possible for speakers of the emerging language form to code-switch between that variety and others they have competence in. Therefore, it is useful to bear in mind the presence of code-switching in these contexts, while acknowledging that that is not the full extent of what is occurring. It is also useful to briefly consider the use of code-switching in the literary texts discussed later in this thesis.

Crossing (also discussed in Section 2.2.2) is a term coined by Rampton to refer to language practices he observed among teenagers in multilingual/multi-ethnic urban areas. He found that, within the peer group, young people would ‘cross’ into a language/language variety



spoken by their peers, but which they were not speakers of, because that language variety connoted prestige, or had some other social function (e.g. humour/ridicule) (Rampton 1995).

Borrowing and switching/crossing between language varieties are common features of multilingual environments, and a fundamental aspect of the development of the kinds of linguistic practices I am discussing. They are also a feature used by rappers and writers alike in order to achieve certain stylistic and symbolic functions (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4). In outlining the parameters of borrowing, code-switching and crossing, I aim to give an idea of the role these phenomena have played and continue to play in the development of urban linguistic practices, as well as providing a basis for my later analysis of rappers and writers who draw on these practices.

### Section 1.1.3 Varieties, lects, and feature pools

Terms such as language variety, dialect and sociolect are frequently used to categorise language, but it is worth examining what they actually mean in order to discern whether they are appropriate for use in this context. Sebba, for instance, notes that: “from a linguist’s point of view, there is no systematic way to decide what is a ‘language’ and what is a ‘dialect’: both refer to the same type of communicative system” (Sebba 1997, 3). The problem with using terms like ‘variety’, ‘dialect’ or ‘sociolect’ is that they imply a knowable entity that is internally consistent and distinct from other varieties, even if the term is not always used in that way. For instance, the Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics defines a variety as “a systematic pattern of language use, such as a language, a dialect, an accent, a sociolect, and so on” (Llamas, Mullany, and Stockwell 2007, 233). But in truth, users of this variety will pick and choose elements of this ‘systematic pattern’ in their speech, mixing them with elements from elsewhere, even within the scope of utterances which could be described as being typical for that pattern. Trudgill simply states that ‘variety’ is “a neutral term used to refer to any kind of language – a dialect, accent, sociolect, style or register – that a linguist happens to want to discuss as a separate entity for some particular purpose” (Trudgill 2003, 139–40). A variety is therefore no more than a vague classificatory tool, the classifying suitability of which must be seen as limited. As a result, many sociolinguists use

the term ‘variety’ while qualifying their use of it loosely, combining it with more flexible terms such as ‘practice’, which is discussed below.

A number of other terms generally grouped under the heading ‘varieties’ are used to refer to specific phenomena. While I find many of these lacking, generally because they are overly specific, or insufficiently descriptive, I do refer to many of them in this thesis, for instance, when referring to another researcher’s use of them. For that reason I will provide a few brief definitions here.

An idiolect can be characterised as “the linguistic system used by an individual speaker (including features of pronunciation, grammar, lexical items and pragmatics)” (Llamas, Mullany, and Stockwell 2007, 216). A sociolect is a dialect that is specifically social, rather than geographical, in use. A dialect is: “[t]he pronunciation, lexis and grammar of a language variety, associated with a particular geographical area or social group” (ibid., 211). Kotsinas, in her attempts to determine whether *rinkebysvenska* (cf Section 2.1.1) is a dialect, uses a number of criteria, which are useful in understanding the concept:

- ⌘ Regional delimitation (although not all definitions of dialect admit a geographical component)
- ⌘ Contrast with the standard language
- ⌘ Spoken language
- ⌘ Acknowledged by users and non-users to be distinct from standard language
- ⌘ Subjective identities/values associated with use
- ⌘ Variation within the dialect
- ⌘ Specific features other than lexis
- ⌘ Establishment among many users in the area/group.

(adapted from Kotsinas 1988, 271–275)

Trudgill defines ethnolect as: “a variety of language associated with a particular ethnic group” (Trudgill 2003, 45). This term has been further adapted to form ‘multiethnolect’, which applies specifically to the emerging phenomena of multi-ethnic communities using a variety seen as typical for that group, for instance, *multiethniskt ungdomsspråk* (multi-ethnic youth language) and Multicultural London English, both of which are discussed in Chapter 2. Researchers hope that by using this term, they are reflecting the fact that these varieties

cross ethnic boundaries, but are still characterised by their emergence in linguistically and ethnically diverse urban areas. Quist, who coined the term, states that in doing so, she sought to “stress the *multilinguality* of the phenomenon as opposed to the term *ethnolect* which could imply a mono-ethnic bias” (Quist 2010, 8, orig. emphasis). Wiese expresses qualms about the term *multiethnolect* (i.e. that it emphasises an ‘ethnic’ character, thus differentiating the variety from other dialect forms). She does, however, use it frequently. She justifies this as follows:

Given [the variability of *multiethnolect*], and the diversity of the linguistic repertoires of its speakers, one might want to avoid calling these linguistic practices or styles ‘(multiethno-)lects’ or ‘varieties’ altogether. In what follows, however, I will use the term ‘variety’ to emphasise the fact that I concentrate on linguistic phenomena on the grammatical level that are characteristic for these *multiethnolects*.

(Wiese 2009, 784)

Fennell describes the concept of *xenolect*: “the product of contact that has already led to the acquisition of a native variety” (Fennell 1997, 77). Speakers thus speak a variety that shares very many features with the standard language, where “there is no significant linguistic restructuring” (ibid.), but there is some influence from the ‘home language’. Furthermore, a *xenolect*, in contrast to a creole, would “be comparable to any other nonstandard (regional or social) dialect”, with the exception that the distinguishing features would bear the stamp of the languages in the immigrant communities of which the speakers are a part (ibid. 77-8). Fennell puts into the class of *xenolect* the linguistic variety researched by Kotsinas in Sweden: *rinkebysvenska* (see Section 2.1.1 for further discussion of *rinkebysvenska* and the work of Kotsinas). I find the concept of *xenolect* persuasive to some degree, in the sense that it refers to the influence of ‘foreignness’ and immigration that is euphemistically avoided by many terms. In the end, though, I am unsure whether the term does enough to capture the characteristics of varieties that are no longer distinguished by the influence of foreign words or syntax, but rather by their status as go-to vernacular forms for (predominantly) working class people in today’s urban environments.

Several scholars looking at language forms emerging in areas of high linguistic and ethnic diversity now refer to these forms as ‘practices’. Quist and Svendsen, for example, use the phrase: ‘linguistic practices among adolescents’. Their wish in doing so is, to quote one of the chapters in the book, to “imply a broad understanding of all types of linguistic behaviours by all speakers in multilingual contexts, that is, recurring linguistic actions

situated in a certain social context” (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2010, xiii). Reflecting this, the term encompasses a range of practices, including “the use of slang and loan words” (ibid., xv); “codeswitching and *crossing*” (ibid., xv, orig. emphasis); and “new varieties or speech styles with a certain level of systematicity at different linguistic levels” (ibid., xv). Wiese also talks of practices, alongside her use of the term ‘multiethnolects’. (Wiese 2009). The key thing about the notion of language as a practice is its affirmation of the input and agency of users. I would argue that this makes it especially attractive to scholars working on language use among marginalised or stigmatised groups, who may have less access to education or self-representation, and who may be represented in society as deficient.

Other studies adopt a variationist strategy (Cheshire and Fox 2009), focusing on individual features (in this instance, was/were variation), and thereby avoiding the need to categorise the varieties as entities in themselves. This fits well alongside an approach that foregrounds the repertoire (See Section 1.1.8). However, because of its (perfectly reasonable) aim of escaping the problem of categorisation, I have had difficulty adopting this approach in the discussion in my research, because I am focusing more on the level of the identity signalled by the use of particular categories of language, and have therefore needed to make certain generalisations about these categories. Therefore, I have ended up adopting a slightly ‘pick and mix’ approach – using ‘variety’ and ‘practice’ as general terms, while I use Ben Rampton’s concept of ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’ (discussed in Section 1.1.9) as an over-arching descriptive term for the phenomena I am analysing in use. I also use regionally specific terms, as discussed in the next chapter (Sections 2.1 and 2.2 refer to the respective phenomena in their national contexts).

Aside from discussions regarding the appropriate terminology to use when talking about these varieties in an academic context, it is also worth revisiting the subject of the terminologies that are in evidence among users of the varieties or in wider society, as discussed at the beginning of Section 1.1. Cheshire et al. assert that: “within any one location these varieties are recognisable to local people, even if naming practices are rather uncertain” (Cheshire et al. 2011, 152). As Cheshire et al. note, and as I discussed briefly in the Introduction, this has led to the creation of popular terms with which to refer to the phenomenon. In the UK, for instance, what is referred to by Cheshire et al. as ‘Multicultural London English’ (MLE) is frequently called ‘Jafaican’ in the press (*The Sun*

2010), or even ‘yoof speak’ (e.g. *The Sunday Times Online* 2010) by members of the wider public, possibly as a result of public perceptions regarding the origins/speakers of the form. However, the young people Cheshire et al. talked to called it simply ‘slang’. In Sweden, a long-standing debate has raged over whether terms like *rinkebysvenska* can be used to refer to instances of similar forms in other regions in Sweden, with Fraurud and Bijvoet arguing for the use of the term *multietniskt ungdomsspråk* (multi-ethnic youth language) (Fraurud and Bijvoet 2004), a coinage which has since been used extensively. Other debated terms include ‘*blattesvenska*’, which is generally a derogatory term – ‘*blatte*’ being roughly equivalent in meaning and usage to ‘nigger’ or ‘paki’ – although, as with ‘nigger’, *blatte* has to some extent been reclaimed by the people against whom it was previously directed as a racial slur. The debate here concerns whether the term’s ‘reclaimed’ status renders it appropriate in this context. ‘*Miljonsvenska*’ is a term coined by writers for the magazine *Gringo* (cf. Section 2.1.2), referring to the emergence of this form in the post-war high-rise suburban estates of the ‘*miljonprogram*’ (Million Project), a Swedish national housing project under which a million homes were built across the country between 1965 and 1975. Despite the initial good intentions of the *miljonprogram* project, the newly-constructed areas quickly became associated with poor planning and neglect, and subsequently with unemployment and poverty. As the discourse around the *miljonprogram* changed, a high level of ‘white flight’ ensued, and this, combined with various government housing policies, resulted in an increase in ethnic diversity in these areas (cf. Andersson 2002). As a consequence, the suburbs (of Stockholm in particular, but also of Gothenburg and Malmö) are viewed as the birthplace of the new language variety.

The wide range of terms applied to these varieties, apparently from many different areas of society (the media, academia, the wider public, and in some cases the communities who actually speak the varieties) indicates the high level of interest in the varieties’ emergence. But the debate over terminology is also testimony to the fraught nature of describing and categorising language. The fact that speakers of these varieties generally use the non-specific term ‘slang’ could be seen to indicate a relative lack of interest in such processes of categorisation.

#### Section 1.1.4 Speech community and communities of practice

An important aspect of research into language change resulting from the contact of different speech communities is the acknowledgement of the importance of social interaction, face-to-face contact and friendship in the development of new linguistic varieties (Cheshire et al. 2008, 1). Marcyliena Morgan discusses the concept of the speech community, arguing that it represents not only a group of people who speak the same language or language variety, but that it is also “the product of prolonged interaction among those who operate within shared belief and value systems regarding their own culture, society and history as well as their communication with others” (Morgan 2005, 3), stating that “the concept takes as fact that language represents, embodies, constructs and constitutes meaningful participation in a society and culture” (ibid.). From this we can infer that the language use of any given speech community is closely connected with that community’s cultural and social life, and that any representation of the community’s language use will resonate with these other elements. Similarly, as well as highlighting the role of interpersonal contact and friendship, the researchers in the recent MLE project (cf. Section 2.2.3) note the importance of pop-cultural influences on contemporary urban language (Cheshire et al. 2008, 19).

The notion of speech community has been widely challenged, however. Cheshire and Fox state that: “traditional definitions of the speech community as a group of speakers who share a set of evaluative norms governing social and stylistic variation [...] are unhelpful in understanding the complex system of variation we have described in inner London” (Cheshire and Fox 2009, 34). This is because certain common linguistic changes were observed across groups that otherwise displayed significant linguistic divergence: “some groups of adolescents may even have different grammars—the patterns of was/were variation for the Bangladeshi and the Afro-Caribbean speakers indicate this possibility—yet there is a net effect on language change” (ibid.). This means that although in some instances, completely different features were used by speakers of different ethnicities, a high proportion of other features were used in common across ethnic divisions. In the MLE ‘speech community’, then, different sub-communities were using different aspects of MLE. For the term ‘speech community’ to be meaningful, it would be necessary to break down the over-arching community into smaller communities, a process which could continue

until there was no community left! This contradiction makes it very hard to define the boundaries of a speech community, and renders the concept of little use (Rampton 2009, 696). As ‘speech community’ has fallen out of use in sociolinguistics, other ways of describing language use have emerged:

[T]here was previously a strong tendency to treat people’s actions as a mere reflection of their belonging to ‘big’ communities that pre-existed them, but now there is much more emphasis on the part that here-and-now social action plays in the production of ‘small’ but new communities, and rather than just concentrating on behaviour at the core, there has been a burst of interest in the flow of people, texts, objects and ideas across local and global networks, as well as in the interaction with ‘strangers’ inside, outside and at the boundaries of specific groups and institutions.

(ibid., 694)

As ‘speech community’ has become less popular as a term, there has been an increased interest in the idea of ‘communities of practice’, a term coined by Wenger (cf. Wenger 1998). Trudgill defines a community of practice in sociolinguistic terms as:

A group of people who associate with one another in some joint activity and share a set of social practices. The term normally applies to groups rather smaller than those implied by the term speech community. The emphasis is on the subjective nature of people’s perceptions of this community and of the boundaries between it and other communities, and on the way this community is negotiated, constructed and modified by its members in interaction with each other.

(Trudgill 2003, 25)

However, Rampton remains wary of the communities of practice model, because of its tendency to foreground the intra-community workings without looking at the wider social implications of inter-community workings: “‘community’ can’t only be seen as co-participation in a locally-embedded practice – analysis also has to extend to the way in which ‘community’ (and other notionally collective entities) serves as a symbol and sign itself” (Rampton 2009, 701). So, although the communities of practice concept is useful in that it admits the variability and diversity of individuals’ practices within a group, it is important to remember that that group operates in a wider context with which its members also interact.

### Section 1.1.5 Language and indexicality

Indexicality refers to “projections of functions onto form – the fact that specific forms obtain specific functions, and that such functions can be multiple (one form can have a referential function, alongside an aesthetic one, a gendering function, a function of politeness, and so on) and context-dependent [...]” (Blommaert 2006, 164). Indexicality is an important factor in the study of group-specific language use, especially when considering the symbolic use of this language in non-speech contexts. When a given language variety is used, the speaker or user of the features of that variety is pointing to the social factors those features index. Therefore, by using these features in a novel, say, the author is creating a level, above the denotative meaning of the content, that connotes additional meanings.

### Section 1.1.6 Register, style and stylisation

Trudgill states that “we use the term *register* in the sense of a variety of language determined by topic, subject matter or activity, such as the register of mathematics, the register of medicine, or the register of pigeon fancying” (Trudgill 1999, 121). However, beyond registers’ technical function (i.e. providing words that are specifically appropriate to the phenomena occurring in any given context), they can also “have the more particularly sociolinguistic function of symbolising a speaker or writer’s membership of a particular group, and of, as it were, keeping outsiders out” (ibid., 122). The indexicality discussed in the previous section is a key part of this. Agha has argued that the recognisability of registers is dependent on ‘typification’: “a minimal condition on [group-forming processes] is that the typifications of speech through which register values are communicated to others, and hence circulated through society, be embodied in sensorially perceivable signs. Such processes depend upon interaction between people mediated by artifacts made by people” (Agha 2005, 27). Artefacts in this sense includes both utterances and material artefacts such as recordings or written texts.

In his definition of style, Coupland uses the phrase “an assemblage of design choices” (Coupland 2007, 1), something I consider to have a pleasing resonance when bearing in



mind the range of creative textual forms included in this thesis. It highlights the fact that style is a product of conscious or unconscious awareness of the practical, social and aesthetic functions of language, and that the production or construction of style is an active process. He goes on to discuss how “part of our social competence is being able to understand these indexical links – how a style marks out or indexes a social difference – and to read their meanings” (ibid.), even if we are not necessarily able to recognise them as distinctive. This reading of style in speech and “ways of speaking” (ibid., 2) can be contrasted with the linked, but not identical concept of literary style, which “relates to the crafting of linguistic text in literary genres and to an aesthetic interpretation of text” (ibid.). Style, Coupland argues, “has to encompass the whole field of making social meaning through deploying and recontextualising linguistic resources” (Coupland 2007, 1).

Bakhtin describes stylisation as “an artistic image of another’s language” (Bakhtin 1981, 362), and Coupland explains that this stylisation can be a “subversive form of multi-voiced utterance, one that discredits hegemonic, monologic discourses by appropriating the voices of the powerful, and re-working them for new purposes” (Coupland 2007, 150). This understanding of stylisation can also be turned around to show how individuals stylised their own speech and that of others, not only to undermine hegemonic structures, but also to project a particular identity associated with the style being appropriated. As Coupland states: “stylisation can be analysed as strategic inauthenticity, with complex implications for personal and cultural authenticity in general” (ibid., 154). This latter point has particular significance for the representations of authenticity in rap and literary texts explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

### Section 1.1.7 Language in ‘super-diverse’ societies

Blommaert and Rampton refer to Vertovec’s term ‘super-diversity’ (cf. Vertovec 2007), talking about changes in the nature of diversity, and a move away from the way multiculturalism was previously thought of (i.e. an ethnically-diverse population with immigrants primarily from the UK’s former colonies). They mention the “tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of

insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on”, leading to changing understandings of what a migrant is, and what behaviours are to be expected of them (Blommaert and Rampton 2011, 1). They assert that this has a major impact on the way language is used, especially given the increased opportunities for interaction that technology has brought about. The effect of this social change on discussions of language is that, “rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages, language groups and communication” (ibid., 3). Thus, the notion of fixed and bounded ‘varieties’ is no longer relevant to the discussion.

### Section 1.1.8 Repertoire as linguistic concept

Repertoire refers to the network of languages, language varieties, modalities, registers and styles that make up communication. These repertoires are organised – we use specific elements of our repertoire in certain settings. What’s more, our different communicative repertoires are linked to our repertoire of identities. The link between these two repertoires, according to Blommaert, is indexicality (Blommaert 2006, 168). We talk to a given person in a way that befits our relationship to that person, and the way we talk to them is indexical of that relationship and the context in which the communication occurs. Within this concept of repertoires, “the distinction between ‘languages’ traditionally understood [...] is not necessarily a more salient distinction than the distinction between a prestige variety and a stigmatised variety of the same language” (ibid., 169).

The concept of linguistic repertoire is said by Blommaert and Rampton to “[dispense] with *a priori* assumptions about the links between origins, upbringing, proficiency and types of language, and it refers to individuals’ very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres, which are picked up (and maybe then partially forgotten) within biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011, 4–5).

Benor proposes a new terminology and focus for studies concerned with sociolinguistic phenomena in multilingual/multi-ethnic communities: ‘ethnolinguistic repertoire’ (Benor

2010). This concept focuses specifically on an understanding of language varieties as constituting a repertoire, both at individual and group level, described as: “the arsenal of distinctive linguistic features available to members of a given group” (ibid., 162). The fact that the term refers specifically to the ‘ethnolinguistic’ element of the repertoire emphasises the aspect of individuals’ language use that is impacted by their membership in social groups. This repertoire is identified as particularly useful because it precludes the need for:

- ⌘ A resolution of the problems associated with the term ‘ethnolect’. These include the complexities created by: intra-group variation – the concept characterises language use as a continuum and a sliding scale (ibid., 162); intra-speaker variation – i.e. the fact that any individual varies their speech according to who the recipient of speech act is, the context, the subject, and so on (ibid., 166); out-group use – the use by members of other speech communities of aspects of the repertoire for their own ends (ibid., 168); the need to delineate an ‘ethnic group’ per se – with attendant issues such as individuals who straddle more than one group/view themselves as being or not being part of a given group (ibid., 168); deciding whether a given form is actually different enough to be termed ‘ethnolect’ at all (ibid., 170).
- ⌘ A resolution as to what non-standard language is actually ‘non-standard’ in relation to – here Benor uses the term “unmarked variety” (ibid. 170).

Although I would argue that the concept of ‘unmarked variety’ is as slippery as the standard/non-standard dichotomy – for whom is the variety unmarked? – Benor’s general approach is helpful in that it allows for multiplicity in the description of language practices and scholarly perspectives on those practices. However, the concept of ‘ethnolinguistic repertoire’ still re-introduces the ethnicity element which so many have tried to do away with.

### Section 1.1.9 Contemporary Urban Vernaculars

Rampton has developed the term ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’ (CUVs) in an attempt to move the debate about what he calls “heteroglossic speech stylisation” (Rampton 2011, 276) away from fixed associations with youth and ethnicity. He defines contemporary urban

vernaculars as set out below, arguing that the term is the most appropriate because it emphasises just these factors.

[Contemporary urban vernaculars are sets] of linguistic forms and enregistering practices (including commentary, crossing and stylisation) that

- ∞ have emerged, are sustained and are felt to be distinctive in ethnically mixed urban neighbourhoods shaped by immigration and class stratification,
- ∞ [...] are seen as connected-but-distinct from the locality's migrant languages, its traditional non-standard dialect, its national standard and its adult second language speaker styles, as well as from the prestige counter-standard styles circulating in (sometimes global) popular culture, and
- ∞ [...] are often widely noted and enregistered beyond their localities of origin, represented in media and popular culture as well as in the informal speech of people outside.

(ibid., 291)

I have elected to use this term over others that have been advanced, because of its emphasis on language as locally-situated practice, as well as its acknowledgement of the interplay between a wide range of factors on those practices, including global pop culture, and the fact that Rampton refers to the further influence of these practices on the speech of communities outside the immediate geographic and social area in which they originated.

## Section 1.2 Other issues with contemporary urban vernaculars

### Section 1.2.1 Gender

It has been argued that male and female speakers differ in their language use, and that male speakers are more likely to use and to contribute to the innovation of CUVs. Kotsinas performed a phonological analysis on young people's speak in two Stockholm suburbs – one a wealthy, relatively mono-ethnic suburb ('Norr') and the other a working class, multi-ethnic suburb ('Söder'). She found that, for the variables she tested (certain vowel sounds that show great regional variation): "not only old, stigmatized variants, but also, unexpectedly, standard variants are more frequently used by boys than girls. Girls, on the other hand, more frequently use nonstandard variants, which seem to be comparatively recent in the Stockholm dialect" (Kotsinas 2000b, 134). However, girls tended to avoid "stigmatiserande uttalsvarianter och vissa andra språkdrag som förbinds med låg social

status, främst svordomar och, med undantag för grundskoleflickorna i Söder, slang”<sup>5</sup> (Kotsinas 1994, 134). This indicates that, in this sample girls were just as innovative, if not more so, in their approach to language, at least from a phonological perspective.

Trudgill states that “while there are some more-or-less gender-specific usages in many if not most languages, these range from the use of a small number of words, phrases or conversational devices in some languages to particular vowels, consonants or grammatical endings in others. Most differences between male and female speech are quantitatively-revealed tendencies rather than absolute differences” (Trudgill 2003, 54–5). There are cases when those researching language have contributed to the view that language innovation is led by male speakers. For instance, Morgan has criticised the way in which “[Labov] constructs authentic African American membership and language as male, adolescent, insular, and trifling” (Morgan 1994, 328). Arguments about gender in language are also relevant to the discussion of creative writing featuring CUVs, as can be seen in the enthusiasm that greeted Swedish author Marjaneh Bakhtiari’s debut novel in 2005. As Bakhtiari states: “tidigare har det mest varit killar som har skrivit [about the experiences of people with immigrant backgrounds]. Var är tjejerna har man undrat? Och sedan när man ser att det kommer en tjej då lyfter man upp henne och visar att här är tjejernas berättelse”<sup>6</sup> (Bakhtiari, interviewed in Kalmteg 2005). This gendered approach to literature is tied up in the kind of biographical interpretations discussed by Astrid Trotzig, as she argues that “mottagandet av Leiva Wenger, Anyuru och Khemiri kännetecknas av en sammansmältning av författaren och den fiction de skildrar”<sup>7</sup> (Trotzig 2004, 25).

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<sup>5</sup> “Stigmatised pronunciation features and certain other features connected to low social status, primarily swearwords and, with the exception of female secondary school students in Söder, slang.

<sup>6</sup> “Previously, it’s mostly been guys who’ve been writing [about the experiences of people with immigrant backgrounds]. Where are the girls? people have wondered. And then when people see a girl come along, they hold her up and declare that this is the girls’ story.”

<sup>7</sup> “The reception of Leiva Wenger, Anyuru and Khemiri is characterised by a blending of the author and the fiction they portray.”

## Section 1.2.2 Labov and the need to describe non-standard language

Current and recent research into contemporary urban vernaculars in Europe owes much to the work of William Labov, an American sociolinguist who did much to further the emerging discipline of sociolinguistics in the 1960s. His groundbreaking study of language practices among Black Americans in Harlem was published in collected form in the volume *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Labov 1972). Labov argued that, contrary to previous reports that black children had few verbal reasoning skills and little control over the style of their own speech, they in fact used complex, well-developed language with a relatively consistent grammatical system.

Labov's work is frequently cited and scholars such as Cheshire et al. have even referred to language phenomena as 'Labovian' (Cheshire et al. 2011, 153), with 'Labovian sociolinguistics' also being referred to by Trudgill (Trudgill 2003, 71) in reference to Labov's concept of 'secular linguistics'. Labov developed this concept to describe a less restrictive view of sociolinguistics, one that focused on variable forms of language, encompassing the study of 'non-standard' as well as 'standard' forms, and thereby challenging "what we might think of as the high priesthood of theoretical linguistics and its reliance on theoretical linguistic data. It also challenges the belief that 'standard' language is more orderly and more worthwhile than 'non-standard' language" (Coupland 2007, 4). This perception of a split between what is and what is not worth documenting and describing has parallels in the rest of the thesis in terms of what kind of language gets used in literature, and indeed, what kind of literary language gets translated. This discussion is developed in Parts II and III, but I wanted to briefly mention it here. As I discuss in Chapter 4, representations of non-standardness often rely heavily on their relative strangeness and the contrast between them and a perceived standard form. The fact that standard language is the norm for literary representation has echoes of the belief in the orderliness and value of the standard remarked on by Coupland above.

### Section 1.2.3 Youth varieties?

Some commentators have indicated that referring to the varieties as exclusively youth varieties may be misleading, as it is argued that these are not teenage slang fads that will fade with time, but major changes in the linguistic profiles of the areas in question.

Rampton has argued that researchers should look beyond the notion that contemporary urban vernaculars are a youth phenomenon, but acknowledges that that notion has hitherto prevailed:

Young people certainly aren't the only focus for research on heteroglossic speech stylisation, but practices of stylisation and crossing have been much more extensively researched among young people than anyone else, and youth is often taken as central to their social distribution, to the extent that these ways of speaking are regularly described as 'youth language'.

(Rampton 2011, 276)

But even in her research in the 1980s, Kotsinas found that some adults who had a lot of contact with young CUV speakers took on elements of the young people's language (Kotsinas 1988, 275). Listening to a Swedish radio programme on which a number of rappers from the late nineties were interviewed ('Ayo Kliver Fram För Intervju' 2011), I could also hear a number of the prosodic, phonological and lexical features associated with Stockholm CUV, most noticeably instances of what Bodén calls the "[x]-like pronunciation of the phoneme /fj/" (the Swedish 'sj'-sound) (Bodén 2011, 44). These men were in their early/mid-thirties when the programme was recorded, which suggests that they have taken at least these elements with them into their adult speech, suggesting that CUVs are an enduring phenomenon, and not merely a teenage fad. Rampton gives another example of CUV use, by Anwar, a successful middle-aged businessman of Punjabi background born in the London suburb of Southall (Rampton 2011, 283). He finds Anwar using a wide range of varieties in different social contexts. In earnest conversation with a close friend from his youth in Southall, Anwar uses a style which Rampton describes within the context of CUVs, and which has been part of Anwar's repertoire since adolescence. Rampton points out how: "[...] 25 years later, it looks as though this style still has affectively powerful connotations of peer-group familiarity, very much rooted in personal experience in a particular milieu" (ibid., 287). Rampton compares this to other evidence from his 1995 study of crossing, and concludes that:

[...] in addition to being active in urban locations in Britain for at least 25–30 years, it looks as though this style of speaking endures across the life-span. The acts and activities in which it is articulated may change as people get older, but crossing isn't incompatible with the process of maturation [...] and a dense vernacular mix of Creole, Cockney and Punjabi forms can still be a valued and quite flexible resource in the repertoire of successful middle-aged professionals.

(ibid., 288)

#### Section 1.2.4 Spoken vs. written / standard vs. non-standard

The criteria for talking about spoken and written language are rather different, primarily because language operates very differently in these two contexts, and the format of the language in use facilitates different types of analysis. My analysis deals specifically with written representations of particular varieties of non-standard language, while a large proportion of research on these varieties, and non-standard language in general, is performed on spoken data. This presents some methodological issues, because written representations tend, by necessity, to omit some features of language (phonology, prosody), while foregrounding others (lexis, syntax) for stylistic reasons or in order to compensate for omissions elsewhere. This means that my analysis deals with some elements (e.g. lexis), which studies into language change tend to avoid. Trudgill, for example, argues that lexical changes do not represent core language change:

Unlike phonology and grammar, words and phrases are easily acquired, and all of us continue to acquire new lexis throughout our lifetimes as a result of simple exposure, in a way that just doesn't happen with other more central aspects of language structure.

(Trudgill 2014, 216)

However, I am not documenting language change, but analysing the representation of that language change in creative written texts, and consequently, the vocabulary used in those texts is a salient feature.

Most speakers of a language would, as a result of their education and socialisation, be able to distinguish standard and non-standard forms of that language, but there is great disagreement among sociolinguists and indeed in the public at large, about the political implications of this distinction and the impact it can have on individuals' social status. As Trudgill argues, it is also difficult to define what a 'standard language' (in this case Standard English) actually is (Trudgill 1999, 117). He goes about the task backwards, as it were, by



stating what it isn't. In the end he comes to the following conclusion: "that Standard English is a dialect [...] a sub-variety of English" (ibid., 123). However, he states that this standard dialect is unusual in that it does not have an accent; it is purely social, rather than geographical (although it has geographical origins in the southeast of England); and that its speakers are "very much concentrated at the top of the social scale" (ibid., 124).

One of the subjects I tackle in this thesis is the question of whether the representation of CUVs in literature represents some kind of codification – a recording, and possibly standardisation of the varieties (albeit in a highly subjective, modified form). Codification is defined as "the process whereby a variety of a language, often as part of a standardisation process, acquires a publicly recognised and fixed form in which norms are laid down for 'correct' usage as far as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and perhaps pronunciation are concerned" (Trudgill 2003, 23–24).

### Section 1.2.5 Contemporary urban vernaculars and stigmatisation

Milani has explored the implications of a 2006 debate in the Swedish media (a topic discussed in Section 2.1.2), analysing the way in which ideas about education, language and opportunities for young people intertwined with social stigma associated with particular forms of language use. He discusses the way that this entwining process is based on a number of processes, using a three-stage model of *iconization*, *fractal recursivity* and *erasure*, taken from Irvine and Gal's interrogations of language ideology (Irvine and Gal 2000). Milani discusses how:

On the one hand, iconization describes how linguistic phenomena are portrayed as if they flowed 'naturally' from a social group's biological or cultural essence. [...] Through iconization, not only are different individuals *essentialized* as a more or less homogenous social group on the basis of allegedly shared linguistic features, but an apparently 'natural' opposition is also created between that social group and other groups that are not perceived to give evidence of the same (linguistic) characteristics.

(Milani 2010, 120)

This essentialising can be seen in debates about CUVs in both Sweden and the UK, with associations made between CUV use and gang involvement (see also Section 4.2.9 for a discussion of how this plays out in literature). The debate in Sweden concerned the

potential negative consequences of CUVs for the educational, employment and general societal prospects of young people of immigrant background in Swedish schools, another example of this generalising process. This negative portrayal of CUVs and the people who speak them is also present in the UK (see Section 2.2.4 for more on this).

The issue of fractal recursivity is more complex, and perhaps less immediately obvious:

Fractal recursivity, on the other hand, captures the fact that the dichotomy constructed on linguistic grounds through iconization is simultaneously salient on different coexisting and interrelated *semiotic tiers* (Milani 2008) – gender, ethnicity, race, social class, morality, aesthetics. In this way, fractal recursivity creates a chain of *entwined* binary oppositions – man vs. woman, Swede vs. immigrant, Rinkeby Swedish vs. standard Swedish – in which the poles of each dyad are not mutually equal in terms of power and value.

(ibid., 120)

In my understanding of Milani's use of this term, it is significant whether one is a male speaker of Rinkeby Swedish whose parents come from Turkey, or a female speaker.

Likewise, a male speaker of Standard Swedish whose parents come from northern Sweden might be viewed, or even treated, differently to one whose parents come from northern Serbia. This is relevant in the above discussion of gender and youth in relation to CUVs.

Milani says of the third element:

Finally, erasure refers to the processes in which ideology simplifies the complexity of sociolinguistic reality by obscuring or effacing its inherent diversity.

(ibid., 121)

That is, such sociolinguistic traits possessed by a female, Turkish-born speaker of Rinkeby Swedish, that do not conform to the characteristics which that classification entails are simply bypassed or explained away. Although I do not go into detail on this latter point in this thesis, it is worth bearing in mind, especially in the discussions of literary representations of spoken language and the reliance on stereotyped, easily recognisable forms to signal a particular category through language use (cf. Section 4.1).

On the flipside of this discussion about the processes by which language ideology operates is the fact that ideologies can also work in a positive way, attempting to counteract essentialising and stigmatisation. This has been true in the context of CUVs with commentators arguing that CUVs represent innovation and creativity, for instance when Knudsen explores the way rappers in Oslo “choose from, appropriate, Signify upon and

develop” features of the multilingual environment in which they live (Knudsen 2010). It has also been argued that CUVs are an important way of demonstrating identity and group affiliation (cf. Sections 3.3 and 4.3), and that users speak CUVs in some contexts, but are able to switch to other varieties as appropriate (the example of Anwar in Rampton’s study, as discussed in Section 1.1.9 above, is a good example of this). It could be argued that many researchers study stigmatised, or non-prestige varieties such as CUVs with a desire to legitimise them in some way, or at least to increase awareness of their complexity in wider society. Certainly, some sociolinguists have been keen to bring their knowledge of the varieties they have studied to a wider audience through media not traditionally associated with the discussion of academic literature (e.g. Kerswill’s column in the *Sun* newspaper (*The Sun* 2010)).

There is also the issue of covert prestige: “favourable connotations that nonstandard and apparently low-status or ‘incorrect’ forms have for many speakers” (Trudgill 2003, 30). This is an observable feature in the case of CUVs, as can be seen from the contrast between the negative portrayal of CUVs discussed here and in Sections 2.1.2 and 2.3.2, and the uptake of CUV features by ‘out-group’ individuals, that is, people who are not directly part of the social or geographic communities in which CUVs have emerged.

## Section 1.3 Conclusion

This chapter has run through some of the key issues relating to sociolinguistic discussions of contemporary urban vernaculars, including conventions and controversies in naming and talking about emerging language practices, and the social symbolism that CUVs have accrued. In it, I have outlined some of the products of language contact, such as code-switching, borrowing and creolisation, finding that the two former practices constitute an integral part of contemporary urban vernaculars, but that these vernaculars cannot strictly be defined as creole forms, although some scholars have placed them, or similar phenomena on the creoloid scale. I have discussed the split between concepts of ‘language variety’ and ‘language practice’ in the context of contemporary urban vernaculars, looking at how these two approaches allow for different understandings of the ways language works. Following this I outlined the role that social meaning plays in language use, by

looking at concepts such as indexicality and the link between this and styles and registers. I then discussed the concepts of super-diversity, and linguistic and ethnolinguistic repertoires, before moving on to summarise Rampton's definition and defense of contemporary urban vernaculars, a term which incorporates the variability and complexity of super-diversity and the flexibility of the repertoire, while allowing for great specificity in terms of the description and analysis of particular linguistic features and practices.

In the second part of the chapter, I have discussed some of the social implications and issues pertaining to contemporary urban vernaculars, including social factors such as gender and youth and stigma, and formal or stylistic factors such as the standard/non-standard 'divide' and the different characteristics of written and spoken language. These outlines lay the foundation for a more informed discussion of CUV forms in the following chapters, and particularly in Chapter 2, which presents some of the sociolinguistic research that has gone into describing the formal and social features of contemporary urban vernaculars.

## Chapter 2 Contemporary Urban Vernaculars and their Emergence in Sweden and the UK

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Building on the summary of terminology and general research into CUVs in the previous chapter, this chapter engages in a more in-depth discussion of developments specific to the national contexts of Sweden and the UK. This will provide a basis for the analysis of these varieties as used in creative forms that constitutes the remainder of this thesis.

I begin with a focus on Sweden, working more or less chronologically through developments and debates in the research into CUVs in Swedish urban and suburban areas. I look at the pioneering work of Ulla-Britt Kotsinas, whose studies in the 1980s and 90s defined the field in Sweden and inspired and informed studies across Europe. The section continues with a discussion of academic and media debates around the impact and use of CUVs in Sweden, and concludes with a look at more recent studies, many of which have led to a re-evaluation of the character and reach of CUVs in contemporary Swedish society.

Moving on to the UK context, I discuss a number of influential studies into friendship, race and language use, including Ben Rampton's seminal 1995 work *Crossing*, which showed the extent to which friendship groups and cultural connections influenced language use in a British urban environment. I then move on to discuss the *Multicultural London English* studies of the 2000s, which have documented the emergence of a new variety in inner London. With reference to these and associated studies, I also discuss the way MLE has been portrayed in the media and in the public realm in the UK. These debates bring us more or less up to the current day, and act as a foundation upon which the subsequent chapters are laid out.

In order to fully integrate the discussion of these two national contexts, the chapter ends with a comparison of the two, identifying key areas in which the debates have diverged or taken a similar path, as well as contextualising them with examples and questions raised by other national contexts where CUVs have been found to exist.

## Section 2.1 Contemporary Urban Vernaculars in Sweden

[D]e e olika de så här blandade ord från olika språk som man sätter i svenskan.<sup>8</sup>

(16 year-old research subject from Rinkeby, Kotsinas 1988, 268)

Since its beginnings on the periphery of second-language acquisition studies, Swedish research into what has sometimes been referred to in academic texts as *multiethnisk ungdomsspråk* (multiethnic youth language, henceforth: MU) (cf. Fraurud and Bijvoet 2004) has passed in and out of the spotlight of popular and academic debate. MU initially rose to prominence through Ulla-Britt Kotsinas' analyses of *rinkebysvenska*. In Sweden, heated debate arose around Kotsinas' research, both in terms of the existence and content of the variety, and of the perceived threat to standard Swedish that the variety posed (cf. Stroud 2004). Recently, an extensive study entitled 'Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings' was carried out by teams at a number of universities around Sweden. The purpose of this study was to investigate language use in the 'multilingual urban settings' to which the title of the project refers, and to identify and map features and patterns that could be indicative of language change arising from language contact. This section gives an overview of the various strands of research and debate that have characterised the field over the last 30 years, beginning with the work of Kotsinas.

### Section 2.1.1 Kotsinas: creolisation and *rinkebysvenska*

Ulla-Britt Kotsinas is generally seen as a pioneer in research into contact language phenomena in Sweden. After publishing her doctoral thesis, an analysis of recordings of the Swedish spoken by a number of individuals, each of whom had migrated to Sweden as an adult and had been resident in Sweden for several years (Kotsinas 1982), Kotsinas published a number of further studies of the Swedish spoken by immigrants and the children of immigrants to Sweden. In her studies involving the children of immigrants, Kotsinas identified, described and analysed a language variant she saw as representing a creolised development of the parents' 'pidgin' Swedish (Kotsinas 1985, 279). In a series of publications, she subsequently discussed the extent to which the new variety could be seen

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<sup>8</sup> They're different, these, like, mixed words from different languages that we put into Swedish.

as a creole or creoloid form, stating initially that it did not (Kotsinas 1988), and then did (Kotsinas 2001) fulfil the criteria for such forms. See Section 1.1.1 for some brief discussion of creoles and related forms.

Additionally, Kotsinas identified a schema of three categories for immigrant children's Swedish:

- (i) immigrant children's language does not differ markedly from that of Swedish children;
- (ii) immigrant children's language lacks specific elements of Swedish – indicative of insufficient learning of language; and
- (iii) immigrant children's language fills all language needs, but differs extensively from 'Swedish' Swedish to the point that Swedish speakers would view many expressions as strange, or grammatically incorrect.

(adapted from Kotsinas 1985, 281–2)

It is this latter form she linked to “*kreolisering*” (creolisation) (ibid.). In an acknowledgement of the complex and shifting nature of language use, Kotsinas then went on to state that: “...det är också möjligt att en och samma individs svenska kan karakteriseras på alla tre sätten, olika i olika talsituationer”<sup>9</sup> (ibid., 282). Here, she identified the culturally-symbolic roots of the phenomenon, which she compared to Labov's description of Black English in the US:

[Det tycks] mig fullt möjligt att samma individ tillsammans med den kamratgrupp han normalt interagerar med, eventuellt bestående av invandrarungdomar ur olika invandrargrupper, kan ha utvecklat en speciell variant av svenskan, som skulle kunna ha de drag som beskrevs under punkt tre ovan. Denna variant skulle då fungera som en gruppdialekt och tjäna till att identifiera medlemmerna i gruppen som just invandrarungdomar [...]<sup>10</sup>

(ibid., 283)

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<sup>9</sup> “It's also possible that the very same individual's Swedish could be characterised in all three ways, differently in different situations.”

<sup>10</sup> “To me [it seems] wholly possible that the same individual could, together with the group of friends he normally integrates with, potentially consisting of young people from various immigrant groups, have developed a special variant of Swedish, which would have the features described in point three above. In this case, this variant would work as a group dialect and serve specifically to identify members in the group as immigrant youth [...].”

In one article, Kotsinas gave a possible explanation for her finding that young people living in areas where many forms of Swedish co-exist spoke in a way that is different to ‘native Swedish’:

Den som växer upp i en miljö där många vuxna och kamrater behärskar svenska dåligt kan nog omedvetet tycka att det inte spelar så stor roll om man säger en boll eller ett boll, bara man förstår varandra. Kanske kan det till och med kännas egendomligt att använda infödd stockholmska respektive göteborgska eller malmöitiska i en miljö där en mängd olika varianter av svenska blandas - dialekter av olika slag och mer eller mindre avvikande svenska.<sup>11</sup>

(Kotsinas 2001, 13)

It is important to remember, however, that category (iii) was only one option, and that many young people in these areas also spoke a Swedish that was indistinguishable, or close to indistinguishable from ‘standard’ Swedish, as well as the fact that individual speakers moved fluently from one to another variant depending on the context. She emphasised the importance of not assuming that this language form was used by all young people living in these areas, or indeed all young people of immigrant background: “det finns en hel del ungdomar med invandrarbakgrund som faktiskt aldrig eller i mycket liten grad använder den nya dialekten”<sup>12</sup> (ibid., 14).

In the speech of the young people she described in 1985, Kotsinas found certain grammatical tendencies such as a tendency towards the use of less marked prepositions (e.g. ‘i’ (in) and ‘på’ (on/in/at) sometimes being used interchangeably) and less specific tense markers in speech. She also found a tendency towards vowel length changes, combined with the retention of typical Stockholm prosody, resulting in “ett uttal som närmast tycks

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<sup>11</sup> “Someone who grows up in an area where many adults and friends speak limited Swedish might unconsciously well think that it makes little difference if you say a ball [en - common gender] or a ball [ett - neutral], as long as you understand one another. Maybe it even seems strange to use native Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö dialects in an environment where many different types of Swedish mix – dialects of different types and more or less divergent forms of Swedish.”

<sup>12</sup> “There are a great many young people with immigrant background who actually never, or to a very small extent use the new dialect.”



signalera ‘stockholmare med invandrarbakgrund’<sup>13</sup> (Kotsinas 2000a, 55-6). Also of note is her comment that ‘*svenska elever*’ (Swedish students, i.e. students with two parents born in Sweden) also stated that they found themselves demonstrating similar tendencies to their “invandrarkamrater” (immigrant friends) (Kotsinas 1985, 289), including certain phrases and “invandraruttal” (immigrant pronunciation) when they were angry/excited (ibid.).

Kotsinas conducted further experiments around Stockholm, most famously in Rinkeby, the north-western suburb that gave its name to the variety she documented. In her experiments, she found that: “de tendenser som framträder är [...] påfallande lika i olika områden av Stockholmsregionen och i olika åldersgrupper”<sup>14</sup> (Kotsinas 1988, 266). Within these tendencies, Kotsinas noted, among other things: “osäkerhet i genusval, utebliven eller felaktiga kongruensböjning, [och] *felaktig ordföljd, t ex rak, där svenskan kräver omvänd*”<sup>15</sup> (ibid., 267, my emphasis). She also documented many of the words borrowed from other languages spoken by students at the school, or in the local area, for instance *para* (money), *kiş* (girl – later *guss/guzş*, cf. Section 3.3.2), and *län* (hey – later *len*), all from Turkish, and *ayde* (get out), from Greek (ibid., 268), as well as *abou* (look/wow), adapted from Arabic, and *loco* (crazy), from Spanish (Kotsinas 1994, 150–1). She emphasises here: “[a]tt det inte är fråga om interferens från modersmålet visas av att de nämnde orden och uttrycken används, inte bara av de talare i vilkas hemspråk dem ingår, utan också av andra talare samt att de är mycket vanliga i informellt tal i vissa grupper, medan de undviks i t ex lärare”<sup>16</sup> (Kotsinas 1988, 268).

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<sup>13</sup> “Pronunciation that seems more than anything else to signal ‘Stockholm resident with immigrant background’.”

<sup>14</sup> “Those tendencies that stand out are [...] notably alike in different parts of the Stockholm region and in different age groups.”

<sup>15</sup> “Uncertainty in choice of grammatical gender, omitted or incorrect conjugations [and] *incorrect word order, e.g. non-inverted, where Swedish requires inverted* [e.g. ‘*sedan han gick*’ (then he went), rather than the Standard Swedish ‘*sedan gick han*’ (lit. ‘then went he’)].”

<sup>16</sup> “The fact that it is not a question of influence from the native language is indicated by the use of these words not only in the utterances of the speakers whose home language they are part of, but also by other speakers, as well as the fact that they are very common in informal speech among certain groups, while they are avoided in contact with teachers, for example.”

The adolescents also created new words or meanings from existing Swedish terms, mainly through wordplay and association (a good example is the use of the term *betongen* (concrete) for the suburbs where MU originated – referring to the fact that post-war suburban estates were predominantly constructed in concrete). Other typical MU features include the ‘-isch’ suffix in verbs, nouns and adjectives, e.g. *taggisch* (run away), *grymmisch* (cool) (Kotsinas 2001, 12), as well as the borrowing or adaptation of many lexical items from American English, e.g. *fet* (very, or cool – ostensibly from the US hip hop term *phat*) (ibid.).

She noted the significance of the variety as a local group marker:

Varieteten tycks emellertid användas inom ett visst talsamhälle med social, etnisk och åldersmässig avgränsning, varför den bör klassificeras som en social dialekt eller gruppvarietet. Eftersom varieteten har en viss regional spridning, troligen inte enbart till Rinkeby utan över huvud taget till invandrartäta områden inom den södra delen av stockholmsregionen och eftersom det tycks finnas vissa tendenser till att den sprider sig även till talare utan invandrarbakgrund, förefaller det inte helt omöjligt att den under vissa sociala, ekonomiska och andra omständigheterna kan komma att utvecklas till en regional dialekt eller lokal dialekt [...] Det förefaller också troligt att liknande varieteter finns eller är under utveckling i andra delar av landet. Basen för de olika varianterna skulle då vara de lokala dialekterna (malmöitiska, göteborgska, osv).<sup>17</sup>

(Kotsinas 1988, 277–8)

Kotsinas also noted the spread of these forms to other areas and social groups: “Även i dag börjar en del av invandrarungdomarnas slangord, musikstilar och andra kulturella element spridas, och det händer att barn i invandrarfattiga områden leker att de ‘talar Rinkebyska’”<sup>18</sup> (Kotsinas 2001, 14).

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<sup>17</sup> “The variety seems, however, to be used in a particular speech community with social, ethnic and age-based boundaries, and should hence be classified as a social dialect or group variety. Because the variety has a certain geographic spread, feasibly not only to Rinkeby, but also to areas with large immigrant populations in the area in the southern part of the Stockholm region, and because there appear to be certain signs that it is also spreading to speakers with no immigrant background, it seems not wholly impossible that it could, under certain social, economic and other conditions, develop into a regional or local dialect [...] It also seems feasible that similar varieties exist, or are emerging in other parts of the country. The basis of these various variants would in that case be the local dialects (Malmö dialect, Gothenburg dialect, etc.)”

<sup>18</sup> “Even today, some of the slang terms, music styles and other cultural elements of young immigrants are spreading, and you can find children in areas with small immigrant populations pretending to ‘speak *rinkebyska*’.”

Kotsinas has been criticised by some for the way that: “her work has tended to confirm stereotypes that these features are more prevalent in the speech of multilinguals than they actually are [...]” (Boyd 2010, 3) and the idea that she has emphasised “[*rinkebysvenska*’s] temporal and transient nature as a learner, or pidginized variety of Swedish” (Stroud 2004, 200). The former charge is perhaps valid. Much of the content of Kotsinas’ many publications on the subject is based on just one or two ethnographic studies. However, Kotsinas does state that there was a high degree of variation among the language use of her research informants (Kotsinas 1988, 274), and she leaves a lot of room for uncertainty in her predictions for future linguistic developments in the areas she studied (cf. Kotsinas 1994, 176). In a later study of young people’s syntactic variation in Swedish (see Sections 2.1.3 and 8.1), Ganuza found comparatively little evidence of the non-standard non-inversion of subject-verb word order that Kotsinas had documented (Ganuza 2010; Kotsinas 1994, 146). Stroud’s charge can, however, be refuted: although the conclusions Kotsinas draws in her studies mention the possibility of viewing *rinkebysvenska* as a creoloid form, she clearly differentiates it from pidgins. For instance, in her 1985 paper, in which she examines the Swedish of immigrants learning the language as adults, describing their language as a pidgin form, while clearly separating this from the Swedish of this generation’s children. Likewise, in her 1988 paper she discusses whether *rinkebysvenska* can be categorised as a dialect (Kotsinas 1985; 1988). She also notes the more enduring effects that young people’s linguistic innovations can have, both on their own language as they mature: “Inte sällan tar ungdomarna med sig sina slangord in i sitt vuxenspråk” (Kotsinas 1994, 169), and on language change in general: “det finns [...] många tecken på att ungdomars nyskapelser spelar en inte obetydlig roll i språkförändringsprocessen” (ibid.).

Whatever the reservations, however, Kotsinas’ work has undeniably had a lasting influence on Swedish (and indeed, pan-European) studies into ethnolinguistic repertoire in contemporary urban settings. Collectively, for instance, the articles in the pan-Scandinavian compendium Quist & Svendsen (2010) cite twelve of Kotsinas’ books and articles, with publication dates ranging across 22 years.

## Section 2.1.2 Debating *rinkebysvenska*, *miljonsvenska*, and *blattesvenska*

Debates about the nature and naming of CUVs in Sweden have continued, with a wide range of opinions being voiced. This section discusses a few of these, particularly the so-called ‘*Gringodebatten*’ (Gringo debate), in and around the magazine Gringo’s coining of the term *miljonsvenska*. In this section I refer to Swedish CUVs as ‘*multietniskt ungdomspråk*’ (multi-ethnic youth language/MU), a term coined by Bijvoet and Fraurud which has come to be relatively well-established in academic discussions. I discuss the term in further detail in the next section. I would like to begin, however, with a short discussion of Stroud’s language-ideological analysis of *rinkebysvenska*. Stroud’s article is relevant to my discussion in the previous chapter, in that “[*rinkebysvenska*] throws into stark relief the difficulties of using traditional taxonomies of language contact or acquisition to pin down and characterize contact varieties like RS that are drenched with sociosymbolic significance” (Stroud 2004, 200). This is an interesting point: why is it so hard to name CUVs? Is it the presence of ‘foreign’ elements (both linguistic and social) in their formation and use? Does the difficulty stem from a reluctance to admit that one distinguishes between ‘ethnic Swede’ and ‘ethnic Other’? Is it to do with a reluctance to consider CUVs as an equal part of the national linguistic ‘landscape’? Here, Stroud considers this in the context of *rinkebysvenska*:

In the Swedish context, a language notion that has dominated the debate since the 1980s is Rinkeby Swedish (RS), a potential, imagined, ‘pan-immigrant’ variety of Swedish. Although this concept ostensibly refers to some recurring and pervasive linguistic characteristics of the Swedish spoken by immigrants, it is also part of those ‘heterogeneous strategies and resources that invoke and reconfigure identities in competition’ (Rampton 1999, 2000: 8). [...] In contemporary Swedish migrant debates, RS comprises a powerful but subtle means for the exclusion and stigmatization of migrants in Swedish public spaces, at the same time that the significance of speaking Swedish is resymbolized [...] although most of us like to think of ourselves as tolerant and permissive, even encouraging, of variation and diversity, with respect to cultures, languages and religions, concepts like SL [semilingualism] and RS in fact constrain, even deny, heterogeneity. Insidiously enough, this is despite the fact that these notions seem to pay at least lip service to diversity and multiplicity.

(ibid., 197-8)

Stroud points out the fact that discussions of *rinkebysvenska* highlight the difference between ‘Swedish’ and ‘non-Swedish’ by delineating a boundary between different types of language. It places the ethnic Swede as observer in relation to the linguistic practices of the ethnic Other. Stroud argues that this process is at work even in well-intentioned acts, such as

Kotsinas' attempts to name and describe *rinkebysvenska*. The mere drawing of the boundary is enough to 'other' the speakers on the other side of that boundary.

Through his article, Stroud is trying to draw attention to "the fact that societal mechanisms of exclusion might not be immediately perceived as such" (ibid., 210). This is a worthwhile aim, and Stroud's analysis is pertinent to a number of studies (not least the current thesis). At the same time, it is difficult to know how to avoid drawing boundaries or making generalisations to some extent when trying to describe phenomena occurring in contemporary society – one of the challenges of talking about contemporary social issues is that those issues involve people who might potentially be offended or even materially affected by what you say. Unfortunately, Stroud does not offer any solutions to this problem.

Others have made attempts to address the kind of issues Stroud raises, with some significantly changing the path of debate in Swedish public discourse. 2004 saw the launch of *Gringo*, a supplement in the free Swedish daily newspaper *Metro*. In the words of its editors, *Gringo* was "en tidning om innanförskap där andra ser utanförskap"<sup>19</sup> (*Skånskan* 2008), with its core aim "att utmana oss själva, läsarna och andra medier att vända på begreppen"<sup>20</sup> (ibid.). In effect, they wanted to wrest the representation of people living in the stigmatised post-war *förort*, (suburbs) from the hands of a few establishment figures, and give what they saw as marginalised voices an opportunity to make themselves heard. Publication of the magazine, which has also had a major web presence (this appears to have since dissolved), ceased in 2007, after its parent company filed for bankruptcy. A short-lived resurgence was attempted in 2008-9, with a supplement in the southern Swedish daily *Skånskan* (*Skånskan* 2008), although this too folded after a few issues. The magazine was extremely outspoken in its re-appropriation of previously derogatory terms, and its legacy has been hotly debated. Alarcón Alanes, for instance, finds that the publication's desire to make visible, and therefore challenge, existing power structures was limited by the fact that "den omstörtande kapaciteten kan i samma möte underställas oppositionella eller

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<sup>19</sup> "A magazine about inclusion where others see exclusion."

<sup>20</sup> "To challenge ourselves, our readers and other media to reassess the way they think about the world."

antipatiska läsningar, varigenom budskapet förvanskas och neutraliseras av samma maktordning det avser att bekämpa”<sup>21</sup> (Alarcón Alanes 2008, 63).

One way in which *Gringo* rose to prominence was through its attempts to foreground the language of the suburbs in print. Their renaming of this language as *miljonsvenska* is a case in point. The editors of *Gringo* deemed it more appropriate that the variety should be given the name *miljonsvenska* in order to remove the association with a single district (cf. Kotsinas’ *rinkebysvenska*), and acknowledge the fact that its use was widespread on the urban periphery throughout Sweden. As Leonard states, referencing Benedict Anderson’s 1983 concept of ‘imagined communities’: “In re-branding Rinkeby Swedish as Million Swedish, *Gringo* made a case for de-linking the sociolect from one particular Stockholm suburb and instead connecting it to a nationwide imagined community” (Leonard 2006, 9).

Milani’s study of the debate sparked by *Gringo*’s controversial language tactics offers insight into media assumptions about language use and language users (Milani 2010). The study analyses the 2006 ‘*Blattesvenska*’ (‘Nigger’ Swedish) debate that featured in the national daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, sparked by Ebba Witt-Brattström’s remarks in the paper (Witt-Brattström 2006a) in response to this fake advertisement in *Gringo*:

Witt-Brattströmska kompaniet söker språkfascister. Du! Ja, Du. Det är Dig vi behöver.  
Under förutsättning att Du vill bevara Sverige svenskt i ordets mest ariska bemärkelse  
[...]”<sup>22</sup>

(*Gringo* 2006)

*Gringo*’s advertisement was itself placed as a response to Witt-Brattström’s comments on a television panel discussion about Sweden’s education system on 25 March 2006, in which she branded the government’s Swedish language education policies racist, and stated that:

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<sup>21</sup> “The revolutionary capacity can in the same encounter be subjected to oppositional or antipathic readings, through which the message is corrupted and neutralised by the same power structures it seeks to combat.”

<sup>22</sup> “Witt-Brattström & Company are looking for language fascists. You! Yes, you. We need You. On the condition that you want to keep Sweden Swedish in the most Aryan sense of the word.”

“[de nya svenskarna] får nöja sig med lite blattesvenska som bara räcker till att slå upp ett stånd i Rosengård där de säljer bananer”<sup>23</sup> (Molin 2006).

Witt-Brattström’s comment referred to revised state education policies regarding bilingual education and the teaching of Swedish as a second language. Sweden has historically had a reputation for providing considerable support for minority language education. In the 1970s, for instance, municipalities were required to provide instruction for the children of immigrants in languages other than Swedish, both as a subject, and as the language of instruction (Boyd and Huss 2001, 4). This was initiated by immigrant communities, and received much attention, both in Sweden and further afield, the idea being that students born outside Sweden would achieve much more, be better able to draw on knowledge they had acquired before coming to Sweden, and feel more invested in their studies if the language they spoke best was a core part of their education. However, Huss and Boyd report that the actual level of availability/take-up of such classes was much lower than generally thought, and that the Swedish government’s ambitions for this kind of cultural/linguistic freedom of expression were ultimately not fulfilled (ibid.).

In 2005, the government launched a renewed national language policy, which included four main objectives. They reflected the idea that language is a key factor in citizens’ active participation in society, that all citizens should have the opportunity to acquire high-level skills in Swedish and other languages, and that Sweden’s linguistic diversity is a resource that should be fostered. Of these four, one is particularly relevant to this discussion: “Alla ska ha rätt till språk: att utveckla och tillägna sig svenska språket, att utveckla och bruka det egna modersmålet och nationella minoritetsspråket och att få möjlighet att lära sig

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<sup>23</sup> “[New Swedes] have to content themselves with a little *blattesvenska* that’s just enough for them to set up a stall in Rosengård and sell bananas.” NB: This version of her statement differs slightly from the version she later quoted herself as saying: “Regeringen signalerar till våra nya svenskar att det räcker om de lär sig lite lagom blattesvenska så att de kan slå upp ett stånd och sälja bananer i Rosengård” (Witt-Brattström 2006a) (The government are signalling to our new Swedes that it’s enough for them to learn a little bit of *blattesvenska* so they can set up a stand and sell bananas in Rosengård).

främmande språk”<sup>24</sup> (*Bästa språket - en samlad svensk språkpolitik* 2005, 2). This focus on language as a human right and as a critical feature of citizenship underlies much of Sweden’s language policy, but it has been criticised by some, including Witt-Brattström. Arguably, though, Witt-Brattström’s comments are founded on misconceptions about language learning, bilingualism, and indeed the language policies she criticises, as discussed by Jonsson and Milani:

Här är det viktigt att understryka att syftet med det regeringsförslag som Witt-Brattström kritiserade var att stärka *tvåspråkig undervisning*, det vill säga den parallela användningen av både minoritetsspråk och svenska som undervisningsspråk [...] Witt-Brattström använder dock uttrycket *hemspråksundervisning* i sin artikel<sup>25</sup>

(Jonsson and Milani 2009, 69).

As Jonsson and Milani explain, *hemspråksundervisning* (home language tuition) not only an outdated term (the term *modersmålsundervisning* (mother tongue tuition) is now used in that context), but also a much less comprehensive concept than bilingual tuition, involving less teaching time and a completely different approach. Jonsson and Milani were not the only voices to speak out against Witt-Brattström’s misrepresentation of Sweden’s contemporary language situation, as can be seen in following quote from renowned bilingualism scholar Kenneth Hyltenstam, in which he criticises Witt-Brattström for her fact-fudging in her assertion that schools are giving too much attention to mother-tongue language instruction, at the expense of Swedish teaching: “Hon har nästan inte en siffra rätt i det underlag hon använder i sin argumentering [...] När en forskare handskas rundhänt med sina källor på det sätt som hon gör i sin artikel på DN:s kultursida den 19 april blir det riktigt eländigt”<sup>26</sup> (Hyltenstam 2006).

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<sup>24</sup> “Everyone shall have the right to language: to develop and acquire the Swedish language, to develop and use their own mother-tongue and national minority language and to have the opportunity to learn foreign languages.”

<sup>25</sup> “It’s important to emphasis here that the purpose of the proposed policy that Witt-Brattström criticised was to support *bilingual tuition*, that is the parallel use of both the minority language and Swedish as the language of instruction [...] But Witt-Brattström uses the term *home language tuition* in her article.”

<sup>26</sup> “There are almost no accurate figures in the data she bases her arguments on [...] when a researcher is slapdash with their sources as she is in her article for *DN*’s Arts pages on 19 April, things get truly dire.”



However, Witt-Brattström subsequently went rather further in her argument against *Gringo*'s attempts to make a space for *miljonsvenska* in the public sphere, because:

[...] det finns inte, kan inte finnas och kommer aldrig att finnas en 'miljonsvenska' där Sveriges i nuläget över hundra invandrarspråk smälter samman till en för alla begriplig dialekt. Dialekt har en konventionaliserad vokabulär och ett standardiserat språkbruk för livets alla områden. Dialekt talas och förstås av människor i alla åldrar, såväl treåringar som hundraåringar. Det som ibland talas av ungdomar i Malmös, Göteborgs och Stockholms invandrartäta förorter är olika varianter av multietnisk pojkslang med ett bästföredatum som överskrids så fort en ny pojkgeneration (flickor är i minoritet) debuterar med sina lokala synonymer.<sup>27</sup>

(Witt-Brattström 2006b)

In this statement, Witt-Brattström not only makes sweeping statements about the universality of dialects, but also exhibits misconceptions about what *miljonsvenska* was/is, and what claims *Gringo* were making for it.

Milani highlights two key subjects for analysis in the *Gringo* debate: attempts to “define the *name, meaning, and value* of a specific linguistic phenomenon” (Milani 2010, 118, orig. emphasis), and the process through which gender was identified as a major element of Witt-Brattström's argument by subsequent commentators. Furthermore, he mentions the links between gender and the “multifaceted image of [*multietniskt ungdomsspråk*]'s] purported speakers” (ibid.). As discussed in Section 1.2.1., the gender aspect of this particular debate is significant, as it highlights what Milani refers to as the cultural scripting of linguistic phenomena (ibid., 120), revealing “deeper social concerns about what it means to be a ‘*non-Swedish*’ young man”<sup>28</sup> (ibid., 118, orig. emphasis).

It is also important to note Milani's identification of the 2006 *Dagens Nyheter* debate as a key site that condensed a wide-ranging discussion, and in doing so became a very public arena

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<sup>27</sup> “But a ‘miljonsvenska’ in which all of Sweden's immigrant languages (currently over a hundred) meld together into one dialect that everyone understands does not exist, cannot exist, and never will exist. Dialects have a conventionalised vocabulary and standardized usage for all areas of life. Dialects are spoken and understood by people of all ages, from three-year-olds to one-hundred-year-olds. What is sometimes spoken by young people in the immigrant-dense suburbs of Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm are different variants of a multi-ethnic lads' slang, which will pass its best-before date as soon as a new generation of male teenagers (girls are in the minority) emerges with its own local synonyms.”

<sup>28</sup> Milani here uses ‘non-Swedish’ to paraphrase a wider societal discourse about what it means to be Swedish.

for a number of knowledgeable voices to present their views on the subject. Looking at more recent treatments of the issues touched upon by the debate, I am struck by the way in which this short, intense period of discussion took this ‘condensing’ role, collating opinions and perhaps allowing the debate as a whole to move forward. It certainly seems to have served as an arena in which prominent public figures’ opinions and preconceptions were laid bare. Witt-Brattström and Åsa Mattsson, especially, were singled out and subject to questioning about the accuracy of their statements. Leonard has analysed the comments of both Witt-Brattström and Mattsson, and finds that: “Here the gloves come off: Witt-Brattström [a feminist academic with Jewish heritage] explicitly identifies her professional and social (and arguably ethnic) position with enlightened authority, fighting to save benighted residents of the suburbs from their own deficient culture” (Leonard 2006, 18).

### Section 2.1.3 Recent studies

In 2004, Fraurud and Bijvoet argued for the use of the term ‘*multietniskt ungdomsspråk*’ (multiethnic youth language), over Kotsinas’s term *rinkebysvenska*, on the basis that this language variety is not restricted to a single geographic location (Fraurud and Bijvoet 2004). Since the mid-2000s, there has been an increased interest in researching ‘Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings’ (the title of a major study), possibly linked to the high profile of the *Dagens Nyheter/Gringo* debate and the increased presence of contemporary urban vernaculars in other spheres such as literature. These studies have led to the collection and analysis of new, more nuanced data, a response to the fact that, as Ganuza states: “Kotsinas’ studies were pioneering, but considering that most of her claims were based on rather small samples of data, there is a need to further explore her findings and substantiate these [...]” (Ganuza 2011, 91). Fraurud and Bijvoet felt that in order to do this, the debate about contemporary urban vernaculars would need input from researchers from a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches (Bijvoet and Fraurud 2010, 170). Accordingly, the ‘Language and language use among young people in multilingual urban settings’ study was conducted jointly by researchers from Gothenburg, Lund, and Stockholm universities. The researchers investigated the language practices of young people in multilingual areas in Gothenburg, Malmö and Stockholm from their

various methodological perspectives. These included phonetic studies, syntactic variation, perception studies, socio-political studies of multilingualism, and literary studies. By gathering this breadth of analysis on data collected from a cohort of over 200 young people across the three cities, as well as using data from other sources, the researchers hoped to sketch a comprehensive picture of the current state of contemporary urban vernaculars in Sweden. I will not refer to all the separate studies here, but I would like to highlight a few that are of particular relevance for my own analysis and discussion.

Ganuza analysed the use of non-standard subject verb order in declarative main clauses<sup>29</sup>, as documented by Kotsinas. She found that many of the young people in the cohort did use this feature in speech (though not in writing), regardless of their linguistic background or whether they went to school in an area with high levels of multilingualism (Ganuza 2011, 93). However this use was infrequent in all but a few participants, and was generally dependent on other variables, such as the preceding word (adverbials such as *'sen'* and *'då'* (both 'then') and clause-initial subordinate clauses such as *'När han kom'* (When he came) were the most common predictors of non-inversion) (ibid., 95). The most prodigious users were all to be found in Stockholm, suggesting that there is something of a regional association. Interestingly, there is also a slight gender influence, as Ganuza found that statistically, male participants were slightly more likely to use the feature than female participants, although some female participants were among the most prodigious users (ibid., 96-7, cf. Section 1.2.1). The feature was used by both monolingual speakers of Swedish and multilingual participants, although "all the most frequent users of [the feature] had a multilingual background" (ibid., 97).

One of the most pertinent points in relation to the current study is Ganuza's finding that non-standard non-inversion occurred most commonly when the participants were speaking about something of particular personal significance for them, when they 'got into' the subject, and were allowed to talk about it for an extended period. Furthermore, the feature had 'symbolic value' for the speakers, who used it "as an active linguistic strategy with which they manifest[ed] their affiliation and identification with the multilingual suburb,

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<sup>29</sup> e.g. *'sen jag gick hem'* (then I went home), where Standard Swedish requires *'sen gick jag hem'* (then went I home).

show[ed] solidarity with their peers in a classroom situation, and/or contest[ed] official discourses” (ibid., 99-100). This conclusion supports the arguments in this thesis about the symbolic link between contemporary urban vernaculars and personal affiliation with a particular location or community (cf. Section 3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.6). Additionally, the use of these features in speech, but not in writing, indicates that it is a stylistic choice that can be applied at will and is not dictated by incomplete learning of Swedish.

Bijvoet and Fraurud conducted analyses of young people’s perceptions of, and attitudes towards, language use in Stockholm. They did this in order to study language varieties as social constructions, as reflected in listeners’ ability to identify and categorise particular features according to social meaning. This was predicated on an acknowledgement of the existence in Swedish society (as in many other places) of

Asymmetric power relations associated with social class and gender as well as with ethnic and linguistic diversity, [which have] scientific and ideological implications for the study of language variation [and urge] us to consider how our research and the way we disseminate it may influence the public debate and political developments.

(Bijvoet and Fraurud 2011, 4)

Bijvoet and Fraurud refer to the “blurred boundaries, [...] lack of clustering of linguistic features, and dynamic and flexible inter- and intra-individual variation” (ibid., 10) that characterise Swedish in multilingual settings, mentioning too the “ diverse linguistic backgrounds and interactive experiences” (ibid.) of individuals in this particular community of practice. This is an important point to note, and something that chimes with Rampton’s discussion of contemporary urban vernaculars (cf. Section 1.2.5, also Rampton 2011). For their study, the researchers selected seven Stockholm residents ‘representing’ different set of language characteristics: two represented the regional norm; two, Swedish as a second language; and three, suburban slang. The recordings of these speakers were then played to listeners who were asked to answer a series of questions about the identity, behaviours and characteristics of the seven individuals. The listeners were from diverse groups in terms of age and ethnicity, although the particular analysis I have based this summary on looked in particular at the responses of students at a high school in the Stockholm suburbs, many of whom had a multilingual background, as well as undergraduate students of linguistics at Stockholm University, all of whom had monolingual Swedish backgrounds.

The listeners' responses to the recordings were varied, and I will not discuss them all here, but I would like to highlight a finding that is especially relevant to the current study, namely, that there was a tendency among listeners to "hear what is not there" (ibid., 23) when presented with recordings of the 'suburban slang' speakers. This was true of both the high school students and the university students, and both groups identified features they associated with suburban slang/*rinkebysvenska*, despite the fact that the features mentioned *were not actually present in the recordings*. In response to one speaker in particular, the listeners noted frequent use of the word '*liksom*' (sort of), of mistakes in grammatical gender, of non-standard non-inversion, and of slang. A detailed analysis of the recording showed that none of these features occurred. Bijvoet and Fraurud attribute this to a process in which

The mere manifestation of even a single linguistic feature [the recording featured prosodic features associated with 'suburban slang'] may trigger in the listener a stereotype of a group of speakers which, in turn, may trigger assumptions about the whole language system of the speaker.

(ibid., 23)

When thinking about the use in rap and literature of contemporary urban vernacular features, it is worth bearing this effect in mind, both in the analysis of the texts, and in the analysis of responses to and debates around these texts.

Overall, the sociolinguistic research conducted into contemporary urban vernaculars in Sweden over the last decade or so complicates the somewhat simplistic image that had developed through Kotsinas' work and media interpretations of it. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that the Swedish spoken in the multilingual environment of the post-war suburb has evolved significantly in the last forty years.

## Section 2.2 Contemporary Urban Vernaculars in the UK

Much of the sociolinguistic research into contemporary UK English in recent years has focused on 'levelling' (the decrease in distinction between regional dialects) as a phenomenon (Kerswill et al. 2007, 1; cf. Torgersen and Kerswill 2004), but a number of scholars have been investigating the increases in distinctive and innovative features emerging in certain urban areas (especially areas of inner London). The most discussed of these emerging language forms has come to be referred to as 'Multicultural London

English' (MLE), or in informal, and often perjorative terms, 'Jafaican' (referring to the purported 'faking' of Caribbean creole speech).

Research in this area has roots in a number of studies conducted during the 80's and 90's, focusing on the language of young people born to foreign parents but brought up in the UK. In schools and youth clubs around the UK, this 'second generation' was seen to be negotiating delicate racial tensions and identity issues, and the language they used played a key role in doing so. Examples of this negotiation through language include the use by young people of varying degrees of Jamaican Patois (a London variant of Jamaican Creole) (cf. Sebba 1993; Hewitt 1986), and Punjabi or Stylised Asian English (cf. Rampton 1995). Since then, however, the focus has turned more towards examining what has been seen by many as a culmination of all these practices: the existence of the new group variety termed MLE by researchers. Each of the earlier studies mentioned here actually makes peripheral reference to "the local multiracial vernacular" (Rampton 1995, 221), "this London English" (Hewitt 1986, 104), and "Black London English" (Sebba 1983, cited in Hewitt 1986, 104). However, the first time its features were thoroughly analysed and described was in the research conducted under the *Linguistic Innovators* and *Multicultural London English* projects of 2004-7 and 2007-10, respectively. I will discuss how each of these studies has contributed to knowledge of current language use among young people in London.

### Section 2.2.1 Hewitt and Sebba – Friendship groups and identities

Roger Hewitt's 1986 study *White Talk, Black Talk* represents a significant text on ethnicity and language among young people in London, and the role of friendship in this. It provides an interesting description of the ways in which young white adolescents made use of UK Caribbean Creole in social situations. Hewitt discusses the importance of Creole in the political struggle for racial equality, and describes how use of the language variety by those seen as using it 'inappropriately' (i.e. the majority of the white adolescents who used it – aside from a small minority whose use of it was deemed to be acceptable as a result of their close personal relationships with their Afro-Caribbean peers) was extremely controversial, and often seen as offensive or mocking by black adolescents (Hewitt 1986). However, Hewitt found that the use of Creole continued to influence the speech of white Londoners,

writing that: “through [black adolescents] association with white children in the local neighbourhoods and schools, their speech has come to have an impact on the new generations of white Londoners, especially in areas of relatively dense black population” (Hewitt 1986, 126–127).

Around the same time, Sebba conducted research in black communities in London to find out more about the language practices of immigrants from the Caribbean and their children. He found that, while first generation immigrants from the many different islands of the Caribbean spoke different Creoles, their children did not speak a mixed “‘British Caribbean Creole’ with features drawn from many Caribbean varieties” (Sebba 1993, 43), as might be expected in a language contact situation (cf. Section 1.1.1). Instead, “they acknowledge two distinct and separable codes. When they are not speaking London English, they may choose to ‘talk black’ or ‘chat Patois’: but this ‘black’ variety [...] is based on *Jamaican* Creole in particular” (ibid.). As Sebba has discussed, “the London Jamaican form seems to be an adaptation of the London English pronunciation, in accordance with a set of conversion rules” (Sebba 1997, 231). And through this, the London English pronunciation impacted on the young people’s apparently Jamaican Creole speech as well as the Creole influencing the London English.

Sebba looked for explanations for the ‘re-creolisation’ occurring among young Londoners, attributing it to a desire to adhere to a ‘Black British’ identity, and be associated with the positive characteristics of black and Jamaican musical culture, and also, in the case of white speakers, to express solidarity with the black members of their friendship groups (ibid., 232).

### Section 2.2.2 Crossing

Following on from this, Ben Rampton conducted a number of studies into urban adolescent language use, starting with his oft-cited analysis of ‘crossing’ practices by young people in the South Midlands (Rampton 1995). In his field work, Rampton interacted with young people aged 13-16 in schools and youth clubs in a town he calls ‘Stoneford’ (ibid., 25). This field work was carried out in 1984 and 1987, and involved primarily male

respondents, although some girls also took part in the 1987 study (*ibid.*, 23). Rampton's approach enabled him to record and analyse the young people's interactions in a variety of contexts, and meant that his exchanges with them were frequently relaxed and informal. The young people Rampton interviewed and observed were also given voice recording equipment with which to document their speech in situations away from the institutions in which Rampton met them. These ethnographic techniques mean that the studies reflect, as far as possible, a range of authentic interactional circumstances, helping to provide the right conditions in which to capture and observe young people's informal language use.

Ben Rampton coined the term 'crossing' to refer to the way young people from a variety of ethnic groups switched between one another's language varieties in different social situations. Crossing differs from code-switching in that it "focuses on code alternation by people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the second language they employ" (Rampton 1995, 280). This indicates familiarity with the out-group variety, either through personal ties, or through the influence of popular culture. The ethnicities of the young people who participated in the studies are characterised by Rampton as: Afro-Caribbean; mixed Caribbean/Anglo; Anglo; Bangladeshi; Indian; Mixed Indian/Anglo; Pakistani (*ibid.*, 23). In the introduction to *Crossing* he notes that his study differs from those published previously (*cf.* Hewitt 1986) in that it includes young people of South Asian descent (Rampton 1995, 13). The languages he analyses as being used in crossing practises are Panjabi (as ordinarily spoken by Indian and Pakistani informants) (*ibid.*, 45), Creole (as ordinarily spoken by Afro-Caribbean informants) (*ibid.*, 45), and stylised Asian English (SAE) (a parody of the English spoken by adults of Asian descent who learnt English as a second language, and by the young people's Bangladeshi peers) (*ibid.*, 50).

Rampton discusses the signifying roles and positions occupied by the practice of crossing amongst these languages, as carried out by the various ethnic groups detailed above, analysing both the young people's account of the significance and consequences of certain speech acts, and accounts and portrayals of the languages/varieties in question in the media and in public discourse. He notes that "pejorative sociolinguistic images" (Rampton 1995, 51) constitute a distinctive thread in the representation of South Asians in, for example, the British press and television. He goes on to refer specifically to the notion of the 'babu', for which he cites an OED definition, describing it as a late nineteenth century term, indicating



a “native Hindoo gentleman, also (in Anglo-Indian use), a native clerk who writes in English, sometimes applied disparagingly to a hindoo or more particularly, a Bengali with a superficial English education” (Oxford English Dictionary, cited in *ibid.*, 51-2). He goes on to state that the young people he interviewed were aware of the “potential significance of this racist imagery in shaping the way that Anglos (and others) perceived South Asians, but their reactions to these caricatures were varied and often ambivalent” (Rampton 1995, 52).

In light of this, he demonstrates how SAE in particular was the subject of a contradictory relationship between South Asians and limited English language proficiency, present in the young people’s “stylised performance of Asian English” (*ibid.*, 52) and in the negative reactions they exhibited towards the English spoken by their Bangladeshi peers and the Pakistani and Indian adults of the older generation. According to Rampton, they made frequent, if not explicit, reference to the ‘babu’ stereotype mentioned above. In referring to the use of stylised Asian English here, I am seeking to emphasise the differing status of different types of crossing in relation to media representations of both the language variants concerned and the people associated with those variants in non-crossing situations. In the case of stylised Asian English, the impact is a negative one, but media and cultural factors could also have a positive impact on the status of some variants, something that is discussed in greater depth in Chapters 3 and 4.

Rampton presents the statuses accorded to other language variants he discusses, with Creole being described by the informants as “tough, cool and good to use, and associated with [...] argument, abuse, assertiveness, verbal resourcefulness and opposition to authority” (*ibid.*, 37). It was also noted that examples of crossing with Creole were said to be more common in boys than girls, and deemed to be deeply rooted in local youth culture: “it was noticeable in Ashmead [an area of Stoneford] that far from being a matter of ephemeral fashion, a number of non-Afro-Caribbean boys regarded these non-serious uses of Creole as locally rooted and as something of a tradition for them” (*ibid.*, 37). Creole’s cachet was attributed, in part, to the continued popularity of reggae, which had also been noted by Hewitt (Hewitt 1986, 112). Rampton contextualises the relative hostility among informants of Caribbean descent to Anglo and Asian crossing in Creole, referring to Hewitt’s discussion of the “central role that race stratification played in the dynamics of adolescent Creole use” (Rampton 1995, 34).

Use of Panjabi crossing was widespread among both Anglo and Afro-Caribbean individuals of both sexes, and was seen as being locally rooted (ibid, 42), and, as a consequence of the supposedly 'local' nature of the phenomenon, connoting a certain 'ownership' arising from the specific conditions in which it took place (ibid, 54), more amicable and less likely to represent mockery or insult. Here, Rampton mentions the role of Bhangra, a style of music originating from the Punjab region, which gained in UK popularity during the 1980s, and stated that informants were often hostile to the Anglo popstars they had heard singing on a number of Bhangra tracks (ibid, 55).

In addition to their examinations of cross-group borrowing, both Rampton and Hewitt also refer to a fledgling hybrid variety. For Hewitt, this "local multi-racial vernacular" (Hewitt 1986, 188) combines features of London Jamaican with the existing London vernacular (i.e. Cockney), while for Rampton, there is the additional influence of "Panjabi, Indian English or second language learner interlanguage" (Rampton 1995, 127). However, neither author explores the new form in great detail. The focus changes, however, in the 2000s, with two projects studying language use in London: the 2004-2007 project '*Linguistic Innovators*' and 2007-10 project '*Multicultural London English*'.

### Section 2.2.3 Multicultural London English

The *Linguistic Innovators* project set out to explore the spread of linguistic innovations among young people from inner London and outer London areas. The researchers identified innovative features being used by young people at the inner London site in Hackney, which they attributed to the multilingual character of the area. They also found that young people in the outer London site in Havering were more likely to use Cockney features, the variety formerly typical of inner east London areas such as Hackney (Kerswill et al. 2007). They grouped the innovative features under the name 'Multicultural London English', and conducted a second, broader study into the incidence of this variety.

Within this 'Multicultural London English' (MLE), the researchers identified a characteristic accent, along with certain grammatical features and lexical innovations and loans from a range of languages, including Jamaican Creole, South Asian languages and American

English. Many of the features the MLE studies documented were at the levels of syntax, pragmatics, or phonology. These are generally seen as stable indicators of linguistic change, rather than passing fads of slang use, as is more common with lexical features (although the researchers also identified many characteristic lexical features in MLE). Core features included the discourse marker ‘you get me’, the plural marker ‘-dem’, and the use of ‘man’ as an indefinite pronoun (Kerswill et al. 2007, 8–9).

Most significantly, the researchers classify MLE as a pool of features, rather than as a variety, arguing that its heterogeneity precludes it being referred to by the latter term. They note, however, that both speakers and non-speakers were able to identify these features as belonging together in some way (Cheshire et al. 2011, 152), which is why I have chosen to refer to it as a variety, with due caution.

There was evidence in the MLE studies to suggest that much of the language change observed could be categorised as endogenous, i.e. generated within the community, a typical feature of language change in urban or central areas that is marked by an increasing divergence from the ‘standard’ (Kerswill and Torgersen 2005). This contrasts with exogenous language change, which results from external contact, and is typically rural, and implies increasing standardisation across dialects, which may in turn lead to ‘levelling’. The group’s research in Hackney led them to suggest that the vowel changes they were observing in local young people’s speech was endogenous, although they also considered the possibility of language contact with external varieties such as Yoruba, Turkish, Bengali, etc. as the frequency of these languages in the borough is high. They also found that some diffusion was occurring from inner towards outer London and other nearby towns, although without suggesting an explanation for this. However, they encountered many new forms within London that have yet to spread outwards.

As I have already discussed, the researchers acknowledged the role of the multi-ethnic character of the inner London areas they studied, but found that the variety was in fact used by young people of all ethnicities, although some features were more present in some ethnically-defined communities than in others (Cheshire et al. 2008, 1). The researchers found a strong connection between local and group identity and the presence of features in speech. For instance, they identified the need to include ideology and identity among the

reasons for diffusion, innovation and levelling phenomena, along with face-to-face contact. They noted too the social indexing of language varieties, and suggest that much of the identity signification inherent in Hackney speech was not yet available or even relevant to those living in more peripheral areas or outside London (Kerswill, Torgersen, and Fox 2008).

#### Section 2.2.4 Press/public reactions

MLE has been much-discussed in the UK media over the past few years. In the Introduction and in Section 1.1, I discussed the names that have been used to label CUV practices. The kind of language used in this debate about MLE illustrates its perceived marginality. In an article in the widely-read London daily *The Evening Standard*, Johns described MLE as gang slang, and wrote that: “often impenetrable and indecipherable to all but those in the know, street slang has become a separatist form of communication” (Johns 2010). Historian David Starkey talked disparagingly on the BBC’s *Newsnight* programme about the way in which “the whites have become black”, referring to the causes of the 2011 riots in England (BBC 2011). He alluded to young people’s language use as indicative of “a particular sort of violent, destructive, nihilistic gangster culture [which] has become the fashion” (ibid.). Johns’ and Starkey’s depiction is typical of an over-arching media association between MLE use and gang culture in the UK. Adding to this perception of marginality, some media representations of MLE have featured interviews with teachers, in which the young people’s future prospects are debated in terms of whether they will be capable of using ‘appropriate’ language in the workplace (Johns 2010). Such articles also frequently feature glossaries to help readers ‘understand’ the terminology of the slang (cf. *The Independent* 2006). As Stroud has argued, such features of the public discourse on language can be viewed as “contact zones” (Stroud 2004, 206), sites that superficially appear to provide a link between two groups, but which actually serve to underline differences and emphasise the boundaries between them.

## Section 2.3 UK/Sweden comparison

The UK-based studies indicate a progression over time from out-group borrowing of in-group ethnically-marked forms, to a hybrid language that is more tied to location and class than to particular ethnic groups. Despite this, the role of migration and ethnic diversity in the emergence of MLE is undeniable (cf. Cheshire et al. 2011). This resonates with the Swedish studies, as Kotsinas states that young Swedes from a range of ethnic backgrounds use MU, with the primary common factor being the place they live, i.e. suburban areas with high ethnic and linguistic diversity (Kotsinas 2001, 14). Many recent studies have also referred to these varieties as examples of the same phenomenon, with Cheshire, et al, noting how, for MLE and equivalent varieties across Northern Europe: “there are increasing indications that these varieties have become the unmarked Labovian ‘vernacular’ for many speakers” (Cheshire et al. 2011, 153).

### Section 2.3.1 Differences in terminology

There have been a number of contrasts between the British and Swedish contexts in the debate about emerging language practices in multilingual areas. A significant one is the fact that in the UK discussion, researchers have historically concentrated, to a certain extent, on discrete language groups in contact situations – Afro-Caribbean/Jamaican, South Asian, Punjabi, ‘Anglo’, whereas Swedish discussion appears only to mention the ‘multietnisk’ quality (within e.g. Kotsinas 1988, there is passing mention of the main language groups represented within the multi-ethnic classification, though I have yet to find a closer examination of the term in the literature). I would tentatively advance the theory that this is attributable to the history of migration in the UK, in which discrete groups of migrants have arrived at different times, and been subjected to different categorisations. The migration history of Sweden has also been a ‘stepped’ process, with first intra-Nordic migrants (especially from Finland), as well as southern Europeans, then Turkish, South American, Middle Eastern, East African and Balkan immigrant communities arriving somewhat in sequence from the 1950s to 1990s as Sweden’s ‘guest worker’ and asylum policies changed. Despite this, there has been a tendency to class ‘invandrare’ (immigrants) together in an erasure of difference that mimics the situation Fennell observed in Germany:

The boundaries between groups, while dynamic and sometimes fuzzy, are nevertheless clearly and palpably divisible into *mainstream German versus generic Gastarbeiter* versus the discrete ethnicities within this generic group.

(Fennell 1997, 121, my emphasis)

This is not to say there has not been a similar generalising process in the UK, but only that it has perhaps had less influence on discourses of language than in Sweden and Germany.

### Section 2.3.2 *Welcome to the suburbs?* - Suburban and inner-city peripheries

In this section, I examine the interplay between location and language in these two national contexts, finding links between the physical peripherality of the suburbs and the cultural peripherality of the inner-city. In order to analyse the role music and literature have played in disseminating features of contemporary urban vernaculars from the social and geographic contexts in which they originate, to other spheres, it is important to examine these social and geographic contexts in more detail.

MU is generally spoken of as a suburban phenomenon, and is often used interchangeably with suburb-referencing terms like *rinkebyvenska*, *miljonsvenska* and ‘*Förortsslang*’ (suburban slang). In the UK, MLE and the social environment in which it is spoken are commonly seen as inner-city phenomena, with MLE described as exclusive ‘urban’ or ‘street’ slang, as exemplified by Johns’ references to MLE (discussed in Section 2.2.4), as ‘impenetrable’, ‘secret’ ‘street slang’ (Johns 2010). But although these language varieties are associated with locations that differ in terms of their proximity to the urban centre, these associations have much in common: I would argue that both the Swedish *förort* (suburb), and the ‘inner city’ can be viewed as peripheral: socially, linguistically, and culturally.

It should also be noted here that geographic peripherality is also subjective. As Hinchcliffe states: “the literature on suburbs is extensive, yet the subject always seems elusive. For some the suburb is a geographical space; for others, a cultural form; while for others still it is a state of mind” (Hinchcliffe 2005, 899). It can also be seen that the ‘inner city’ is not always so ‘inner’. An example can be found in the administrative division of London’s boroughs into ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ London. Haringey and Newham, two boroughs central to MLE and to grime (research has shown that MLE features were common among young

residents of Haringey as well as ‘inner-city’ Hackney (Cheshire et al. 2011)), are classed as outer London in statutory terms, and inner London for statistical purposes (*London Government Act 1963* c.33; ONS Geography 2010). I would argue that all these areas would be viewed by a layperson as ‘inner-city’, but this does not necessarily reflect geographical proximity to the centre of London.

## Section 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the results of studies into the emergence of new language phenomena in Sweden and the UK and discussed the debates that have arisen, either concurrently, or as a result of this research. In doing so, it has produced an overview of the field, and of the character of CUVs, from which to analyse creative works that draw on these varieties.

The emergence of CUVs as a product of the increased movement of peoples around the world, and especially into Western European countries, has provided a rich source of material for writers seeking to draw attention to these phenomena and the social relations and tensions that have occurred as a result of them. The emergence of CUVs as a characteristic phenomenon of modern cities has similarly provided rich material for writers wishing to portray contemporary urban environments, their inhabitants, and the experiences of those inhabitants. Both of these paths towards the creation of texts present specific challenges and specific areas of interest to the researcher. An understanding of the developments that have led to the emergence of these varieties is essential to any analysis of the use of the varieties in creative texts.

The development of CUVs has been contingent not only on the presence of multiple language communities in the areas in which they are spoken, but also consistent and deep interaction between those communities. This means that strong senses of affiliation have arisen between CUVs, the localities in which they are spoken, and the communities that speak them.

In this chapter I have discussed the way CUVs have been described as developing as a result of interracial friendship, a phenomenon that implies a set of norms that are unspoken

but recognised by the people who populate these communities and those around them. I go on in Part II of this thesis to argue that the use of these varieties in creative writing and the media has also contributed to these varieties' development and spread.

I have also discussed the different trajectories of research into CUVs in these two national contexts. This lays the groundwork for my comparison of CUVs in rap and literature, and then for my later analysis, in Chapter 8, of translators' engagements with CUVs. If there is a differing academic and public reaction to the position of CUVs in society, does this have any impact on the way they are perceived and approached by translators?

A number of the studies I have discussed in this chapter highlight the role played by music as a major factor in the status and dissemination of CUVs. With this in mind, the next chapter investigates precisely that topic. However, I then take the conversation a step further, looking into the way other forms of creative writing have utilised and represented CUVs, a phenomenon which may have implications for the lasting acknowledgement and even codification of CUVs in wider society. In the final chapter of Part II, I compare these two contexts of CUV representation, looking into the differences in form and content, and asking whether authorship and audience identity have an impact on the ways CUVs are used and portrayed, and what implications such use and portrayal can have.



**PART II: WRITING CONTEMPORARY URBAN  
VERNACULARS IN SWEDEN AND THE UK**



## Chapter 3 ‘MANS IS ON STAGE’: Rappers, Rapping and Contemporary Urban Vernaculars

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### Section 3.1 “Slang Like This”<sup>30</sup> – Rap as musical and verbal form

All the suit-wearing guys// in cities can’t stand us//  
they don’t understand us// when we speak in slang like this  
(True Tiger feat. P Money *Slang Like This* 2010)

Vi representerar förortens röst med stil//  
berättar om vår vardag som en säkerhetsventil<sup>31</sup>  
(The Latin Kings *Botkyrka Stylee* 1997)

The lines quoted above are from lyrics by London-based grime MC P Money and Stockholm hip hop act The Latin Kings. This chapter discusses the role played by rappers in originating, capturing, exploiting and disseminating emerging language practices. As discussed in the previous chapters, much attention has recently been devoted to the language practices of young people in urban and suburban contexts around Europe. Sociolinguistic studies across Europe have documented new language varieties. These ‘multiethnolects’ (Quist 2008), and ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’ (Rampton 2011) have been shown to have developed in areas of high linguistic and ethnic diversity. They are often described in terms of their connection to rap and hip hop, and other youth subcultures. However, few studies have looked in depth at this connection, or examined the role of rappers in promoting or disseminating the language varieties.

These varieties<sup>32</sup> are also described in terms of their connection to particular locations. This connection is key for a discussion of rap and language. My analysis focuses in part on the

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<sup>30</sup> (True Tiger feat P Money *Slang Like This*, 2010)

<sup>31</sup> “We represent the voice of the suburbs with style, describing our lives like a safety valve”

<sup>32</sup> Or practices – see Section 1.1 for a discussion of terminology. I use the terms varieties and CUVs interchangeably throughout this thesis, but acknowledge that language is a constantly renewed and re-performed practice

way language use can serve as a badge of identity for rappers – a way for them to mark their affiliation with certain communities and urban locations.

Using Swedish and UK sociolinguistic studies discussed in Chapter 2 as a basis, I identify a few key language features, and explore the occurrence of these in hip hop and grime lyrics. I have chosen to restrict my selection to lexical and morphosyntactic features, as these are much more clearly identifiable in lyrical contexts. Additionally, although the main subject of my analysis is lyrical content, I do take account of the impact upon lyrics of rap's rhythmic, musical components.

The lyrics for my analysis have been taken from my own direct transcriptions of the songs concerned, or, in the case of the Swedish lyrics, from the fan website [hiphoptexter.com](http://hiphoptexter.com), onto which fans upload their transcriptions of the lyrics. In this latter case, I have checked the lyrics for any inaccuracies by listening to the tracks concerned. Unless otherwise stated, translations of lyrics and citations are my own, and attempts have been made to render slang terms where possible.

### Section 3.1.1 Rap, rappers and local scenes

The main analysis of this chapter looks into the use of CUV features in the lyrical practice of rap in Swedish hip hop and UK grime. First I will provide brief definitions of rap, hip hop and grime, and explain why I refer to hip hop/rap in the case of Sweden, and grime in the case of the UK.

As I explore here, language is the raw material with which rappers practice their craft, and as such, emerging forms of language provide rappers with new tools with which to experiment, innovate and refine their craft. Despite having originated in New York in the 1970s, hip hop has become a global phenomenon, and is now recorded and performed in many languages. Bearing witness to this, H. Samy Alim refers to the “‘Global Hip Hop Nation’ [...] a multilingual, multiethnic ‘nation’ with an international reach, a fluid capacity to cross borders, and a reluctance to adhere to the geopolitical givens of the present” (Alim 2009, 3). I focus here on a specific branch of Swedish hip hop/rap that located itself in

Sweden's post-war suburbs, performing a "förortspoesi" (suburban poetry) (Dahlstedt 2006) that informs both lyrical content and style.

I will take the opportunity here to distinguish between rap as a verbal form and hip hop as a musical and cultural one. In Afrika Bambaataa's fabled concept of hip hop's four elements, rapping (or MCing) is an important part, but ultimately no more or less so than the other three elements, DJing, graffiti writing, and b-boying (breakdance) (Chang 2005, 90). Although rap and hip hop music are often treated as synonymous, my analysis focuses on rap as a verbal form with musical elements, with occasional references to hip hop culture in general. I have attempted to be clear about which element I am referring to at each juncture, although in some instances, there is a significant overlap.

Sometimes referred to as the UK's answer to hip hop, grime developed from dance music genres in the early 2000s; MC is the title generally given to grime rappers. Grime is frequently associated with the genre 'urban music', as evidenced by the tagline of the music news website [www.grimedaily.com](http://www.grimedaily.com): "The Epicentre of Urban Entertainment". According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, "urban contemporary [music] began as an American radio format designed to appeal to advertisers who felt that 'black radio' would not reach a wide enough audience" ('Urban Contemporary Music' 2012). It is now standard (if not undisputed) terminology in the UK.

It may seem strange that I am comparing hip hop in Sweden with grime in the UK, rather than discussing hip hop from both places. The main reason for this is straight-forward, however: it is primarily a question of association. In the 1990s, Swedish rap was closely associated in public discourse with contemporary urban vernaculars. In the 2000s, similar, high-profile associations were drawn between contemporary urban vernaculars and grime. These associations are discussed throughout this chapter. UK hip hop, on the other hand, has rarely been discussed in the same terms. There are undoubtedly many complex reasons for this difference, but I will focus here on one major factor. The Swedish music industry has generally been very quick to pick up on pop music influences from elsewhere, primarily the US and the UK (Johansson 2010). Many young people wishing to identify with an anti-establishment musical subculture during the 1980s were drawn to hip hop culture (Strage 2001, 76–77). In the UK, the presence of large Afro-Caribbean, and in particular Jamaican

communities meant that, to a certain extent, reggae, ragga and dancehall took this place, and large numbers of young people took part in the soundsystem culture associated with these styles in cities like London, Birmingham and Bristol. (Gilroy 2002, 217–224). Additionally, the large South Asian communities led to Bhangra becoming popular around the same time (Rampton 1995, 44). Out of soundsystem culture, rave culture and eventually what Reynolds calls the ‘Hardcore Continuum’ (Reynolds 2013) emerged. Genres within this continuum, such as jungle, UK garage and, later, grime, all provided a space for young



Figure 3-1 The Latin Kings (1994) *Välkommen till förorten* album cover

people to produce and celebrate subcultural identities. This is not to say that hip hop has not been popular in the UK – it has. But with such productive home-grown scenes, and such a pride in the fact that they were home-grown, UK hip hop has tended to take a back seat. The Latin Kings (TLK) are often referred to as pioneers of Swedish-language hip hop, releasing their best-selling debut album *Välkommen till förorten* (Welcome to the Suburbs) in 1994. Although Swedish hip hop was produced from 1979 onwards, with one or two exceptions (Strage cites Just D’s comedy rap and 12-year-old MC Tim’s single *Jag är def* (I’m def) (Strage 2001, 81–83)), commercially successful Swedish hip hop featured exclusively English-language rap until TLK’s breakthrough (Nyberg 2008, 162). TLK formed in Norra Botkyrka, a post-war suburb of southern Stockholm, where the three members, Dogge, Chepe and Salla grew up. Throughout their career, they cultivated associations with Botkyrka and

people to produce and celebrate subcultural identities. This is not to say that hip hop has not been popular in the UK – it has. But with such productive home-grown scenes, and such a pride in the fact that they were home-grown, UK hip hop has tended to take a back seat.

The Latin Kings (TLK) are often referred to as pioneers of Swedish-language hip hop, releasing their best-selling debut album *Välkommen till förorten* (Welcome to the Suburbs) in 1994. Although Swedish hip hop



Figure 3-2 The Latin Kings (2003) *Cashen dom tas* music video

with “förorten” (the suburbs). They did this through the imagery they used in their videos and album covers: (Figures 3-1 and 3-2), and through the titles and subject matter of their songs, as well as the linguistic form and delivery of their lyrics. They were the first Swedish rappers to articulate the social, as well as geographical, marginality of the suburbs in this way. Although I talk in this chapter about TLK as an act, I occasionally refer just to the act’s frontman, Dogge Doggelito, who wrote most of the lyrics. Furthermore, the greater part of my analysis focuses on TLK, but I also refer to Ayo<sup>33</sup>, another Stockholm-based rapper who was popular in the late 1990s. Ayo did not reach the same level or duration of fame as TLK, nor has he provided as much fodder for academic analysis. However, he was important in the development of Swedish hip hop, and many of the tracks from his 1999 album *Föder nåt nytt* (Make Something New) are linguistically interesting. His foregrounding of language has provided some useful material for this study. A third Swedish rapper referred to in this chapter is Lilla Namó, who released her first single in 2012.

JME is an MC from Tottenham, north-east London, who has been prominent since around 2004 (‘JME - Grime Wikipedia’ 2012). His relationship with the urban tropes that constitute much of grime’s imagery is intriguing and complex - as grime blogger Blackdown says: “Though JME’s long since been an independent, free thinker, his hardcore grime credentials are unquestionable : he founded BBK [Boy Better Know] alongside grime legends DJ Maximum, Jammer and his brother Skepta, and was part of Wiley [the so-called Godfather of Grime]’s Roll Deep and before that Meridian Crew (who had a serious street reputation)” (Blackdown 2012). As with TLK in my discussion of Swedish rap, I focus primarily on JME in referring to grime. However, I also use the examples of several other MCs, including Dizzee Rascal and P Money, also both London-born and bred.

### Section 3.1.2 Rap lyrics vs spoken language

At this point, it may be useful to consider the significance of the different types of text I am using in my analysis. Rap lyrics are not the same as the spontaneous speech which makes

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<sup>33</sup> Ayo has also been known as One Eye Red or *Ett Öga Rött*, which leads me to wonder whether this inspired the title of Jonas Hassen Khemiri’s 2003 novel *Ett öga rött*.

up instances of CUVs in everyday personal interactions. Lyrical instances of CUV features and instances of these varieties in media representation are just that – representations. As remarked by Bell and Gibson, “These are instances of language which stand out from the ordinary, marked and reframed in some explicit way as ‘performed’” (Bell and Gibson 2011). Likewise, lyrics are marked out by the fact that they are formally adapted to fit with music. Some rappers may perform short acapellas, but on the whole, an instrumental track is integral to any rapper’s performance. This means that the verbal expression of rap is inescapably moulded by the music it accompanies or is accompanied by. As Adam Krims argues: ‘identity in rap music indeed has its poetics, and that poetics is partially – and crucially – a poetics of musical organization’ (Krims 2000, 3). Coupland states that “the semiotic resources available to speakers and singers are radically different, with singing having both more restraints (e.g. the general need to follow a melody line and a rhythm, prosodically) and more affordances (e.g. the general freedom to repeat sequences [...])” (Coupland 2011, 575). Although rap is not directly comparable to singing, many of the ‘restrictions and affordances’ presented by song are also true of rap, meaning that the restraints of the form shape the possibilities available to the composer of the lyrics. Two of the features that mark out rap lyrics (either in their very composition, or in their delivery) include flow (the rhythmic and prosodic delivery of lyrics) and rhyme.

The term ‘flow’ is used to describe the way a rapper’s words ‘flow’ with the music – how the words fit in with the rhythm and the melody of the instrumental, and indeed, how the words have a rhythmic character of their own. Flow, in the words of Patrick Turner, is “the idiosyncratic rhythm and style of the bars spat [lyrics rapped] by an emcee, an individual’s sonic signature or fingerprint” (Turner 2010, 144). Turner states that, within grime rapping at least, flow has a major impact on word choice and structural composition, suggesting that writing grime lyrics was all about “turning words into abstract sounds so as to produce a kind of sound poetry” (ibid.). He writes that this abstraction is more important in grime than it is in other forms of hip hop lyricism, where the technical skills employed in flow occasionally take a backseat to lyrical narrative, as is arguably the case with The Latin Kings. However, it is safe to assume that flow has a formal impact on rap as verbal expression, regardless of the specific genre.



Unlike poetry, which may or may not be structured around rhyme (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of the ways in which rap and literary writing overlap and diverge), it is rare to hear rap that does not feature at least line-end rhymes. The rap lyrics of TLK and JME are no exception. Whether one hears their lyrics performed or sees them on the page, Coupland’s comments are relevant – lyrics differ significantly from everyday spoken language. In using rhyme, these rappers are forced to exclude or select words on the basis of their suitability for the rhyme scheme and their unique ‘flow’. If the meaning of the words cannot be fitted into the formal structure, it must be adapted, or excluded in favour of something that can be tailored to the aural pattern dictated by the form. The very best lyricists turn this restriction to their advantage, and many rappers have developed strategies that enable them to rap on almost any theme while still adhering to the form’s strictures. An example is US rapper Nas, whose “gripping narratives and rhymes are a virtuosic example of the possibilities of heard rap through their intricate uses of interior rhyme, complicated rhyming patterns, and enjambment” (G. C.-H. Preston 2008, 262), as can be seen in the following bars from his track *N.Y. State of Mind*:

[m]usician inflictin’ composition  
 Of pain. I’m like Scarface sniffin’ cocaine  
 Holdin’ a M-16, see, with the pen, I’m extreme.  
 Nas *N.Y. State of Mind* 2004

Nas is famous for the dexterity and complexity of his rapping and the imaginative and diverse themes he encompasses in it. Even so, there are many rappers who are successful despite their lack of lyrical virtuosity, and TLK’s Dogge would most likely be included among this latter group. Many of Dogge’s lyrics were “enkla som dagboksanteckningar”<sup>34</sup> (Strage 2001, 339) rather than technically virtuosic and intricate. The clumsiness of Dogge’s rhymes indicates that he at times falls short of expressing himself fully within the constraints of the form. This may not impair the overall effect of the rap; as discussed above, Turner finds that many rappers willingly subjugate lyrical content to rhythm and flow (Turner 2010, 144).

There are other characteristic features of rap lyrics, however, and it is worth giving a more detailed view of them here. This is not an easy process, as the features naturally vary

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<sup>34</sup> as simple as diary entries

depending on sub-genre, performer, and individual song. However, rap is identifiable as a genre, and it therefore has certain conventions, many of which have been handed down from the very origins of the form. These might include typical (if not universal) rhyme schemes, or certain types of content. This latter category will certainly vary depending on writer, sub-genre and song, but the content of rap could be grouped into superficially recognisable themes. Talking about US rap in particular, Tricia Rose states that:

Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or narrator. Male rappers often speak with the perspective of a young man who wants status in a locally meaningful way. They rap about how to avoid gang pressures and still earn local respect, how to deal with the loss of several friends to gun fights or drug overdoses, and they tell grandiose and sometimes violent tales that are powered by male sexual power over women. Female rappers sometimes tell stories from the perspective of a young woman who is sceptical of male protestations of love or a girl who has been involved with a drug dealer and cannot sever herself from his dangerous life style.

(Rose 1994, 2)

Although this description is somewhat dated (Rose was writing in the early 90s), these themes will be recognisable themes to anyone familiar with US rap, and particularly the sub-genre gangsta rap. Swedish rappers, including The Latin Kings, have certainly adopted some of these themes as well, although these are perhaps less credible in the context of the Swedish welfare state, which despite issues with social segregation and racism, is not on the scale of the USA in terms of the social issues that comprise much of that country's rap narrative. As Wacquant reminds us: "urban marginality is not everywhere woven of the same cloth" (Wacquant 2008, 1).

Another distinctive quality of rap is its association with orality and spontaneity. Rap is most commonly performed through the recitation of lyrics accompanied by music. In some cases, instead of recitation, it is produced spontaneously during the performance. However, the spontaneity of rap must be treated with caution. As H. Samy Alim states:

In analysing Hip Hop lyrics, we cannot assume that they are comparable to naturally occurring everyday speech, and as the data illustrate, there are some distinct differences. For the most part, Hip Hop lyrics are not as spontaneous as free flowing speech (although some artists come pretty damn close). Lyrics are sometimes written, rehearsed, performed and recorded several times before they appear on CD. Hip Hop artists, in general, pay a great amount of attention to their speech.

(Alim 2006, 122)

As Alim points out, spontaneous performance does occur (in the form of ‘freestyling’), especially in the rap/MC battle format, where rappers take it in turns to verbally outdo one another, often increasing in intensity until one is unable to continue. Even freestyling, though, can become formulaic, especially when a rapper has developed certain retorts over time. Added to this is the fact that much rap is listened to on record, rather than at live events, meaning that spontaneity is less relevant to the form in which most listeners consume it. These considerations notwithstanding, freestyling is a tenet of the concept discussed in the next section – authenticity or ‘keeping it real’. The spontaneity and inventiveness of a skilled freestyler is the epitome of authenticity. With no need to polish or refine their lines, their true character and ‘essence’ comes to the fore.

## Section 3.2 “All this talk about repping your endz”<sup>35</sup> – Rap, language and localised identity

### Section 3.2.1 Rap’s obsession with ‘keeping it real’

The idea of authenticity, of ‘keeping it real’, is historically central to rap music and has spread with hip hop culture as that culture has found new audiences, performers and scenes around the world. But, as Alastair Pennycook states: “the culture of authenticity, which indeed is one aspect of hip-hop culture that has spread globally, becomes, by its very nature, something different in each context in which it is taken up” (Pennycook 2007b, 93). So how is this ‘culture of authenticity’ expressed in the context of Swedish and UK rap? First, it may be helpful to look at the ways in which authenticity is defined in rap in general.

For the purposes of this chapter, I have chosen to define authenticity primarily as the personally accurate representation of the self, one’s surroundings or one’s experiences, or, to borrow the terminology of hip hop: ‘keeping it real’. There is another interpretation that has also been important in hip hop culture and rap music, which is that authenticity requires the recognition of, and faithfulness to, the African American roots of the form. If held up alongside one another, these two interpretations appear contradictory. This

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<sup>35</sup> (JME *Serious*, 2005)

suggests that to rap ‘authentically’, a rapper must either retain closeness to their local origin and their own background, or to the ‘origins’ of rap.

Alastair Pennycook unites these two contrasting principles as he contends that “[k]eeping it real in the global context is about defining the local horizons of significance while always understanding the relationship to a wider whole” (ibid., 104). Speaking from a sociolinguistic perspective, he refers to the way authenticity in hip hop is replicated in the ‘ways in which English and hip hop become intertwined as local cultural and linguistic formations’ (ibid.). However, he still perceives English to play a major role in helping its users to ‘claim greater global authenticity’ (ibid.). The presence of the ‘hip hop English’ terms that have become common in Swedish hip hop, and the slang that has developed on suburban estates in Sweden, are evidence of this. The word *fet* (very/cool), is a simple example of this which features in the lyrics of many Swedish rappers, including those of The Latin Kings. It is derived from ‘phat’, a term popularised by American hip hop culture. The use of this term, and others like it, is an indication of the way marginalised communities in Sweden have appropriated the terminologies of marginalised communities in the US, thereby connoting an affiliation between the two groups. This is not to say that the word has any express meaning associated with black urban communities in the US. The simple fact of its being ‘translated’ and naturalised into Swedish via rap and hip hop culture is evidence of the changing parameters of authenticity in Swedish society, the imagined connections between marginalised communities across national borders, and the role of hip hop in this.

Imani Perry presents a further perspective, which contains a variety of ways to understand the concept of ‘keeping it real’. She shows that there are differing, but not always contradictory ways to read authenticity, including: “celebrations of the social effects of urban decay and poverty”, “assertions of a paranoid vigilance in protecting one’s own dignity”, or a “device responding to the removal of rap music from the organic relationship with the communities creating it” (I. Perry 2004, 87). Although the latter point in particular relates to the perceived commodification of rap by external agents, a subject I do not touch on in any detail here, all three points have resonance for the relationship between authenticity and place, a key element in hip hop imagery.

If the idea of ‘keeping it real’ has emerged in the context of the marginalisation, oppression and poverty in the communities in which hip hop culture has emerged, it also relates to the negativity voiced towards the linguistic practices of these communities, in Sweden and the UK as much as in the US. Ever since Ulla-Britt Kotsinas’s research into *rinkebysvenska* was first publicised (and arguably even before this), concerns have been voiced about the negative impact of contemporary urban vernaculars in Sweden (cf. Section 2.1.2). There are clear parallels here to the UK, where outraged articles about the ‘advance’ of ‘Jafaican’ across the traditional territory of Cockneys were a frequent occurrence following the publication of the MLE research (Mount 2010; Sinmaz 2013). This fits into a much wider discourse about immigration and national identity that has centred on the suburban estates of the *miljonprogram* in Sweden and inner-city council estates in the UK. These areas, despite initially being intended as the welfare state’s solution to the post-war housing shortage, have come to be seen as increasingly problematic. In Sweden, ethnic segregation, poverty and crime have featured prominently in the media discourse around the estates, as explored by Ristilammi’s 1994 study *Rosengård och den svarta poesin* (Rosengård and the Black Poetry). Ristilammi highlights the media’s use of negative visual and verbal imagery to portray the Rosengård estate in Malmö, southern Sweden, analysing how this contributes to a national stigmatisation, not only of Rosengård, but of all such estates throughout Sweden, and even estate residents. As he states: “Om man väljer en fysisk miljö som konstruerande för en kultur eller delkultur skapas det också en risk för miljödeterminism av det slag som länge dominerat debatten om Rosengård och liknande områden”<sup>36</sup> (Ristilammi 1994, 20). Despite the fact that this study is now 20 years old, it still resonates with today’s media coverage, and there are also contemporary parallels in the treatment of the language of the estates. Lynsey Hanley’s study *Estates: An Intimate History* discusses similar developments in the UK, describing how under-investment and media stigmatisation led to a drastic move away from the idea of such estates contributing to social integration and quality housing for all (Hanley 2008).

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<sup>36</sup> “If a physical environment is chosen to represent a culture or subculture, the risk of environmental determinism of the kind that has long dominated the debate around Rosengård and similar areas is also created.”

Such negative debate about the environments and the communities in which CUVs are spoken, as well as, in some cases, the speakers themselves is a contributing factor to the importance of authenticity in rap. Indeed, there is a connection between notions of authenticity and ownership, where ownership is understood as the possession of knowledge and the right to expression of that knowledge, as well as the right to decide how a particular location, social group or mode of existence is represented. One of the most interesting responses to Swedish rap has been the unquestioning association of rap with marginalisation and the suburbs (this despite the fact that many rappers in Sweden are white, middle class and urban). But there is an assumption that goes back to the roots of hip hop culture that hip hop and rap were something, often the only thing, that marginalised (and primarily black) communities had ownership over: it was ‘their’ mode of expression. In his 2007 study *Etnotism* (Ethnicism), Aleksander Motturi problematizes the assumption that marginalised communities have a privileged position when it comes to representing the ‘realities’ of suburban life. He satirises the perception that “*det är dem [‘nya/annorlunda’ svenska röster] som kan skildra den sanna verkligheten i förorten*”<sup>37</sup> (Motturi 2007, 63). Furthermore, he asserts that it is often such marginalised groups themselves who claim the exclusive right to represent that marginalised position (ibid.). This resonates with the perception, both among insiders and outsiders, that hip hop is the expressive preserve of marginalised groups, and, in particular, African Americans. Tricia Rose states that “[t]he drawing power of rap is precisely its musical and narrative commitment to black youth and cultural resistance [...]” (Rose 1994, 19) and that “[rap] is black America’s most dynamic contemporary popular cultural, intellectual, and spiritual vessel” (ibid.). In this, Rose indicates the importance of black Americans’ ownership of the ‘vessel’ through which they can both define and refine their identities, as well as communicating to those inside and outside the community. In Rose’s words, rap represents “a powerful conglomeration of voices from the margins of American society speaking about the terms of that position” (ibid.).

This assumption that rap is essentially ‘owned’ by the black communities from which it originated poses interesting challenges for studies concerning rap produced by marginalised

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<sup>37</sup> “It’s they [‘new/different’ Swedish voices] who are able to portray the true reality of the suburbs.”

communities other than black Americans. In Sweden, for instance, many of the rappers that made their names in The Latin Kings' generation are of immigrant background, but few of them can claim any African American or African heritage. But Pennycook broadens the scope, by noting that:

The identifications with American and African American culture by hip-hop artists around the world are embedded in local histories of difference, oppression, class and culture, often rejecting aspects of American dominance while identifying with forms of local struggle. [...] an identification with hip-hop may indeed be centrally an identification with urban poverty, racism, drugs and violence, though this will always also be about local issues, conditions and themes, and will contain local musical and lyrical influences.

(Pennycook 2007a, 91)

However, this does not negate the fact that hip hop is not, or is no longer, a mode of expression reserved purely for 'marginalised' groups (cf. Section 3.2.3 for a discussion of this).

### Section 3.2.2 Rap and the performance of identity

This discussion of authenticity leads me to ask how this authenticity has come to be such a prominent feature of rap as a culture. Rappers are not simply 'keeping it real' and authentically reproducing the language of the streets around them. They are performing this belonging, emphasising or selecting certain aspects of this style of speaking for creative purposes. They draw attention to the 'place' of their texts, thereby making it appear more authentic to insiders and outsiders. The Latin Kings recognised the marketability of their style even before their first album was released:

Under inspelningarna var de rädda för att någon skulle stjäla deras idéer och ge ut en hip hop-skiva på svenska om livet i förorten. De sade åt Gordon [Cyrus, their producer] att hålla hart i mastertejperna. Om någonting läckte lovade gruppen att slänga honom från Västerbron<sup>38</sup>

(Strage 2001, 340).

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<sup>38</sup> "During the recordings they were afraid someone would steal their ideas and put out a hip hop record in Swedish about life in the suburbs. They told Gordon [Cyrus, their producer] to keep a tight hold of the master tapes. If anything leaked, the group promised to throw him off Västerbron bridge".

The notion of performativity (i.e. “[...] that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Judith Butler 1993, 2)) is one picked up in Pennycook’s study of language and hip hop (Pennycook 2007a). He states that an understanding of performativity is fundamental to an appreciation of “the ways in which both language and identity are produced in the performance [of hip hop]” (ibid., 58).

JME has been vocal in his criticism of the stereotypes of rap and ‘urban’ life. A good example of JME’s ‘critical insider’ role is the track *Serious*, in which he challenges MCs to think more critically about their lyrics and the themes on which they base them (the title of the Section 3.2.4 is an example of this, taken from that track). In *Serious*, JME talks about



Figure 3-3 JME 2007 *Serious (Remix)* video still

the challenges of writing lyrics that don’t play on the same clichés, and entreats other rappers to be more ‘serious’ about their approach to writing grime lyrics – both from an aesthetic and a political point of view. In doing so, he questioned

the value of performed authenticity. The video to the remix version of the track (Figures 3-3 and 3-4) is also interesting in the context of this discussion. Starting out on a suburban street lined with trees and semi-detached houses, JME is then pixelated out of the real world into an animated fantasy of stereotypical grime imagery, framed by tower blocks that bounce in time to the beat, or a beam of endlessly reproduced handguns. The video plays with grime tropes, stating an awareness of this representation, but maintaining visual distance. This kind of



Figure 3-4 JME 2007 *Serious (Remix)* video still



imagery can seem an integral part of grime and hip hop performance, in the context of the outside world's representations of the communities rappers like JME and TLK come from, as discussed in Section 3.2.1.

### Section 3.2.3 Creating and negating belonging

As Fredrik Strage states in his 2001 chronicle of Swedish hip hop, *Mikrofonkåt*,<sup>39</sup> rap and hip hop enjoyed a prominent place in Swedish culture around the year 2000, but before The Latin Kings' first single in 1993, it was considered to have mainly underground appeal, receiving little attention in the mainstream press. At that time, there were also few opportunities for people living in the post-war suburbs to present their life experiences in the media, meaning that the 'voice' of the suburbs went unrepresented, or was represented by those who had little personal experience of life there. The representations that resulted were often negative. As Magnus Dahlstedt noted in 2004:

Förorten framstår i stora delar av massmediernas rapportering om storstädernas ytterområden [...] som en plats någonstans långt bortom den trygga, välordnade och 'civiliserade' världen, men samtidigt något som denna värld kan konstruera och definiera sig mot.<sup>40</sup>

(Dahlstedt 2004, 16)

In this analysis, the negative portrayal of the suburbs is reaffirmed by its opposition to the secure and well-ordered world from which the portrayal issues. This is again confirmed in Ylve Brune's assertion that: "i årtionden har journalister åkt till dessa områden som ett slags koloniala upptäcktsresa, för att efter några timmar återvända till redaktionerna i innerstaden"<sup>41</sup> (Brune 1998, 7, cited in Dahlstedt 2004, 16) (cf. also Ristilammi 1994). To paraphrase Brune and Dahlstedt here, those defining the suburbs are distanced from the

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<sup>39</sup> 'Hot for the Microphone'

<sup>40</sup> "The suburbs appear, in much mass media reporting on the peripheral areas of major cities, [...] as a place somewhere far beyond the safe, well-ordered and 'civilised' world, but simultaneously something that that world can contrast and define itself against."

<sup>41</sup> "[For] decades, journalists have travelled to these places on some form of colonial voyage of discovery, before returning, a few hours later, to their offices in town."

subject of their definition, and those who inhabit the suburbs are distanced, by that very definition, from the right to engage with this definition.

The Latin Kings became famous throughout Sweden for their own brand of rap, in which they portrayed the conditions in suburban estates in the slang spoken on those estates. Their rapping is thus strongly influenced by the environment in which they grew up, and by the multi-ethnic, multilingual character of the communities that inhabit that environment. This made them both a curiosity and a valued commodity to outsiders who knew little of the environment they were portraying. Strage argues that:

För många svenskar blev Latin Kings den första kontakten med förorten och en tillvaro som de knappt hört talas om. Vita medelklassungdomar som aldrig satt sin fot i Fittja eller Rinkeby lärde sig att kalla tjejer för 'gussar' och polisen för 'bengen'.<sup>42</sup>

(Strage 2001, 29)

The warm welcome The Latin Kings received when their popular brand of hip hop suburbanism burst into the Swedish charts is perhaps not so surprising. However, the idea that The Latin Kings and other early rappers could be treated as spokespeople for a generation (cf. Altgård 1995, see Chapter 5) has, quite rightly, been questioned. In Sweden, as in other locations throughout hip hop's history, the genre has been closely associated with interlinking ideas of place, marginality and authenticity. Bredström and Dahlstedt set this discussion in the context of 'authenticity', noting that:

En av de problematiska diskurser som genomsyrar stora delar av hiphopen består av de anspråk som åtskilliga rappare har på 'äkthet', på att 'säga sanningen'. Dessa anspråk understödjer lätt en tämligen essensialistisk förståelse av 'tillhörighet'.<sup>43</sup>

(Bredström and Dahlstedt 2002, 8)

This sense of *tillhörighet*/belonging has often involved the suburbs. According to Bredström and Dahlstedt, "[d]et är i denna strävan efter lokal förankring som 'äktheten' står på spel,

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<sup>42</sup> "For many Swedes, The Latin Kings were the first contact they'd had with the suburbs and an existence they'd barely heard of. White middle class young people who'd never set foot in Fittja or Rinkeby learnt to call girls 'gussar' and the police 'bengen'."

<sup>43</sup> "One of the problematic discourses that runs through much of hip hop is the importance various rappers place on 'authenticity', on 'keeping it real'. The importance of these concepts can easily result in a rather essentialist understanding of 'belonging'"

allt för att rapparen skall undvika anklagelser om att vara 'sell-outs'"<sup>44</sup> (ibid. 10). This also has echoes, in the concepts of 'underground' (*underjorden*) and 'mainstream' (*öfentlighet*), as examined in the Swedish context by Lennart Nyberg (Nyberg 2008).

As can be seen from Bredström and Dahlstedt's comments above, the relationship between hip hop and place is often carefully constructed to create an *image* of authenticity and street credibility. This construction takes place both at the hands of rappers/hip hop artists themselves, and by others, such as journalists and record companies (Bredström & Dahlstedt 2002, 9). The sense of belonging that accompanies this construction of what it means to 'keep it real' is heavily dependent upon the local political and social circumstances of the moment, meaning that

Den gemenskap som formeras i rappen kan således, liksom de starka anknytningar till förorten som antyds, inte ses som några 'sanna' avspeglningar av ett 'reellt' tillstånd, utan de måste snarare förstås som representationer, skapade i en bestämd historisk kontext.<sup>45</sup>

(Bredström and Dahlstedt 2002, 11)

This is not to deny that this association has value, at least for some fans, if not universally. For instance, Marie-Noelle Godin found that the young people she spoke to in Norra Botkyrka identified with The Latin Kings, and: "agreed that hip hop music, by promoting their language and culture, tried to reach them in their daily life and circumstances" (Godin 2005, 138). One of her research subjects went as far as to say that: "People feel a connection here, they feel like they live in the same situation" (ibid.). These young people felt a connection with The Latin Kings, and with hip hop in general, and they saw hip hop as something that was relevant to them because of their shared suburban identity. This is interesting in the case of these individuals, and possibly, many other individuals in similar situations. It must however be borne in mind that many of the people who listened to The Latin Kings and felt an affiliation with them did not 'live in the same situation', and that

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<sup>44</sup> "It's in this desire for local ties that 'authenticity' comes into play, in order that the rapper can avoid accusations of being a 'sell-out'"

<sup>45</sup> "The sense of community created in rap (and the strong association to the suburbs that that implies) can therefore not be seen as a 'true' reflection of a 'real' situation. It must instead be seen as a representation, created in a particular historical context"

many of the people who ‘lived in the same situation’ may have been uninterested in The Latin Kings.

This duality of constructed identity and genuine identification in rap is not necessarily irreconcilable. The Latin Kings’ foregrounding of place and suburban identity can be seen to represent a deep-seated connection with the place in which they grew up. It is simultaneously a canny use of this identity to market themselves to local audiences and to outsiders seeking to associate themselves with The Latin Kings’ exotic suburban appeal. This can be clearly seen in the band’s concerns during the recording of their first album, as mentioned in the quotation from Strage (2001) towards the beginning of Section 3.2.2. So they were highly conscious of their brand and the power it could have. This awareness means it would be ill-advised to take their representation of suburban life as read. This does not make it any less interesting.

The Latin Kings drew attention to, and verbalised a pride in, the place they came from, thereby challenging the existing discourse surrounding the suburbs. Furthermore, they did this by codifying a way of speaking that was synonymous with the suburbs, but which at that time was little discussed or represented in mainstream Swedish culture. By codifying, I do not mean that they recorded a perfectly representative sample of the language of the suburban streets and tower blocks. They created their own distinctive performance style that captured characteristic aspects of the way they and those around them spoke. They put this on record and later in a book of their lyrics – thereby documenting and preserving the characteristic words and phrases for posterity. As mentioned in Section 5.6, the lyrics volume even includes a glossary for those unfamiliar with the slang, or for future generations of fans keen to understand the lyrics.

Section 3.2.4 “Everyone thinks to MC good, your lyrics must be about living in the hood”<sup>46</sup> – Challenging authenticity through form

Turner’s claim, noted in Section 3.1.2, that content can be subjugated in order to achieve formal effects has implications for any association between rap and authenticity. If the

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<sup>46</sup> (JME *Shut up and Dance* 2006)

content can be twisted to suit the form, any authentic ‘message’ contained therein can just as easily be sacrificed. The presence of any ‘authenticity’ in rap is thus contingent on this authenticity being adaptable to rhyming conventions and other formal restraints, and therefore cannot be taken for granted.

The Latin Kings, as the first rap group in Sweden to rap in Swedish about these suburban estates and their experiences of living in Norra Botkyrka, could be seen to produce rap that represents what Perry calls a “[celebration] of the social effects of urban decay and poverty” (I. Perry 2004, 87, cf Section 3.2.1). Although their lyrical content varies from song to song, The Latin Kings have rapped a good deal about the experience of being a young man growing up on a suburban estate and encountering prejudice and discrimination from outsiders. In this sense, their track ‘*Borta i tankar*’ (Lost in Thought) encourages a reading that anticipates authenticity. Its portrayal of a young man, struggling to break free from his own internal barriers and those presented by society, is typical of much discourse around marginal and stigmatised communities. The rap’s authenticity is marked in specific ways: the description of certain experiences of starting out with nothing, in an environment in which little is expected of you, and its use of an accent and words characteristic of the ‘concrete suburbs’. Yet the way in which it does this also contradicts the idea of ‘keeping it real’. Rather than describing things directly to convey his message, Dogge uses copious metaphor, which is often clumsy, in terms of both the metaphor’s salience, and the way the lyrics fit rhythmically:

Aggresivitet sviker som frustration//  
Greppar mikrofon, exploderar som en kanon<sup>47</sup>  
(The Latin Kings *Borta i tankar* 1997b).

At times, Dogge’s use of metaphor is apt (in terms of the metaphor’s ‘fit’ in the flow, and the added meaning it conveys in this context):

Betongen runt omkring mig, den tog mig på djupet//  
Det blev bara början på livet inte slutet<sup>48</sup>  
(ibid.)

Dogge’s rap also relies on cliché:

Lägger sig ner och aldrig mer vakna//

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<sup>47</sup> “Aggression betrays you like frustration/Grip the microphone, explode like a canon”

<sup>48</sup> “The concrete around me, it got to me deeply/It was the start of my life, not the ending”

Man tänker här på jorden finns inget jag ska sakna<sup>49</sup>  
(ibid.),

and hyperbole:

Det finns inga vänner när man ligger slagen på botten//  
Vännerna kommer när du närmar dig toppen<sup>50</sup>  
(ibid.).

I mention these aspects of Dogge's rapping style because they highlight the distance between an authentic retelling of everyday experiences, and rap as a creative, expressive art-form. The use of devices such as metaphor and hyperbole is not consistent with the straight-forward approach that authenticity suggests. The song is built around a central theme: being 'lost in thought', and revolves around an imagined escape from the realities of life, which could be interpreted as being the opposite of 'keeping it real'.

### Section 3.3 “Vi representerar förortens röst med stil”<sup>51</sup> – Rappers as linguistic disseminators – inside and outside of lyrics

#### Section 3.3.1 “Den rätta tonen från betonggenerationen”<sup>52</sup> – Rappers as members and representatives of CUV communities of practice

Du vet, slangen är central för rappen, i en rapp behöver man rim, man rimmar hela tiden,  
och i slangen finns det massor av rim, den är en gruva av guld för mig.<sup>53</sup>

(Dogge, in Bäckstedt 2004)

In this quote, we can see how Dogge foregrounds the lyrical potential of slang, exploiting it to a particular end. This section looks at the way rappers, as everyday speakers of CUVs, have used them to create innovative, meaningful lyrics, and how this use has led to the dissemination of certain CUV forms beyond the immediate communities of practice of which the rappers are a part.

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<sup>49</sup> “Lie right down and never wake again/ You think here on earth there's nothing to miss”

<sup>50</sup> “There are no friends when you're down at the bottom/The friends all come when you reach the top”

<sup>51</sup> “We represent the voice of the suburbs with style” (The Latin Kings *Botkyrka Stylee*, 1997)

<sup>52</sup> “The right sound from the concrete generation” (The Latin Kings *Passa micken*, 1997)

<sup>53</sup> “Slang is central to rap, you know? In a rap, you need rhymes, you're rhyming the whole time, and in slang there's loads of rhymes, it's a goldmine for me.”

The Latin Kings rap with a clear MU inflection, as well as using many of the lexical features identified by Kotsinas as typical of MU. In particular, Dogge's MU 'credentials' are widely recognised: as an adolescent, he was part of a focus group in Kotsinas' sociolinguistic studies, and in 2004, he collaborated with her to produce a dictionary entitled *Förortsslang* (Suburban Slang) (Dogge Doggelito and Kotsinas 2004). As already discussed in this chapter, these rappers are users of CUVs who have, whether intentionally or not, become high-profile speakers and even representatives of these varieties. JME's everyday use of MLE features can be seen in the videos of himself in various situations he frequently records and posts to the video uploading site YouTube. In some of these he is talking to camera, and in others, engaging in casual conversation with friends, or in a recent example, police (*Long Chat With Policeman* 2012). He also makes frequent use of MLE features on the social networking site Twitter. I will return to this point in Section 3.3.4.

The Latin Kings can likewise be heard speaking in a number of interviews that were audio or video recorded. In one video, Dogge had been interviewed by a school student for a project on language use in the Swedish suburbs (*Intervju Med Dogge Doggelito Om Förortsslang* 2012). Interestingly, the comments section features a number of commenters discussing the use of the MU term 'guzz' in northern Sweden:



Figure 3-1 YouTube fan comments beneath (*Intervju Med Dogge Doggelito Om Förortsslang* 2012)

These examples of Dogge's and JME's language use in a variety of situations show that not only are they everyday speakers of MU and MLE respectively, but also that they are conscious of their own language practices and choose to implement them (and accentuate them) in their lyrical production and promotion of themselves and their music. They hail from the multilingual and multiethnic urban environments in which these varieties are reported to have emerged, and perform their belonging to these locations through their lyrical, verbal and visual imagery. For example, the MLE accent is central to grime MCs'

style, demonstrating an allegiance with the domestic scene, and a distancing of that scene from US rap. As the MC Skepta (JME's brother) observed in an interview on a U.S. hip hop radio station, good-naturedly referring to how this has limited grime's popularity in the U.S.: "I don't think you lot was feelin our accents at first" (*Skepta Interview* 2010).

This self-consciousness is echoed through grime MC P Money's lyrics to the track *Slang Like This*, which are built around the enumeration of MLE slang terms:

They don't understand us, when we speak in slang like this//  
You get me, bredrin, cuz, bredrin  
(True Tiger feat. P Money *Slang Like This* 2010).

Peaking at #17 on the iTunes chart, the track's popularity implies the dissemination to diverse audiences of these terms and a sense of association through them.

As we have seen in the previous sections, The Latin Kings have been keen to emphasise their connection with the suburbs, and have used language to do this, even going so far as to assert themselves as representatives. The following lyrics, from TLK's first album, emphasise the rappers' claim to represent the "concrete generation", which, in some ways, is supported by their status as the first successful Swedish-language rap act to engage with their suburban background, both through the language, and the imagery they used:

Latin Kings skakar om hela nationen//  
med den rätta tonen från *betonggenerationen*<sup>54</sup>  
(The Latin Kings *Passa micken*, 1997).

### Section 3.3.2 Guss/Guzz

Another example is TLK's frequent use of the word *guss* in their songs, for instance in the track *Gussen* (The Girl) from 1997. *Guss* is derived from the Turkish word 'kız', (girl), despite none of TLK being of Turkish descent. In 2006, the word was added to the SAOL, the Swedish Academy Glossary, which is generally seen as the most authoritative lexicon of the Swedish language (Bäckstedt 2005). Not only had the word been acknowledged by the Swedish Academy, the body responsible for issuing the Nobel prize, it was also rumoured

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<sup>54</sup> (Latin Kings shaking up the whole of the nation/With the right sound from the concrete generation)



to be in common use among young people in locations as distant as Kiruna, a town in the Arctic circle (Bäckstedt 2004).

Short of asking the Swedish Academy and the young people of Kiruna how they came to be acquainted with the term (perhaps a task for future research!) it is difficult to say, but the fact that hip hop is as popular in Northern Sweden as in the big cities of the south (Strage 2001, 298) is likely to be a factor. The word *guss* is still in use, and still being used by Swedish rappers today. An example is the 2013 track *Haffu Guzz* (chirpse girls) by Lilla Namu, which had over 300,000 views on Youtube as of August 2014.

### Section 3.3.3 Man

JME is well-known for his catchphrases and wordplay. I focus here on his use and promotion of the word ‘man’ as a personal pronoun, both in his lyrics, and through the online social networking site Twitter, where he currently had almost 250,000 followers at the time of writing (‘Jme (jmebbk) on Twitter’ 2014). In the following lyrics, two different uses of ‘man’ can be seen. The first two excerpts shows ‘man’ used to refer to an unspecified third person or persons, while in the third line, JME uses ‘man’ to refer to himself:

*Man* see me and think I got P’s  
(JME *Poomplex* 2006)

*Man’ll* go to radio on Thursday, even though it’s his birthday  
(JME *Serious* 2005)

That’s how you know *man’s* got *bare* fans  
(JME *Boy Better Know* 2006)

These uses of ‘man’ are noted by both Henry and Pollard to derive from Rastafari traditions in Jamaica (Henry 2006, 12; Pollard 1994, 66), and feature among the core innovative features identified by the MLE study (Kerswill et al. 2007, 8). Cheshire has also discussed the grammaticalisation of the feature as a new first person singular pronoun, one which has emerged, under the influence of Jamaican Patois in London, as a locally-originated innovation among MLE speakers (Cheshire 2013, 2). Cheshire finds extensive use of ‘man’ in film and television representations of young people in inner-city London and Birmingham, suggesting that the feature is strongly culturally salient.

Dramatic changes in media and distribution technologies mean that much online promotion is now done without the mediation of a journalist or agent. Instead, an artist is able to interact directly with his or her fans, shaping the identity they present to them, rather than being 'presented'. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, they have the



Figure 3-2 JME onstage tweet (twitter.com/jmebbk)

potential to impact upon the language of those who come into contact with them. JME identifies himself prominently as someone who shapes his own image. I will now explore this briefly by looking at JME's use of Twitter.

Online social media represent an ideal opportunity for MCs to promote their work and shape their identity as lyricists. Twitter, in particular, provides a high-profile space for wordplay, due

to the limitations of its 140 character message format, and many MCs tweet dozens of times daily. JME's engagement with this form can be demonstrated anecdotally: at a concert I attended in April 2011, he took a photo of himself onstage, and tweeted it immediately, with the tagline 'Mans is on stage' (Figure 3-6). This engagement was reflected in the actions of fans at the concert who could be seen checking their Twitter feeds to see it.

An added dimension of Twitter is the 're-tweet' function, where a member can re-publish another member's tweet onto their own profile, enabling anyone who follows them to see this other member's tweet. JME makes extensive use of this function, re-tweeting fans' comments in which they have made use of turns of phrase they associate with him. In this way, the fans whose messages he is re-tweeting are confirmed in their use of this terminology. Take, for instance, Figure 3-7, in which JME re-tweets fans' use of 'man' several times in quick succession.



Figure 3-3 JME re-tweets (twitter.com/jmebbk)

### Section 3.4 “Det var ju hon som fick mig att upptäcka mitt eget språk”<sup>55</sup>: Rap’s relationship with the margins and the mainstream

This idea of marginal cultures taking their voice into the mainstream is a major feature of the discourse around hip hop. Much has been written about hip hop’s relation to marginalised cultures around the world (cf. Toop 2000; Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009). However, I do not think it is controversial to argue that hip hop and rap are now a prominent part of mainstream entertainment culture. This visibility means that hip hop and grime can no longer be considered to be a marginal concern, even if many artists in both genres still maintain strong connections with a perceived ‘underground’ (Nyberg 2008).

Swedish hip hop has been a central part of Sweden’s music industry for many years. In 2001, Fredrik Strage wrote that “Swedish hip hop is in the process of transforming from a subculture to a mass movement”<sup>56</sup>. TLK’s *Välkommen till förorten* sold gold when it was released in 1994 (Strage 2001, 340). In the UK, a number of grime artists have achieved number one singles and widespread media attention. For the most part, this success has been connected with non-grime projects. However, grammatical and phonetic MLE

<sup>55</sup> “She was the one who got me to discover my own language” (Doggelito, in Bäckstedt 2004).

<sup>56</sup> “Svensk hip hop är på väg att förvandlas från en subkultur till en folkrörelse.”

features are still prominent. The successful MC Dizzee Rascal made a famous appearance on BBC current affairs programme *Newsnight* when Barack Obama was elected to the White House in 2008 (BBC 2008). In this appearance, Dizzee uses typical MLE features, greeting the presenter Jeremy Paxman with the phrases ‘what’s good?’ and ‘what’s happening?’.

Although JME has released records in the conventional sense (primarily through independent record labels), much of his fanbase accesses his music online. Examples include websites such as Soundcloud.com, where some of his tracks have hundreds of thousands of plays (‘JmeBBK’ 2014), or YouTube, where many of his videos have over a million plays (‘ManBetterKnow’ 2014), and digital download services such as iTunes. Record sales are therefore less relevant for him than for TLK, and YouTube views and similar statistics are similarly irrelevant for TLK, as their success pre-dated such online social media.

### Section 3.4.1 “I’m not average or decent, and it’s hard to write lyrics like these”<sup>57</sup> – Rap and subcultural capital

It might be asked why hip hop and grime rappers are so well-placed to act as disseminators of the features of contemporary urban vernacular and slang. According to Alim, rappers are “critical interpreters of their own culture” (Alim 2006, 11). Additionally, successful rappers and MC's are in a position of visibility. Here, it is useful to turn to Thornton’s term ‘subcultural capital’ (Thornton 1995, 11). Due to their possession of subcultural capital, rappers are highly visible both from within, and outside of, the urban/suburban culture they are seen to represent. Therefore, they act as a sort of benchmark by which those wishing to be associated with this culture can measure their own practices. Subcultural capital is, according to Thornton, “embodied in the form of being ‘in the know’, using (but not over-using) current slang” (ibid.), and so on. This is relevant in all subcultures, but especially a highly verbal form such as rap.

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<sup>57</sup> (JME *Serious*, 2005)

As rappers have a high degree of subcultural capital, it is likely that fans will want to align themselves with the imagery they cultivate, for instance by dressing in similar ways, or by using similar language. Indeed, the MLE study found that prodigious users of MLE were all: "...dominant characters within their friendship groups and highly regarded by their peers. [They were] involved in activities such as rapping and MCing either as participants or consumers, and these are highly valued resources in contemporary youth culture" (Cheshire et al. 2008, 19).

Cecilia Cutler's study *Yorkville Crossing* explores the appropriation of AAVE (African American Vernacular English) by young white Americans through hip hop culture. She described the speech habits of a middle class white boy in Manhattan and his use of AAVE in his efforts to associate himself with hip hop culture. The role of hip hop as a lifestyle to which individuals can align themselves linguistically, through clothing styles, and even through their behaviour, is key in Cutler's study. Cutler also emphasised the importance of location in the boy's appropriation of AAVE, suggesting that a prime means by which AAVE features were acquired was contact with AAVE speakers in the urban environment: on the street, in the subway, in nightclubs and so on. But, as the boy lived in Manhattan, an area with a comparatively low population of African Americans, she suggested that the boy probably also acquired AAVE features indirectly, through contact with particular friends who had more direct contact with black youth through living in poorer, 'blacker' areas (Cutler 1999).

We can look back at Rampton's analysis to see an example of how music has provided a conduit through which diverse language communities are exposed to the linguistic features represented in lyrics. Rampton gives the example of Mashuk, a young man of Bangladeshi descent who toasted in sound system performances, and, according to Rampton: "emerged from these with considerable local prestige, and much greater licence to use Creole in ordinary talk than any other white or Asian" (Rampton 1995, 236).

Looking at the research of Kotsinas, Rampton and the other researchers I have mentioned, it can be seen that individuals in any given locality may pick up the language features of those they come into contact with in that locality (cf. also Marzo and Ceuleers 2011, 453). However, people not living in that area may come into contact with those features through

their contact with prestigious cultural forms. This may explain the presence of similar features in suburban estates across Sweden, as fluency in the language of hip hop is seen as a conduit through which to express affiliation with other suburban communities, in contrast to mainstream urban Swedish culture. Although a causal relationship is difficult to prove in this context, especially so long after the event, the fact that Swedish acts like TLK started using local MU/suburban slang features in commercially successful rap as early as 1993 may mean they helped spread these features to other suburban communities. It may be that fans felt a desire to express their affinity for the rappers by picking up elements of their speech.

Hewitt highlights the interplay between music, language and identity. He talks, for example, of the 'toasting' practices of reggae Dancehall deejays in the UK during the 1980s. He defines toasting as “*the oral form of reggae music*” (Hewitt 1986, 115 orig. emphasis). Lez Henry explores this in more depth, describing how Dancehall deejays consciously used a UK-inflected Jamaican Creole (which Henry calls Patwa) in their performances, in order to assert their identity as members of a universal black culture: “Reggae Sound System culture and Deejaying gave all black youth, irrespective of where in the Afrikan Diaspora either they or their parents came from, a voice that spoke to their immediate concerns” (Henry 2006, 2). According to Henry, by using Patwa, these young people were able to align themselves with a particular historical descent and highlight the widespread racism they faced in mainstream British society.

London deejay Smiley Culture showed how this performance can move beyond this group into popular culture, upturning Henry’s view of an inward-looking practice. His 1984 hit *Cockney Translation* brought to the attention of mainstream society the linguistic and cultural changes that were taking place in Britain at that time. Paul Gilroy notes how Smiley's 'translation' of words and phrases between Creole and Cockney highlighted commonalities between black and white urban subcultures, thereby challenging the idea that there was an inherent incompatibility (Gilroy 2002, 262). As journalist Dotun Adebayo put it: “through his musical slapstick, Smiley made it OK for guys like me [i.e. a black Londoner] to chat cockney without being regarded as 'coconuts', and for white guys to speak 'yardie' without being regarded as wiggers” (Adebayo 2011). This can be compared with P Money’s listing of slang terms, but also, very rewardingly, with Ayo’s 1999 track *Översättning* (Translation),

in which he explains MU terms for a non-MU-speaking audience. The following lines are taken from the track, also providing handy usage tips!

Jag översätter så kallade gettosnacket//  
Så ni hajjar vad jaf söker när jag säger nåt vackert//  
För invandrapacket runt omkring där jag bor//  
Det är sånt man lär sig, från liten till stor//  
[...]  
Jag börjar med 'Sho len', betyder 'vad händer'//  
Säg det aldrig om du vill slå ut några tänder//  
Ord number två, lyssna: här har vi 'gitta'//  
Använd bara om du vill sticka o inte sitta.<sup>58</sup>  
(Ayo Översättning, 1999)

Despite Henry's arguments about Patwa, it is problematic to claim that a 'universal black culture' exists, or that 'all black youth' feel a connection with reggae. It would seem hard to justify Henry's claim that any member of the 'Afrikan Diaspora' is intrinsically capable of sharing his understanding of reggae music or the problems facing young black people during this period in the UK.

### Section 3.5 “Forward slash slash dot JME, Mash up the whole HTTP”<sup>59</sup> – Conclusion and areas for further research

In this chapter, I have discussed the use of contemporary urban vernaculars in rap and in rappers' representations of themselves as artists against the background of the emergence of CUVs in areas of high linguistic and ethnic diversity in Sweden and the UK respectively. These varieties have been strongly associated with the environments in which they developed, i.e. the post-war suburban estates of the Swedish *miljonprogram* and the so-called 'inner-city' estates of London. I have explored the complexity inherent in the portrayal of these environments, and the language varieties associated with them. With this in mind, I

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<sup>58</sup> “I’m translating the so-called ghetto chat/so you’ll understand when I say something nice/for the immigrant gang around where I live/it’s the thing you learn from little to big. [...] I’ll start with *sho len* that means what’s happening/don’t ever say it if there’s teeth to be bashed in/Word number two, listen: here we have *gitta*/only use it if you’re heading out, not staying sitting.”

<sup>59</sup> (JME *Boy Better Know*, 2006)

have suggested that rappers make claims to authenticity in relation to these environments, although this authenticity is as complex as the environments themselves.

Furthermore, I have explored the ways in which hip hop and grime artists are among the most visible practitioners of these linguistic phenomena. They construct and perform identities, emphasising their connection with place. In some ways, they have become symbols of these places. Through their prominence and their possession of subcultural capital, they are key agents in the dissemination of certain language features to a wider context.

In conclusion, I would like to assert that this dissemination confirms the fluid, adaptable and adoptable nature of the language varieties I have focused on. They are not fixed to a given social or geographical environment, and are liable to flow into other receptive environments. This flow occurs via friendship links, through online interactions, and through music culture, as in the following example of MLE's use in the rapping of Virus Syndicate, a Manchester grime act. Despite their audibly Mancunian accents in interviews (*Virus Syndicate TV Interview - Elek Tronique™* 2010) the MCs use distinctly MLE features in their rapping. Despite this fluidity, I would argue that language varieties retain an association with their place of origin that is often difficult to shake off.

An area that is worth exploring further is the dissemination of language varieties through music blogs and online fan forums. Androutsopoulos has conducted interesting research into online language use associated with hip hop culture in Germany (Androutsopoulos 2006), but I have yet to encounter any such research focusing on the UK and Sweden. Rappers are, of course, not the only people who speak contemporary urban vernaculars in public or in private, as can be seen on any hip hop or grime forum (cf. [www.grimeforum.com](http://www.grimeforum.com)). Blogs and online forums play a key role in genres such as hip hop and grime, and it would be interesting to analyse the extent to which these other aspects of the hip hop and grime community are active in promoting urban vernaculars online.



## Chapter 4 CUVs in Literature

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This chapter compares a number of different literary approaches to the use of contemporary urban language. It analyses how these approaches are applied in order to enhance characterisation, create a sense of place or social setting, and discuss questions of ethnicity and race, or moral or social issues, as well as creating a particular literary style. The texts analysed are written in Swedish and English, published in Sweden and the UK, and represent a number of genres and forms. The main things they have in common are their contemporary urban settings (all but one of the Swedish texts are explicitly set in Stockholm or Gothenburg, and the UK texts are all set in London), and their use of language that draws on contemporary urban vernaculars. The chapter explores the ways in which literature can depict social relationships through language, by representing modes of speech that shape, and are shaped by, these relationships.

The mid-2000s saw a debate in the Swedish media in which critics, authors, academics and others took part. The debate focused on a number of texts, all written by young men and women who were said to fit into the category ‘second-generation immigrant’ (i.e. at least one of their parents had migrated to Sweden before they were born, or when they were very young). The language used in the texts came under particular focus, along with their representations of ethnicity and identity in contemporary urban and suburban Sweden. As Roger Källström states, referring to Swedish authors Jonas Hassen Khemiri and Alejandro Leiva Wenger: “both authors rejected all claims that they represent young people in multi-ethnic suburbs, and Khemiri repeatedly stressed that his main character’s language was representative only for the character himself” (Källström 2011, 142). This is definitely worth emphasising, but while it is dangerous to attempt to read these literary works as documentary representations of life in the suburbs, it seems disingenuous to deny that the works are informed by the social and media landscape in which they were produced. The texts demonstrate an engagement with social, political and personal realities. Interestingly, critics appear to have found it difficult to dissociate this engagement from the rap music that had previously been the only creative engagement with Sweden’s ‘concrete suburbs’ that had any impact in the mainstream media:

[In Till vår ära] riktas strålkastaren mot betongförorten på samma självklara sätt som inom svensk hip hop, vilket för övrigt är den konstnärliga uttrycksform som ligger närmast till hands om man vill beskriva Leiva Wengers skrivsätt, mättat som det är med en förortsslang som är obegriplig för folk över 30.<sup>60</sup>

(Lundgren 2001)

Lundgren's comments are problematic for a number of reasons, not least the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy set up by the assertion that nobody over thirty would understand the slang Leiva Wenger employs. However, what he says does contain a grain of truth: even though Leiva Wenger depicts an individual's personal experiences rather than portraying an authentic representation of an imagined 'them', he is commenting on the social and political circumstances that contribute to those personal experiences. It is striking, though, that literature cannot be seen to speak to these circumstances without reference to hip hop.

Debates in the UK have taken a somewhat different course; indeed, it might even be reasonable to say that there has been little focussed debate on the issue of authenticity and representation in literature dealing with questions of multiculturalism, although some voices have certainly spoken up on the subject (as discussed in Section 4.3). This could be because the British-born children of immigrants have been writing about their experiences and those of others for several decades already (Khemiri, for instance, has been compared to Hanif Kureishi, author of *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) (Karlsson 2008, 149; Gaettens 2013, 84).

This chapter focusses, in varying degrees of detail, on ten texts: six from Sweden and four from the UK. Some have been referred to in more detail because they offer particularly valuable examples relating to the function of CUVs in literature, while others are given less attention but are included because an aspect of the text is particularly relevant to the argument. In addition, the selection of texts is far from exhaustive, but features a range of text types and approaches to CUVs. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, male writers are strongly over-represented among these ten (only one of the texts, Bernadine Evaristo's *Hello Mum*, is by a woman). This was accidental, but is indicative also, of the over-representation of male writers using CUVs in their writing. This is an interesting point

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<sup>60</sup> “[In Till vår ära] the spotlight is directed at the concrete suburbs in the same natural way as in Swedish hip hop, which is, moreover, the form of artistic expression that comes to mind if one is describing Leiva Wenger's writing style, stuffed as it is with a suburban slang incomprehensible to anyone over 30.”

in itself, and one that would certainly be worth exploring further, but it must unfortunately be left for another study to consider.

The chapter consists of several parts. It begins with a discussion of debates surrounding some of the texts and their relationship to the question of contemporary urban vernaculars. This is in order to lay a foundation from which the social, geographic, ethnic and linguistic content of the novels can be further discussed and contextualised. After this follow a few brief definitions of key terms and concepts in the application of sociolinguistic research to writing, in particular literary writing. These concepts are then applied through a deeper analysis of language use in the texts and the wider implications of this language use. Areas focused on include the possible purposes of the authors' linguistic choices; the reception of the results of these choices; the role of the author; and the question of authenticity in literary representations.

The texts covered are as follows<sup>61</sup>:

#### Sweden

- ☞ *Borta i tankar* – Alejandro Leiva Wenger (short story, 2001)
- ☞ *Ett öga rött* – Jonas Hassen Khemiri (novel, 2003)
- ☞ *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* – Johannes Anyuru (poetry, 2003)
- ☞ *Montecore* – Jonas Hassen Khemri (novel, 2006)
- ☞ *Snabba Cash* – Jens Lapidus (novel, 2006)
- ☞ *Invasion!* – Jonas Hassen Khemiri (drama, 2008)

#### UK

- ☞ *Foxy-T* – Tony White (novel, 2003)
- ☞ *Londonstani* – Galkam Malkani (novel, 2006)
- ☞ *Hello Mum* – Bernadine Evaristo (novella, 2010)
- ☞ *Pigeon English* – Stephen Kelman (novel, 2011)

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<sup>61</sup> Please see Appendix 2 for text summaries.

## Section 4.1 Writing spoken language

It is interesting to consider what happens when writing is used to represent speech, especially when this form of speech is heavily debated and contested, as with contemporary urban vernacular forms (cf. Part I). Many studies have discussed the power that literature can have in representing communities through language, and the impact that this can have in the wider world (cf. Källström 2011). The sociolinguistic studies discussed in Chapter 2 are relevant to the analysis in this chapter because they can be put to work to explain the use, by these authors, of certain styles of language for their characters and groups of characters. As Bakhtin states, the potential to encompass a broad “social diversity of speech types” (Bakhtin 1981, 163) in a novel is a major part of what makes the novel such a powerful form, so differentiating and understanding the significance of these diverse types is a useful tool in analysing a literary text.

There exists a considerable body of research into language use in literature, much of which comes under the banner of stylistics, a field which has analysed the way in which linguistic style is put to use by literary authors. Stylistics has an equivalent field more rooted in the analytical techniques of linguistics as a social science, register. Agha defines register as “a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices” (Agha 2004, 24). The term register can be applied to a variety of forms of language, including spoken and written, and has increasingly been treated as a useful meeting point between literary stylistics and linguistics (cf. Butler 1999). I would like to briefly introduce Määttä’s conception of ‘literary dialect’ (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion). Literary dialect refers to a dialect that is not geographically, but formally bound – it is the conventionalised version of any language that is used in literature, and which, as Määttä explores, has specific features and norms that mark it out from other written forms of language (Määttä 2004, 320). Määttä also distinguishes between standard and non-standard literary dialect. It is this standard form of literary dialect in Swedish and English against which the literary texts discussed in this chapter can be contrasted.

It is important, when discussing the written representation of spoken forms, to take into account the particularities of written language. One consideration is that writing (and

especially creative writing) is generally much more ‘planned’ than speech. This can be seen immediately from any transcription of spontaneous spoken language, with the attendant repetitions, inconsistencies and mistakes. Another, related consideration is the fact that in writing, the words on the page must stand for the text as a whole (assuming there are no illustrations, expressive typographic features or similar), whereas speech is augmented by a range of aural and visual elements, that can add emphasis, complexity and contain meaning on a non-verbal level. As Agha states, “When we speak of the effects of utterances in context we are not speaking only of the effects implemented by the register’s tokens; we are concerned rather with the effects of an array of co-occurring signs of which the register token is a fragment” (Agha 2007, 159). This semiotic tapestry may not even be consciously recognised by the speaker or the listener. The result of this complexity of speech is that in writing, you can only represent some aspects of language use and its contextual effects. The potential to plan a written text means that the selection process can be optimised to best convey the desired meaning, mood and style. In the representation of spoken language, this tends to involve the use of stereotypical features and easily ‘borrowed’ features. Easily, that is, because they can be identified and removed from the complex, multi-layered ‘whole’ of the spoken language variety by non-speakers.

In each of these texts, this stereotyping process can be seen in the foregrounding of particular tokens that are widely represented and discussed in wider society – ‘innit’ is a prominent example in the UK texts (discussed in Section 4.2.2). Another strategy is the exclusion of other aspects that cannot be represented through the written word, but which may actually be equally, if not more, typical of the speech communities in question, such as phonetic or prosodic features.

A commonly used strategy for indicating non-standard language of one type or another is the use of non-standard spellings of various kinds. One is the visual representation of the phonological features, known as dialect re-spellings (D. R. Preston 1985, 328). An appropriate example in this case might be ‘dem’ for ‘them’, or ‘dat’ instead of ‘that’, as in the following passage from *Londonstani*: “**Dat’s** right, the three a us go in boy-band mode again, – ansa **da** man or we bruck yo fuckin face” (Malkani 2007, 8, my emphasis). Dialect re-spellings differ from allegro spellings, such as ‘gonna’, which, according to Preston, “attempt to capture through the use of nonstandard spellings (some more traditional than

others) the fact that the speech is casual, not carefully monitored, relaxed – perhaps slangy” (D. R. Preston 1985, 328). White and Kelman both use allegro spellings, and White uses eye dialect (re-spellings that represent the same pronunciation but an unspecified ‘non-standard-ness’), for instance here: “**Probaly** use **are** own phone fe grass us up init” (White 2004, 57, my emphasis).

Shamsie makes a valid point when she highlights the selective emphasising of accents in literature:

I think different vernaculars are best conveyed by capturing the choice of diction rather than through spelling words phonetically to convey accents (this latter strategy is inevitably deployed selectively, creating the sense that some people – e.g. BBC newsreaders - don't have accents, while others – e.g. Asians in Hounslow – do).

(Shamsie 2006)

These authors undoubtedly all had different intentions in using CUVs in their texts, and these intentions are likely to have an impact on the way they are represented in writing. In *Ett öga rött*, for instance, Khemiri uses different types of language to indicate different linguistic situations. Halim’s diary style, which its exaggerated use of non-standard subject-verb order only appears within the inner monologue he writes in his diary. When he is talking to his father, for instance (the family speak Arabic among themselves), the passages are reported in Standard Swedish. When he is relating conversations from school the passages are likewise written in Standard Swedish. This reflects Khemiri’s desire to portray Halim as unreliable – to the sensitive reader, it is clear that Halim is fully capable of code-switching between the idiolect he has created in his diary and Standard Swedish.

## Section 4.2 Text analysis

### Section 4.2.1 CUVs as style

Each of the texts analysed have featured CUVs for both their social connotations and their aesthetic/stylistic potential. As well as being an effective way of signalling social affiliation and/or otherness, they also locate a literary text in a landscape of contemporary urban culture and in doing so give it a certain atmosphere, or even urgency. This may, of course, be linked to CUVs’ social connotations, but it has a separate effect on the character of the

text that is well worth mentioning. An example is the use in Malkani's *Londonstani* of a kind of text-speak rendering of MLE, as in the following example: "I got me one question bout dis ride I been meanin 2 aks u bredren 4 time now" (Malkani 2007, 25). This stylisation foregrounds the importance for the young characters of mobile phones – as communication device, status symbol and way of making money. It also creates a mood, in the dialogue passages where it is used, of macho boldness and flippancy, and speeds the pace of the discourse (even though for some readers, deciphering it might be a slow process).

### Section 4.2.2 CUVs as immediate social marker – innit

The invariant tag question 'innit' has been much debated over the past decade or so. An example of its use can be taken from *Foxy-T*: "A couple of police get out the car **innit**" (White 2004, 105). Made famous by media personalities such as Sacha Baron Cohen's comedy alter-ego Ali G and the Teenagers on BBC series *Goodness Gracious Me*, it has become a symbol for the perceived grammatical ineptitude of young people. An example is actress Emma Thompson's comments to students at her former school, entreating them not to use the form outside their friendship group (BBC 2010). The origins of the term are uncertain, although it is derived from the variant tag questions 'isn't it?' or 'ain't it?'. Although I have found no conclusive evidence to support this, Mahal argues that it may have become invariant under the influence of the Hindi tag phrase '*haina*' (Mahal 2006, 48–9) – evidence that may be supported by its prominence among British Asian speakers during the 1990s. But regardless of its provenance, it has now become synonymous with CUV use, and the speech of young people, particularly in London, and as such has come to be an immediate marker of the social category 'young, urban, multicultural'. It is used extensively in all the UK texts.

### Section 4.2.3 CUVs as rebellion and solidarity

The opening scene of Jonas Hassen Khemiri's play *Invasion!* features an actor delivering a monologue from *Signora Luna* by nineteenth century Swedish playwright Carl Jonas Love

Almqvist. The actor's performance is earnest and formal, with archaic language. The play-within-a-play is interrupted, much to the audience's surprise, by other audience members – two young men who throw bits of paper, make farting noises and talk loudly over the performance in a stylised version of *multietniskt ungdomsspråk*: “Ey, det är du som ska visa respekt, jao” (Khemiri 2008b, 79). Their running commentary is immediately marked as rebellious, as they imitate another member of the audience talking about how “Hela Rinkeby är visst här” (*ibid.*, 80), and threatening her with the theft of her fur coat as revenge for her rude comments.

Another example is Halim's language in *Ett öga rött*, which Khemiri, in an interview, has talked about being a refraction of his own teenage desire to assert solidarity with residents of the suburbs, in rebellion against his own middle-class upbringing:

Halim bryter självmant ner sitt språk, bråkar med ett språk och försöker hitta en identitet genom att uppfinna ett språk. “Så där höll jag och mina kompisar på i högstadiet. Vi [...] associerade, kryddade med ord som vi uppfattade kom från förorten”.<sup>62</sup>

(Kellberg 2003)

#### Section 4.2.4 CUVs as awakening

As discussed in Section 5.3, Anyuru's *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* draws strongly on a sense of coming of age and awakening to the self in a particular place and time.

Contemporary urban vernaculars play a role in this. Interwoven through the poems, words and snippets of overheard dialogue provide a kind of soundtrack to Anyuru's recollections of becoming an adult; shaping his identity in relation to his environment and those around him:

“*aide* det blev tjafs bara”<sup>63</sup>

(Anyuru 2003, 33)

Man hör inga svenska ord här:

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<sup>62</sup> “Halim breaks his language down on purpose, he's battling with language and trying to find an identity by creating a language. Me and my friends did the same in school. We [...] made associations, spiced our language with words we perceived as coming from the suburbs.”

<sup>63</sup> “Come on, there was just a bit of hassle.”



till och med araberna har lärt sig  
att skrika:

*Mira! Mira!*

när det rusar en perfekt slagen passning  
längs cykelvägens kant.<sup>64</sup>

(ibid. 14)

In Evaristo's *Hello Mum*, the protagonist Jerome explains CUV words and phrases to his mother, as he writes her a letter from beyond the grave:

Whatever, man. KMT! (Kiss my teeth!)

(Evaristo 2010, 74)

Two cool dudes, ya get me? Brap-brap! (Respect!)

(ibid., 41)

These short explanations underline Jerome's growing distance from his mother, and his progression, at the age of fourteen, into an adult world quite separate from the one she inhabits. In doing so, it highlights the importance of language for identity formation. This can be seen in the fact that Jerome even uses these words in a letter to his mother – in spite of the fact that he knows full well she is not party to the mode of expression he uses with others of his age.

#### Section 4.2.5 CUVs as friendship

MLE and MU both have many terms of address indicating male companionship: in MLE, examples include 'blud', 'bruv', 'fam', 'cuz', all allusions to familial/blood ties. MU examples include '*brushan*' (from *brorsan*, brother), '*bre*' (from *brate* Serbo-Croat., brother), '*bresh*' (from *brushan*), again, all alluding to familial relations. Many of these terms are used in the texts referred to here, and they all share related functions: of indicating the ties of friendship, or of satirising those ties.

From *Hello Mum*, we see Jerome's sense of betrayal after Delmar has sent him off on a gang errand, but also the need to keep up the pretence of friendship:

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<sup>64</sup> "You don't hear any Swedish words here:/ even the Arabs have learnt/ to scream/ *Mira! Mira!*/ as a perfectly pitched pass rushes/ along the edge of the cycle path.

‘Deed done, my man?’ he asked me with his mouth open and full of chips. No table manners. I hadn’t noticed before.

‘Deed done, bruv,’ I replied, thinking he wasn’t my bruv, no way.

(Evaristo 2010, 78)

Another example in which contemporary urban vernaculars are used to indicate the ties of friendship is in passages from Jonas Hassen Khemiri’s *Montecore*, in which a new friendship is strengthened through a sense of commonality. ‘Jonas’, the narrator, has visited his new friend Patrick’s family home, and been embarrassed by his own ignorance in the face of their middle-class sophistication. Patrick seeks to make up for this in the following way:

[N]är sluttexterna rullar säger Patrik som av en slump att hans riktiga pappa kommer från Chile. Är det sant? Visst det är sant för Patrick heter Jorge i andranamn och svenska pappan är bara låtsaspappa och i samma sekund som du hör det inser du att Patrick också måste vara samma sort som du, Melinda och Imran och du säger det till honom, du säger: Men då är ju du också blatte! Och Patrik tänker efter och kliar sin armbåge och säger: Blatte?<sup>65</sup>

(Khemiri 2006, 252–3)

Nu är tiden annorlunda för våren börjar likna sommar och Patrik har lärt sig hur man trasket moständares mammor och ersatt sina överklass-i:n med trovärdig spansk brytning där h uttalas ch och s uttalas th.<sup>66</sup>

(ibid., 267)

In the first passage, he affiliates himself with his new friends Jonas, Melinda and Imran by mentioning his (possibly fictional) ‘real’ father from Chile. Jonas brings him into their world by saying that he too can now be counted as a ‘*blatte*’. Patrick seems a little uncertain as to whether this is a positive or negative development, as he answers ‘*Blatte?*’. In the second excerpt, as a little time has passed, he warmed to his *blatte*-identity – marking his membership by adopting Spanish-accented CUV features, and joining in with group pursuits such as ‘trash-talking’ his friends’ mothers.

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<sup>65</sup> When the end credits roll, Patrick says, as if by coincidence, that his real dad is from Chile. For real? Yeah for real cos Patrick’s middle name is Jorge and his Swedish dad is just his pretend dad and the moment you hear that you realise Patrick must be the same type as you, Melinda and Imran too, and you tell him that, you say: “but then you’re a *blatte* too!” and Patrick thinks a moment and scratches his elbow and says: “Blatte?”

<sup>66</sup> Now times have changed, cos spring starts to seem like summer and Patrick has learnt how you trash talk your opponent and replaced his upper class i with a believable Spanish accent, where h is pronounced ch and s is pronounced th.

## Section 4.2.6 CUVs as community

*Foxy-T* is narrated in a style of English that is very similar to that used by the majority of other characters, and all the young British Bangladeshi ones. This creates a relatively unified sense of a speech community that shares fundamental norms and conventions. Despite a few minor and specific differences in usage, the narrator and all the characters in *Foxy-T* share a remarkably similar mode of speech – indicative of the author’s desire to create a sense of speech community to coincide with the sense of geographic community the novel is built around. Notable differences include the use by Foxy-T and Ruji-Babes of ‘fe’ (a feature common in Jamaican Patwa, meaning ‘to’) and ‘to’ respectively, as in the following passage:

But Foxy-T aint stupid init and go, ‘Listen man is Rooj you **a fe**<sup>67</sup> deal with on them type a thing. I don’t know is it.’ [...] And Ruji B would [...] probaly go, ‘Look man we got enough **to** do here already init’.

(White 2004, 15)

However, such differences are not maintained consistently throughout the dialogue, and it is therefore appropriate to state that there is a relative similarity across the various characters. Let’s take a closer look at some examples of this voice, how it relates to Multicultural London English, and how this creates a sense of community within the text.

The first example is from a section in which the narrator is relating an incident involving the police.

Red-Eye **look** over where Shabbaz **is stand** and **go**, ‘Eh Shabs is the **Feds** man’.

(*ibid.*, 105)

This excerpt is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it contains the quotative ‘go’ (i.e. ‘he goes’, rather than ‘he says’), which MLE researchers found to be a common feature of young Hackney residents’ speech (Kerswill et al. 2007, 10). Another aspect is the use of the term Feds to refer to the police. This term stems from American/African American English (most likely adopted via pop-cultural references), and has been associated with MLE in the media, most famously by Mark Duggan, the man whose killing by a police marksman sparked the riots in England in 2011: “‘The feds are following me’ was what

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<sup>67</sup> ‘a fe’ here means ‘have to’, as in ‘you have to deal with’.

Duggan texted to his fiancée, Semone Wilson, shortly before he died, and the word is everywhere on Twitter and Blackberry messenger (BBM)” (Henley 2011). Additionally, the non-agreement of the verbs ‘look’ and ‘go’, and the construction ‘is stand’ (an alternative to the standard ‘is standing’), are, while not features explicitly mentioned by sociolinguistic studies I have encountered, linguistic forms that recur throughout the text, uttered by a variety of characters.

The following excerpt demonstrates the use of the same non-standard feature (*aks*, an alternative pronunciation of ‘ask’ common in Caribbean creoles and present in London speech) by Safar and by the narrator:

‘What?’ she says again.  
‘Oh. I was just gonna **aks** you something,’ he says.  
‘Yeah? Whats that then?’ she **aks**.

(White 2004, 121)

The presence of these non-standard forms in the speech of several different characters supports the argument that the author was seeking to portray a mode of speech common to a particular culture, in contrast to the world beyond that speech community. A number of other features identified by MLE researchers as innovative in the Hackney young people they researched feature in the prose of *Foxy-T*’s narrator and the various other characters (the boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets border one another). These include the use of ‘man’ as a pronoun, used in a similar way to French ‘*on*’ or German ‘*man*’, something discussed in relation to grime rapper JME’s lyrics in Section 3.3.3. This usage can be seen in the excerpt below, and is used sporadically throughout the text by White’s narrator, although not so much in dialogue.

But even though **man** could a cut the air in that room with a knife there something is make Zafar feel at home [...]

(*ibid.*, 114)

The intensifier ‘nuff’ is another MLE innovation (Kerswill et al. 2007, 10) used a number of times by the narrator: “And believe me is **nuff** rude boy stand around and watch now init” (*ibid.* 105). Finally, the use of the particle ‘dem’ to indicate the plural was identified as an MLE innovation (*ibid.*, 11) – and occurs frequently as ‘them’ throughout *Foxy-T*, either before, or after the element to be pluralised:

Even when he turn off **them** light and the fire and that.

(White 2004, 176)

Having discussed a selection of the features of the geographically and socially specific language used in *Foxy-T*, it may be useful to contextualise this and explore what it means in the context of the novel as a whole.

As previously mentioned, the narrator of *Foxy-T* is positioned as a member of the speech community, narrating the whole text in a similar register and with similar syntactic and lexical usage to the other young characters portrayed in the novel. In fact, at the end of the novel, it emerges that the narrator has been writing his account of the lives of Foxy-T, Ruji-Babes and Zafar on one of E-Z Calls' own computer terminals. In doing so, White is effectively inviting readers into the community, giving them an intimate view of that linguistic space, or at least, his representation of it. *Foxy-T* offers a small-scale portrait of the day-to-day lives of a tight-knit community. While it offers a comment too on the way young people navigate their life choices, exploring the challenges and temptations of drugs, violence and love, these issues remain a background element, while the location and the apparently insignificant moments in the lives of the characters come to the fore. Indeed, it is in focusing on the language in which these day-to-day interactions were conducted, that White sought to convey the sense of the community:

[...] when my novel Foxy-T was published by Faber and Faber in 2003 it was criticised for using the language that I was hearing all around me in east London at the time, where white, Asian and other mainly (but not exclusively) young people were adopting or hybridising Black British language and in so doing were disrupting what had been the very necessary identity politics of the 1970s and 80s: a disruption typified for me by young Bangladeshi rudeboys calling each other 'Rasta' and most easily illustrated by the fact that it became impossible to determine the ethnicity of an unseen speaker (e.g. someone sitting behind you on the bus) by the sound of their voice. It had seemed to me that if with Foxy-T I was trying to map the ephemeral economies of Cannon Street Road, London E1, then this most ephemeral economy – spoken language – would need to be central to that. It would have been impossible to write the novel in any other way.

(White 2010)

#### Section 4.2.7 CUVs as identity

As previously mentioned, Stephen Kelman's *Pigeon English* is narrated by Harrison, the novel's 11-year-old protagonist, a relative newcomer to London life. Harrison describes his

encounters with various schoolmates and fellow residents of the Dell Farm housing estate, and recounts his ponderings on these encounters and other events and themes in his life. Harrison is frank and curious in his descriptions of what he sees and experiences, much of which is strange and counter-intuitive to him. Kelman has rendered his adolescent's voice with sympathy and nuance, and events and experiences likely to be familiar to the reader take on a new significance seen from this perspective. In many cases, the new perspective highlights the unfairness and illogical nature of these events and experiences, but also a sense that Harrison is fascinated and intrigued by what he sees.

The style of Harrison's narrator is a key aspect in the 'newness' of this perspective: Harrison writes in English, the language he has grown up speaking, and yet his English is subtly different to many of the other characters in the novel – he uses many formulations and expressions typical of the English spoken in Ghana ('Ghana Web Dictionary' 2013). These include words like 'Asweh' (I swear): "**Asweh** it was a mighty relief!" (Kelman 2011, 16), 'hutious' (scary): "[i]t was still **hutious** though" (ibid. 124) and phrases such as "**don't bring yourself!**" ('don't get cocky', ibid. 145), 'bo-styles' (really cool): "Poppy loves my Diadoras. She thinks they're **bo-styles**" (ibid.) and 'dey touch' (weird/sissy): "[Ross Kelly] always sticks his tongue out when he's writing his answers, he says it helps him concentrate but it just makes him look **dey touch**" (ibid. 135). There are also numerous formulations that are not obviously Ghanaian, but that differ from conventional British English syntax. Examples include "sweets shop" (ibid. 14) and "I never buy the jelly babies **for if it** would remind her" (ibid. 14). Such alternative formulations occur extremely frequently.

Harrison is an outsider, both linguistically and culturally, and his lack of familiarity with the linguistic norms of his schoolmates is aligned with his inexperience regarding other aspects of London life. As well as being marked out in his language itself, his outsider status is indicated by his metalinguistic commentaries, clarifying for the reader novel features of the English he encounters, as in the following example:

Me: 'How much?'  
Dean: 'Dunno. A grand. Maybe more.'  
A grand is a thousand.

(ibid. 48)

Although some of Harrison's Ghanaian words are unfamiliar, it is unlikely that any of Harrison's narration would be unintelligible to a British reader of the novel – the differences between his idiolect and 'standard' British English literary dialect are too minor for this. However, there is a consistent, noticeable difference that acts to distance the reader from the events portrayed in the same way as Harrison's child's perspective does. The reader sees Harrison's world from his outsider's perspective, both linguistically and thematically. This analysis obviously pertains to the reading experience of a native speaker of British English rather than a speaker of Ghanaian or West African English, but given that the novel is written by a British English author and published in the UK, I do not deem it unreasonable to take this perspective.

An interesting group of characters in *Pigeon English* centres around X-Fire, leader of the Dell Farm Crew gang. X-Fire and his henchmen are several years older than Harrison, but still attend the same school. They are violent towards other students and to members of the public, and Harrison and Dean's investigations into the boy's stabbing lead them to suspect that the gang are involved. They also act as a negative influence on Harrison, as he seeks to initiate himself into the gang, without really understanding the implications of what he is doing. The language they use features many elements associated with MLE, making the link between the violent world of the estate, and media representations of MLE speakers.

Killa got a screwdriver out of his pant. I saw it with my own two eyes.

[...]

X-Fire: 'Put it away, **blud**'.

(ibid., 128)

There are several other characters, many of them 'extras' that use MLE features. The following excerpt is one example:

Me: 'I wonder what songs they'll play.'

Bigger kid: '**Dizzee Rascal! They should play Suk My Dick, innit!**'

Another bigger kid: 'You know it, man!'

TV news lady: 'Can you **moderate** your language please, we're filming here, thanks.'

Bigger kid: '**Modify this bitch!**'

He pretended to grab his bulla and pointed it at the lady. She didn't even see it, she was already turned around. He was only bluffing. He didn't even say it loud enough for her to hear.

Another bigger kid: '**Rarse!**'

(ibid., 34-5)

As well as featuring a number of different register choices (the TV news lady's relatively formal 'moderate' contrasting with the 'Bigger kid's 'Modify this bitch!', and the Jamaican Patwa-referencing 'Rarse!' ('arse') uttered by 'Another bigger kid'), the excerpt above highlights another feature of Kelman's novel. In addition to the linguistic markers that associate the characters with the MLE speech community, *Pigeon English* makes reference to cultural factors such as pop-cultural references (see the reference to rapper Dizzee Rascal above), and other elements stereotypically associated in the media with the use of MLE, such as gang involvement and street violence (See Section 3.2.2 for a discussion of these associations in relation to rap).

In the following excerpt, Miquita, a friend of Lydia who is connected to the Dell Farm Crew, uses a number of linguistic features that identify her as a young Londoner, potentially an MLE speaker. Also of interest is her rejection of Harrison's Ghanaian 'Asweh', which further serves to portray him as 'other':

Miquita isn't going to the dead boy's funeral. She didn't know him.  
Miquita: 'What's the point, **man**? All funerals are the same, **innit**.'  
Me: 'It's only for respect.'  
Miquita: 'But I don't respect him. It's his own fault he got killed, he shouldn't **have been fronting**. You play with fire you get burned, **innit**.'  
[...]  
Miquita: 'Whatever. **You don't know shit**, you're just a kid.'  
Me: 'You don't know either. Asweh, you're just a fool.'  
Miquita: '*Asweh, asweh! Asweh by God!* You sound like a little yappie dog. Get out of my face now, you're **vexing** me'.

(ibid., 28-9, orig. italics)

The issue of class, bound up with race, is another aspect highlighted in the different voices of *Pigeon English*. People with a pedagogic function, or in positions of control (with the exception of the bully Julius, whose control over others is achieved through violence), are portrayed through their language use as educated or middle class, often using a more formal register or more standard syntax. This suggests a tension, which Harrison is caught in the middle of, in language as well as in attitude and opportunities. On one side is the violent pull of the estate and its gangs, with the 'gang slang' to match; on the other is the secure, educated, 'well-spoken' world. The TV news lady mentioned above is portrayed as formal and stiff in Harrison's narration. She is a middle class outsider, and the language she uses, and her reaction to the language of the young locals goading her cements this contrast. The teachers in Harrison's school are also depicted as having middle class speech:



Mr Tomlin: 'What's up Harri, why are you running?'  
Me: 'Nothing. I got lost.'  
Mr Tomlin: 'You'd lose your head if it wasn't screwed on.' [...]  
Mr Tomlin: 'Breaktime's not over for another four minutes. Go and find someone else to annoy.'

(ibid., 197)

At the furthest end of the scale is the pigeon Harrison 'befriends', and who becomes a sort of guardian to him. Many reviews of the novel commented on the rather wistful style of the pigeon's monologues, and the sharp contrast this 'pigeon English' forms with the rest of the text. One reviewer writes that: "[i]n the novel's weakest passages, Harri's street-smart observations give way to portentous prose in which this pigeon-protector reflects on magpies, poisoned grain and the fleeting nature of human existence" (Aspden 2011). Here is a passage from one of the pigeon's monologues:

*Your superstitions tickle me, I see it all the time in the touching of buttons, the scattering of salt. It's kind of sweet, you think if you dress death in costume and ritual he'll defect to your side.*

(Kelman 2011, 191, orig. emphasis)

This contrast between the style of the different characters' language, connected to the status or moral positions is telling. I would argue that Kelman has (whether consciously or not) created a kind of moral dichotomy in the language of his texts. If those who are in positions of control or wisdom use unmarked speech, doesn't that reinforce social stereotypes of socially-marked speech as being deficient or indicative of lack of agency?

#### Section 4.2.8 CUVs as authenticity

In this section I would like to look in more detail at the ways in which texts featuring CUVs both reinforce and challenge authenticity through the language they use. The discussion focuses on Leiva Wenger's short story *Borta i tankar*. Although the text focuses on Felipe's difficulty in coming to terms with his move to a new, high-status school in central Stockholm, it would be wrong to read Leiva Wenger's story as a simple tale of youthful confusion. The difficulties experienced by Felipe are personal and complex, and the story portrays this with sensitivity. One of the most striking aspects of the story is the frequent change in narrative voice. Although the story focuses on a single protagonist, the perspective from which it is told varies depending on whom the narration is directed

toward. At times, the protagonist narrates, defending his betrayal of his girlfriend to that girlfriend:

Alla är falska ibland, jag vet nu alla är, dom blir typ tvungna fast dom inte vill. Jag med, jag var också<sup>68</sup>

(Leiva Wenger 2001a, 25)

At other times, a third person narrator relates this betrayal, and the events leading up to it, to the reader. This narrator also identifies directly with the protagonist, as in the following sequences:

Då fick han alltid lust att vända om eller gömma sej bakom nån annan så dom inte skulle se mej;<sup>69</sup>

– Ja, vi får – säger jag, säger Felipe, säger han, säger Fällan<sup>70</sup>

(ibid., 11, 12)

In some cases, the two (or more) narratives occur in the same sentence, leaving it to the reader to figure out who is speaking to whom, as here:

– Du vet jag är kär i dej – sa jag. – Lägg av tjockis, klart jag inte är kär i henne<sup>71</sup>

(ibid., 19)

The shifts between narrative voices are compounded by certain typographical features. The following is an approximation of a section of the text as laid out in the hardback edition of the collection:

Abo, abo, få kolla len, är det deras andra?, Nico visar och dom  
VÄNTA JULIA, LÄGG INTE PÅ. DU MÅSTE HÖRA FÖRST. JAG VET JAG VAR  
kollar, sen dom går hem till Nico och lyssnar, eh håll  
falsk men du var också. jo du var. ibland alla är, jag med. men  
käften, höj, vad säger han, Dogge och Boastin i den fetaste [...]<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Sometimes everyone’s fake, I know now that everyone is, they’re like forced even if they don’t want to be. Me too, I was as well.”

<sup>69</sup> “Then, he always had the urge to turn around or hide himself behind someone else so they wouldn’t see me.”

<sup>70</sup> “– Yeah, we can – he says, Felipe says, he says, Fällan says.”

<sup>71</sup> “– You know I’m in love with you – I said. – Get lost fatso, course I’m not in love with her.”

<sup>72</sup> “(Oi, oi, pass it over mate, is it their second one? Nico holds it up and

This example, which continues for several pages of text, demonstrates how the two narrative threads are interwoven, forcing the reader to adopt complex reading strategies in order to follow the narrative.

This kind of creative engagement with the formal structure of the text is not altogether uncommon in literature - Nørgaard finds evidence of similar typographic play in the works of Dan Brown and J. S. Foer, among others (Nørgaard 2009, 149–157). I interpret the structure of Leiva Wenger's text as serving two purposes. First, it confuses the reader, thereby drawing attention to the protagonist's confusion and replicating this experience 'authentically' through its immersive qualities. Second, it enables the author to demonstrate, through typography, the ways the context and interlocutor can influence the very substance of a story, altering its relationship to reality (ibid., 146-7). A series of events can thus be interpreted in a certain way in one version, and in a different way in a second version. These two interpretations are closely interwoven and inseparable from one another. The structural and typographic play of Leiva Wenger's story indicates the power of the author's creativity and imagination. The author is in control of the reader here, delimiting the boundaries of the reader's understanding of the text by moving away from conventional techniques. The reader's complacency is thereby pushed aside; they are encouraged to examine their understanding of what is being presented to them. Nothing can be taken as read; nothing is authentic.

I would like to refer back to the discussion about authenticity, ownership and performance in rap in Section 3.2. If we turn to the concept of ownership and authenticity in literature we can see that the parameters are somewhat different. That literary and media worlds are dominated by the white middle classes suggests that there is little doubt as to the right of this group to represent themselves. There is thus little mention of 'authenticity' until it comes to the question of the 'Other' entering the literary sphere. This was exactly what

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WAIT JULIA, DON'T HANG UP. YOU HAVE TO LISTEN FIRST. I KNOW I WAS  
they look, then they go back to Nico's place and listen, yo shut  
FAKE BUT YOU WERE TOO. YOU WERE. SOMETIMES WE ALL ARE, ME TOO. BUT  
up, turn it up, what's he sayin, Dogge and Boastin in the phatest [...]."

happened when the work of authors who were deemed to fit into the category of the ‘Other’, such as Leiva Wenger, started to be published in Sweden. Malte Persson commented on this in *Expressen* newspaper: “En gång i tiden fantiserade man om den ädle vilden. Denna självföraktande längtan efter äkthet gick aldrig riktigt över”<sup>73</sup> (Persson 2003, cited in Dahlstedt 2006, 219).

But how does this relate to Leiva Wenger’s text? I suggest that the protagonist Felipe’s performance of his own self complicates the reader’s understanding of the text as a representative portrayal of young suburban masculinity. Felipe is conscious of the insincerity of his own actions, but fails to ‘keep it real’ either for those he is closest to, or for himself. He acts according to the regulations imposed on him by the expectations of others and in doing so he reproduces their expectations. There are moments when he breaks free of this, but he is still constrained by the structure of the text, which performs the confusion and frustration he feels. His switching between different registers, narratives and relationships is also a complicating factor in the issue of authenticity. He has multiple realities to stay true to, and must perform his own self in accordance with the widely varying expectations of his environment.

#### Section 4.2.9 CUVs and foregone conclusions

I write in my summary of *Borta i tankar* in Appendix 2 of the way in which the people around Felipe cast him in a particular role as young man from the suburbs. But this prejudice could also be seen to come from within Felipe, in his inability to reconcile himself to the high expectations others have of him. His nickname, *Fällan* (literally, ‘the trap’, although this meaning is left implicit in the text), references this self-fulfilling position. This is consistent with many representations of ‘real life’ experiences of young men growing up in marginalised communities, thereby suggesting an engagement with high-profile social issues in contemporary Sweden. In rooting his story firmly in a specific time and place,

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<sup>73</sup> “Once upon a time, people fantasised about the noble savage. That self-contemptuous longing for authenticity has never really passed.”

Leiva Wenger ensured that it resonates with contemporary debates, adding a comment on social issues from a new quarter, literature.

However, it might also be possible to see this from another, more negative perspective – as a form of prophecy that reinforces negative images of young, working class men. As Behschnitt discusses (cf. Section 4.1.1), Leiva Wenger’s complex formal play undermines such a simplistic assumption, as did Khemiri’s plays on expectations in *Ett öga rött* and *Montecore*, and Kelman’s myriad voices in *Pigeon English*. In creating space for difference, they create a space in which it is possible to imagine other ways of being a young man in multicultural working class urban areas. Arguably, other authors have been less successful in creating this ambiguity. The protagonists of *Hello Mum* and *Londonstani* are also young men who appear to be sleep-walking towards their unhappy fates, caught in a performance of masculinity. The authors of these fates are undoubtedly writing them in order to highlight and examine a way of life that is not often represented from an insider perspective. Through his letters to his mother, the protagonist of *Hello Mum* indicates his reluctance and fear at getting caught up in a gang and becoming involved in activities he knows his mother would be upset by. This fear and the personal insight into it are the very things that this particular vision of masculinity shuts out. By giving the reader a glimpse of it, Evaristo is attesting to its existence. Likewise, in *Londonstani*, the protagonist reflects on the events he is experiencing in a way that offers a different perspective on the Asian rudeboy stereotype (notwithstanding the fact that the protagonist is not actually an ‘Asian’ rudeboy at all). Nonetheless, to a certain extent, these books are reinforcing stereotypes associated with speakers of CUVs. I have not encountered any books featuring representations of CUVs that do not also feature ‘toughness’ and violence. This communicates to readers of these books the foregone conclusion that CUVs are inextricably bound up with these things, thus potentially causing these readers, who might not otherwise come into contact with CUV speakers, to take such representations at face value.

## Section 4.3 Role of authorial identity

It is not my job, nor indeed do I believe it to be appropriate or even necessary, to assess the ‘accuracy’ of any of these authors’ representation of the language of their characters and the ‘real-life’ communities they might be perceived to belong to. These are, after all, creative works of fiction that serve as fully-formed worlds in themselves. Indeed, accuracy is a strange concept to apply when many of these texts seek deliberately to destabilise assumptions about language and voice. However, it must be said that some readers have taken issue with perceived inaccuracies in some of the writers’ representations of language. The following quote from the blog ‘missojikutu.wordpress.com’ is an example: “[Kelman’s Ghanaian phrases] might have been inserted with enough frequency to satisfy the Western reader; to West African readers their syntax have [sic] often been noticeably wrong” (Ojikutu 2011). The blog post also discusses the suitability of a white British man depicting Ghanaian pidgin and slang in his prose, noting that it could even be seen as provocative by Africans who feel that to have a white man “attempting to see through the eyes of a black man [all too often] turns the black man into a caricature” (Njuko, cited in *ibid.*). One pertinent question in relation to this is the extent to which the average reader of the novel is aware of such inaccuracies or flaws. Judging from the reviews in the mainstream British press, there was little resistance to Kelman’s language use, aside from the ‘guardian’ pigeon, whose flowery prose was mocked by a number of reviewers, as previously discussed.

In some instances, reviewers lauded the language Kelman creates for Harrison. One even states that he felt tempted to use the phrase ‘advise yourself’ so frequently uttered by Harrison’s contemptuous older sister Lydia (Robshaw 2012). What does this positive affirmation of Kelman’s representation of his characters’ voices mean? Is it acceptable to treat as neutral his choices for characters who belong to a Ghanaian-British community he does not? Does the fact that his production of text is a creative act give him free reign in his representations? Or, conversely, does an author have to be a member of a speech community in order to represent it in prose? Obviously, if the answer to this last question were yes, very few books would ever be written, but there is exists a level of ambiguity in relation to the other questions. Both Kelman and White are white men in their thirties or forties who have some experience of worlds comparable to the ones they portray in their novels. For example, White’s statement in Section 4.2.6 indicates the extent to which he

took inspiration from his surroundings to produce his novel. Kelman has referred in articles to the fact that he grew up on a working class estate on London's periphery, and that many of his experiences there formed a template for characters and events in *Pigeon English*. He has also stated that during the writing of his book, he lived in an area of London where there were many Ghanaians, and became familiar with their speech and communication habits by listening to and observing intra-community interactions:

The estate I was living on was quite a difficult and dangerous place – but I still feel lucky to be from there. I was lucky because it made *Pigeon English* easier to write: I was surrounded by the people I was writing about, their hopes and fears, and the things that made them laugh. Some of the scenes in the book actually happened to me or were things I witnessed.

(Kelman 2012)

However, as Marcyliena Morgan has written,

[...] cultural conflict can arise when people who are familiar with communities where they may not share membership use a language or jargon for emphasis, play, or to align with an 'outside' identity within the boundaries of their own communities. In this case the style of speaking may be readily identified as belonging to a particular community, but the value norms and expectation of the source community do not accompany it. What's more, the words and expressions may be used out of context and in ways considered inappropriate and offensive.

(Morgan 2005, 17)

I do not believe that the writers discussed in this chapter are seeking to align themselves with the communities they are representing in fiction. The point remains though, that they are representing those communities, and in doing so take a position towards them (perhaps unconsciously), and make choices about what they represent. In doing so, they may foreground elements that do not coincide with the communities' perceptions of themselves, thereby causing offence or misrepresenting those communities to readers outside them.

If fiction is an imaginative process, surely arguments over authenticity, membership and ownership that these questions imply are less relevant. But is the situation different if the author is writing imaginatively about a community that actually exists, making this community identifiable both through the language and through other references in the text, in a way that may impact upon outsiders' (or insiders') views of that community? Does the author have some sort of 'obligation' to accurate representation? It may be argued that this is impossible in any case, if one takes into account the difficulties of representing spoken language in writing discussed previously.

An important question is the position and identity of the author in this equation. One potential area of further study is the inequality in the space and attention given to white writers over black ones. This can be seen in black author Alex Wheatle's comments about the selection of *Pigeon English* for the Man Booker Prize shortlist, in which he acknowledges Kelman's contribution, but wonders: "why it had to take a white author to explore the black underprivileged to finally attract the attention of a major award" (Wheatle 2011).

Thinking forward to my discussion of the translation of CUVs in Section 7, it strikes me how rarely the issue of the translator's race or ethnicity comes up in regard to their translation of books written by or about people of a different skin colour or ethnic group. What is different about a writer's and a translator's relationship with the text that makes it less acceptable for a white individual to write about black experience than it is for a white individual to translate that experience into the grammatical system of a different culture? If this is a question of representation, then surely (as I argue in Section 7.1), the translator's choices potentially have an impact on that representation to a certain degree, if not necessarily to the same degree as the writer of the source text. That said, I should reiterate that I am absolutely not claiming that authors are only or should only be able to write experience that reflects that of their 'own' social group – whatever that might mean. I simply feel that if translation is, as I argue in the Introduction to this thesis, an act of creative writing, then it is worth considering on comparable terms with other forms of creative writing.

## Section 4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that the choices authors make about the language of their characters can have an impact of the message conveyed by their texts. We find that documented, publicly recognised language features can be a useful tool in reinforcing a sense of geographic and social setting. Meanwhile, this use can also highlight the tensions that arise in contemporary urban settings, where different communities of linguistic practice coalesce, influencing each other's linguistic and social behaviour. Contemporary urban vernaculars can also be used to signify more personal phenomena – friendship, emotional states, memory.



I am aware that I have perhaps focused overly on the role of the author, without interrogating what role the reader plays where literary representations of CUVs are concerned. A thorough discussion of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth briefly turning to the reader's role in relation to the text in order to better understand the effect of literary representations of CUVs. Donoghue asks the questions: "How does a particular interpretation of a book indicate the ideological axioms on which its reader silently proceeds? What does a particular reader assume goes without saying? And shouldn't we tease out those assumptions?" (Donoghue 1998, 36). If we tease out the assumptions that lie behind the reading of the literary texts I have discussed, we find assumptions connecting ethnicity, language use, and the right to represent that language use (as discussed in relation to Kelman and White in Section 4.3, and Khemiri, in Section 5.5). Such assumptions indicate the strong ties between language and identity, and between CUVs and their association with minority ethnic experience. However, such ties are constructed and performed, as we saw in Chapter 3. Literature offers a perfect ground on which to test and explore these constructions and performances. While one of the privileges of the reading process is being able to interpret the subject matter, style and form of literature as the reader sees fit, the careful reader will be rewarded for their attention to the author's tests and explorations.



## Chapter 5 The Interplay of Rap and Literature

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The chapter begins by exploring the concept of intertextuality and examining how it might be applied to the re-appropriation of rap lyrics in literature. This discussion focuses on the Swedish context, as I have found much more evidence of the relationship between rap and literature in the Swedish texts I consider than in those from the UK. I begin by exploring the ways in which expectations were built up around The Latin Kings' distinctive brand of rap in Sweden during the 1990s. These expectations foregrounded The Latin Kings' use of contemporary urban vernaculars as a stage in the increasing visibility of these vernaculars in the mainstream of Swedish culture. This discussion lays the ground for a more in-depth, thematic analysis of the literary texts in question, an analysis built upon aspects of the texts that I deem to make particular use of rap's symbolism. I explore how rap/hip hop is used as a marker of belonging in Johannes Anyuru's *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* and Alejandro Leiva Wenger's *Borta i tankar*. This sense of belonging might be experienced by the protagonists in the work, or by the author of it. The following section deals with the way Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Ett öga rött* uses rap to signify a constructed belonging that can be used to artificially define groups or individuals, both within literature, and beyond it. I then discuss the significance of relocating an oral art form as a written art form on the page, and in conclusion, attempt to trace how this act of intertextual relocation might be of assistance to the translator.

### Section 5.1 Rap, hip hop and intertextuality

In order to effectively analyse the interplays<sup>74</sup> between rap and literature below, it is essential to put in place the theoretical framework around which I will map out the processes taking place. This will facilitate a deeper understanding of the significance of the interplays in question and aid an investigation of how these might be utilised in the translation process. I will, therefore start by defining intertextuality, and discussing how it

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<sup>74</sup> Interplay is understood here as a set of direct and indirect relationships between rap and literature – quotation, inference, borrowing of terms, linguistic influence

can be applied in the context of this study. I will also discuss the concept of intermediality, and explain why it is relevant to my discussion, but not sufficiently central to warrant its use as the basis of the theoretical framework.

Kristeva introduces the concept of intertextuality by talking about the fact that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva and Moi 1986, 37). This image of the absorption of myriad influences into a whole is an intriguing one in relation to texts that feature representations of CUVs, in that CUVs could themselves be talked of in the same terms: as languages that are constructed as a mosaic of quotations from the various languages spoken in the locations where they have emerged. In any case, this definition, which underlines the inter-relatedness of all texts, is a good start for thinking about intertextuality. Moving on, we can see that intermediality is defined by Werner Wolf as:

... a particular relation (a relation that is ‘intermedial’ in the narrow sense) between conventionally distinct media of expression or communication: this relation consists in a verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable, direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artefact.

(Wolf 1999, 37)

Wolf’s idea of the “conventionally distinct media of expression” suggests that the references to an example of verbal expression within another verbal form would be excluded from the definition. As rap is a verbal form which can be equated with poetry, it is arguably intertextuality, rather than *intermediality* that is at play here. This takes into account the fact that the quotation of (rap) lyrics in poetry and other forms of literature involves the transfer of verbal elements from one text to another. There are several factors that mark these kinds of texts out as distinct media, to use Wolf’s term, not least the fact that rap lyrics are only one aspect of a musical form. This means that both frameworks could effectively be used to analyse the processes I am examining. I have chosen to focus on the intertextual framework as, although I think the role of music in rap is an essential factor in the interplay between rap and literature, it is not a core feature of my analysis in the current study.

As discussed in Section 3.1.2, the rhythmic component of rap and hip hop has an influence on the verbal components: flow has a formal impact on rap as verbal expression, regardless of the specific genre. With this in mind, it is worth investigating the role played by flow and

rhythm in poetry, to see whether there is any crossover between rap and poetry on this level. Poetry can be highly rhythmic, and is even sometimes set to music. Some writers and rappers cross-over between the forms, especially in the spoken-word genre and in so-called ‘poetry slams’. In the following passage, Alim quotes some illuminating comments by rapper Pharoahe Monche:

‘I mean, poetry is a awesome art form in itself. I dabble in it before I write some of the songs that I do. I try to be poetic with some of the songs. Hip Hop is based on a mixture of that, but more writing musically. Points and timing, you know. So is poetry. But on a level where it’s based on the music, you have to be more rhythmatically connected with your listener and crowd, in terms of rhythm, you know.’ What Pharoahe’s and other rappers’ comments reveal is that Hip Hop is similar, but different, to most poetry in that there are multiple layers of complexity required in order to ‘get a response rhythmatically’.

(Alim 2006, 126)

The cross-over potential that exists between rap and poetry may play a role in the intertextual use of rap within literature. After all, Johannes Anyuru, one of the writers whose work I analyse below, has performed a hip hop show entitled *Abstrakt rap* with DJ Khim throughout Sweden. If a poet is, or has been, a practicing rapper alongside his or her writing for the page, it is likely that the two roles will influence one another.

This poet/performer ambiguity leads us on to the role of performance in rap and verbal forms in general. As I discussed previously, hip hop music has increasingly been listened to in recorded form since its origins in the block parties of the Bronx in the 1970s. However, the performance of rap at concerts and in events such as rap battles and live radio freestyles is still important. Performance is an integral part of rap, informing the rapper’s behaviour and language use as they craft an onstage persona, but is obviously not unique to rap. Performance also has a place in poetry, as it does in many art forms – poetry slams, for instance have been seen as an exciting way to draw in a new generation of poets, as discussed by Turner (2010). Live readings and recitals are also popular forms of poetry performance. Two key distinctions remain, however, between the performance of rap, and the performance of poetry. The first is that however much poetry slams lend themselves to spontaneity, poetry readings and recitals are unavoidably rooted in the written word, while rap is generally characterised by its orality, even though many rappers write or sketch lyrics prior to performing them. The second is the integral role in rap of music, something which, as discussed in Section 3.1.2, has a major impact on the formal character of the lyrics.

There is a certain amount of research on the relationship of performance to language use and style in song, although I have as yet found nothing that focuses on rap specifically. Nikolas Coupland distinguished between *mundane* performance and *high* performance to indicate that all speech acts could be viewed as containing an aspect of performativity, but that certain conditions are in place when it comes to *high performance* (Coupland 2007, 146). This latter concept applies to the current discussion. Rap as linguistic performance is an event which has a specific meaning for all involved. The audience and performer occupy specific roles within this performance framework, and have certain expectations as a result of those roles. In relation to theatre, Snell-Hornby talks about how “for the spectator in the audience, language and the action on stage are perceived *sensuously* as a *personal experience* to which he/she can respond” (Snell-Hornby 2006, 85, orig. emphasis). Keyes argues that a prime characteristic of the performer-audience dynamic of rap performance is the reciprocal engagement, whereby the performer performs an action in order to elicit a response, and “[t]he audience, in turn, responds physically to rap artists with handclapping and verbal replies” (Keyes 2002, 151). An example of this is call and response, a common feature of hip hop performance, in which the performer calls out a stock phrase, e.g.: “Let me hear you say ‘ho-oo’”, and the audience responds with a stock reply: “ho-oo”. The continuing popularity of call and response (I have witnessed it in action at grime performances in the last few years) is indicative of a reciprocity that underlies the mechanisms that would make rap capable of influencing everyday language beyond the performance itself.

My purpose in focusing on the question of performance here is that the performance aspect of rap distances it from less performative verbal forms such as the novel. While I have thus far discussed the possibility that poetry and rap have numerous areas of overlap, I have focused little on the (almost) purely written form of the novel and the short story. I add the ‘(almost)’ here to indicate my awareness that reading aloud can play an important part in readers’ relationships to the novel, and that novels and stories are frequently adapted into other media such as film, and even song. However, I have chosen to disregard these alternative formats for the purpose of my analysis as I see them as supplementary to the novel or story as text. (One format which comes closer to my field of analysis, and which

would be an interesting topic for future investigation, is the audiobook. However, this is beyond the scope of the current study.)

In Section 5.6, I discuss aspects of orality and literacy in the interplay between rap and literature. In order to contextualise any occasional references to this theme throughout the chapter, I will briefly highlight a couple of important points about rap's complex relationship with writing, and what happens when rapped lyrics become written words on the page. I will do this by introducing the thoughts of an American writer, Adam Mansbach, who has described how his work has been heavily influenced by his interest in hip hop music and culture (rather than rap, specifically), terming his brand of literature 'lit hop'. His approach highlights important intertextual aspects of hip hop that I have not yet referred to. Mansbach defines hip hop through the notion of "intellectual democracy through collage" (Mansbach 2006, 93). In doing so, he is referring to the tendency of hip hop as a form to borrow musically, textually, and in other ways, from a wide range of sources. He illustrates this by saying that: "whatever's hot is worthy of adoption regardless of its location or context: a dope Monkees drum break is not penalized for the corniness of its origins" (ibid.). Furthermore, he compares 'lit hop' with the jazz literature of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century that "does not have to take jazz as its subject", but which is still influenced by the spirit and the structures of jazz in terms of its innovation. He says of writers such as Langston Hughes: "their genius was not in writing *about* jazz, but in *writing jazz*" (ibid.). He equates this to what he sees as the future for literature that is informed by hip hop: "[i]n some ways, the mark of success for lit hop will be when a book that isn't about hip-hop is understood as beholden to the aesthetics of the culture" (ibid.).

But what is the significance of this for the literary texts I am analysing? Mansbach claims to be thoroughly steeped in hip hop culture, even going so far as to define his work in these terms. Despite stating their interest in hip hop, none of the writers in my study have defined themselves as 'lit hop' writers in the way Mansbach does. Regardless of this distinction in self-identification (which in any case is of limited value in this analysis), there are aspects of Mansbach's approach to hip hop and literature that can inform my treatment of the texts in question. One is the idea that the formal structures of hip hop, its collage approach and inherent intertextuality/intermediality have a fundamental effect on the way these writers approach the task of writing. This is the view taken by Corina Lacatus (2008),

which I discuss in more detail in Section 5.5. There are elements of Mansbach's presentation that I find problematic, including his narrow definition of what 'real' hip hop is, i.e. not its "most visible, consumable, misogynistic manifestations" (Mansbach 2006, 96) of which he says: "I wouldn't want that shit infecting literature either" (ibid.). Overall, though, his treatment of the potential for the aesthetic qualities of hip hop to move beyond the rapped word or the sampled loop onto the page has informed my own ideas about intertextuality.

In order to begin an analysis of literature's relationship with rap, however, I need to first return briefly to the subject of my discussion in Chapter 3 on the significance of rap as a cultural form and a social symbol in 1990s Sweden, broadening this to look at ways in which expectations of a literary equivalent to The Latin Kings' work began to emerge. The social role The Latin Kings played has a major impact on the ways in which their lyrics have been used within the literary texts this thesis focuses on. This is followed by a theme-by-theme discussion of what I perceive to be the main functions of quotations of rap in the literary texts I consider.

## Section 5.2 "Låt oss i alla fall hoppas det" – new voices in Swedish literature

The Latin Kings' relationship to the authors and poets on which this study focuses is closely tied to the social and linguistic context in which the rappers created their unique performance voice. Similarly important is the complex interplay of language, identity and suburban place in The Latin Kings' lyrics.

As explored in Chapter 2, the three members of The Latin Kings, Dogge, Chepe and Salla all grew up in Norra Botkyrka, a suburb of Stockholm that was built as part of the 'miljonprogram' social housing projects of the 60s and 70s. Aside from their pioneering success in rapping in Swedish, they were adroit in their creation of a marketable identity that also gave voice to issues that had been bubbling under the surface in Sweden for many years: they expressed and brought to public attention many of the concerns of thousands of suburb-dwellers who felt marginalised and maligned in Swedish society. They did this in a



way that was at once serious and light-hearted, combining the comic and the credible with the intermedial flair typical of hip hop. Whether consciously or not, they manifested their membership in Swedish society by rapping in Swedish (English had previously been the norm) and sampling popular children's TV themes. Simultaneously, they asserted their place alongside an (American) hip hop tradition that has famously provided a means of expression for marginalised groups around the world: their name is borrowed from a notorious Chicago gang, The Latin Kings, they surrounded themselves in their promotional material with the 'ghetto' imagery of fighting dogs, concrete estates and blacked-out-windowed cars, and drew heavily on the 'place' of the *miljonprogram* as a site of disaffected youth rebellion (See Section 3.2.3 for a discussion of such tropes in relation to authenticity).

In 1995, just after The Latin Kings had released *Välkommen till förorten*, their gold-selling debut album, literary critic Clemens Altgård wrote an article in a popular literary magazine, commenting on the exciting new prose literature that was emerging in Sweden at that time. He described the way that this new generation of writers was depicting exciting new elements of Swedish society, but noted that he found one aspect of contemporary Sweden to be missing from this depiction, and asked:

Men var finns då det Sverige som håller på att växa fram, det land som beskrivs på Latin Kings CD *Välkommen till förorten*, och där man talar Rinkebysvenska? Jag tror att den första romanen om den verkligheten kommer att dyka upp ganska snart – i varje fall före år 2000. Låt oss i alla fall hoppas det.<sup>75</sup>

(Altgård 1995, 17)

Altgård's hopes were answered in part from 2001 onwards, by a series of writers who drew on suburban slang and suburban tropes in their work. Alejandro Leiva Wenger's 2001 collection of short stories *Till vår ära* (In Our Honour) was one of the books seen to answer Altgård's call (although in actual fact, only two of the stories in this six-story collection could be said to represent 'det Sverige' that Altgård was referring to, at least in terms of linguistic style). *Till vår ära* was followed by other books, such as Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Ett öga rött* (One Eye Red), Johannes Anyuru's *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* (Only The Gods

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<sup>75</sup> "Where is the Sweden that is emerging, the country described on Latin Kings' CD *Välkommen till förorten*, where people speak Rinkeby Swedish? I think the first novel about that reality will turn up soon – in any case by the year 2000. Let's hope so, anyway."

Are New), and Marjaneh Bakhtiari's *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (Call It What You Damn Well Like), which all, in their own ways, depicted the 'reality' that Altgård was searching for. Furthermore, the debuts of Anyuru, Khemiri, and Leiva Wenger (and, to a lesser degree, Bakhtiari) all referred to and drew upon aspects of rap and hip hop culture, and more precisely, the rap of The Latin Kings.

This chapter focuses predominantly on three texts of the texts discussed in Chapter 4, Leiva Wenger's *Borta i tankar*, *Ett öga rött*, by Khemiri and Anyuru's *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*. For an introduction to each of these texts, please refer to Appendix 2. However, it is worth briefly outlining the ways I perceive the authors to use rap in the texts, as well as mentioning a few underlying connections between these authors and the rap world that may lie behind this use. I will then move onto a more in-depth consideration of the engagement between the literary and rap texts.

As I interpret it, *Borta i tankar* references the songs of The Latin Kings to provide a recognisable pivot around which the main character Felipe's reminiscences about friendship can turn. My analysis of Anyuru's poems focuses on references to The Latin Kings as a marker of personal identity, or intimate friendship, rather than the masculine camaraderie of Leiva Wenger's story. Khemiri's focus on authenticity and the construction of identity also informs my treatment of rap and The Latin Kings in *Ett öga rött*, as the lyrics are used to denote other individuals' simplistic assumptions about Halim's interest and tastes.

There are complex reasons why each of these writers refers to The Latin Kings, and their reasons for doing so may well differ from my interpretation of why they are doing so. However, it is important to remember that rap, hip hop music and culture in general, and The Latin Kings in particular, have all been key features of Swedish youth culture over the last 20-30 years. Due to this prominence, many references to them may represent no more than the importance of music to young people. Despite this consideration, rap and hip hop culture occupy a significant position in the literature on marginality and marginalised (youth) cultures. This tension is interesting in and of itself, in that it demonstrates the very significant role allegedly minority or marginalised cultures can have on mainstream culture. The Latin Kings have been the subject of a number of studies analysing issues such as identity and ethnicity in contemporary Swedish culture, leading Strage to call them: "en våt

dröm för språkforskare, socialantropologer och reportrar för P1 och DN Kultur”<sup>76</sup> (Strage 2001, 341, cf. also Bredström and Dahlstedt 2002; Nyberg 2008; Behschnitt 2013). Hip hop has a wide listenership, and yet, perhaps as a result of its ‘keep it real’ mentality, it retains an important association with rebellion, anti-establishment attitudes and the struggles of the under-represented which cannot be ignored, however much it is important to retain critical distance from it. So it can be seen that, although some references to The Latin Kings in Swedish literature may not be playing on the associations I am discussing, no author is likely to refer to The Latin Kings without knowledge of their unique place in Swedish culture, meaning that the associations created by the intertextual references to them in the text are unlikely to be accidental.

As Section 3.2.1 shows, the concept of ‘keeping it real’ so often resorted to in hip hop culture is certainly problematic. This applies to language use (i.e. the use of slang), as well as to the idea of identity or of belonging to a specific culture. This is not to deny that identification and solidarity play an important part in hip hop culture. As stated in Section 3.2, rappers can be viewed as representatives of a given community by people from within that community. Rap music is a musical subculture, and as such, it forms a locus around which friendships and other social structures can be organised. It can also be used as a marker or a symbol of these social structures by other agents (I am thinking primarily of the stubborn association of rap with youth violence and gang culture, a subject discussed in Ilan (2012)). But as I will demonstrate, writers also use rap as a symbol to create certain associations in their texts. These associations play on the place that rap and hip hop culture have in youth culture – the formative experiences of building an identity and a social circle around their developing music tastes, as many young people do. I argue that rap has also been used in literature to question narratives of authenticity and identity that are predicated on these associations.

In large part, my analysis focuses on why writers choose to use rap in their lyrics, and the effects of this use on the literary text. I would, however, like to call on Wolfgang

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<sup>76</sup> “a wet dream for language researchers, social anthropologists and reporters from P1 [Sweden’s main national radio station] and DN Kultur [the arts section of a major Swedish daily].”

Behschnitt's discussion of what effect this use has for rap as a genre, The Latin Kings as an act, and more generally, CUVs and the communities that use them. Behschnitt argues that:

Literary texts make use of hip hop not only to root themselves in suburban culture and take advantage of the symbolic capital the band has acquired in this cultural field but at the same time contribute to introduce The Latin Kings and their language into another cultural circuit dominated by a well-educated Swedish middle-class elite.

(Behschnitt 2013, 188)

Although The Latin Kings were already a high-profile musical act, with many middle class fans (cf. Strage's comment above), Behschnitt's comments are worth considering as they reflect the fact that different audiences consume different forms of culture. There are undoubtedly many people for whom their first contact with The Latin Kings would have been through Alejandro Leiva Wenger or Anyuru. The significance of The Latin Kings and their lyrics being featured in novels, poems and other texts more conservatively viewed as literature could be seen as a symbolic step on their path towards inclusion in the Swedish literary canon. This inclusion is something that, judging by the existence of studies like mine and Behschnitt's, would seem to be well underway.

### Section 5.3 Literary representations of rap music and friendship

Many scholars of rap and hip hop culture have referred to the role played by these forms in the social lives of young people around the world (Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009; Pennycook 2007a). I would like to talk here specifically about how The Latin Kings' presence in two literary texts lays the parameters for the reader's understanding of this social life, by symbolising the specific context in which the friendships that make up this social life emerge. One factor that seems to unite the references to The Latin Kings that occur in all of the literary works is the significance of The Latin Kings' music to friendship and interpersonal relations. The majority of the references I have noted occur in moments of the texts where friendships are being cemented – the first hearing of a new album, stretched out on the bed of a close friend – the music soundtracking a significant moment, or even creating it, as here:

Jag är femton sexton år här, just här.

Jag ligger helt stilla, utsträckt på sängen  
i hans rum,

täcket kommer från Somalia,

det är rött och broderat med  
sol från långt borta. Strålningen  
i rummet är fruktansvärt stark,  
ur stereon hör jag rytmen, den nya, hårda  
rytmen:

Dogge kommer från Alby.<sup>77</sup>

(Anyuru 2003, 49)

This passage captures a sense of youthful discovery of self in relation to others. The reference to being fifteen or sixteen, a formative period for many people, and of being ‘från långt borta’ in common with someone else with whom you have a lot else in common, regardless of where that ‘långt borta’ actually is. All this underlines the significance of finding someone else at a crucial time of life, feeling a sense of not being alone. The ‘strålning’ here is an energy created by the moment, by the music, the new rhythm. These young people are sharing something for the first time in the presence of the energy and emotion of a physically reminder, the blanket with its embroidered sunbeams of otherness. The line break before the last line: ‘Dogge kommer från Alby’ gives a sense of paraphrase, perhaps drawing a parallel between Dogge and the narrator (and his friend) as outsiders. It also provides a moment for reflection about the importance of place in Dogge’s lyrics.

I will now turn to Leiva Wenger’s story *Borta i tankar*. Here, references to The Latin Kings serve a similar purpose, providing the soundtrack for a nostalgia for a time when the bonds uniting a friendship were simpler, when all the characters were ‘in it together’, united by their love of a music that in some way expressed their situation. This is also reflected in the way the members of this particular group of friends talk to each other. The story is built up through intertwining narrative threads. Felipe, the main character, has joined a high school in a more affluent area of Stockholm, leaving behind a group of friends who have gone on to the local technical college in the suburb where they have grown up together. His social

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<sup>77</sup> “I’m fifteen or sixteen here, just here./ I’m lying quite still, stretched out on the bed / in his room, / the quilt is from Somalia,/ it’s red and embroidered/ with sun from afar. The energy/ in the room is fantastically strong,/ from the stereo I hear the rhythm, the new, hard/ rhythm/ Dogge comes from Alby”

life at his new school is more or less restricted to a girl, Julia, who he has started to go out with. Felipe is forced to betray Julia when a game of dare with his old friends goes awry. The narrative consists of him relating to Julia, and to the reader, in two looping, inconsistent and parallel threads, the events that led to this disastrous outcome. The subject of the narrative switches constantly between ‘I’, and ‘he’/‘Felipe’ or the nickname ‘Fällan’, often mid-way through a sentence, as here: “Ibland var **han** trött och därför **jag** försökte gömma mej när **han** såg dom komma från andra hållet”<sup>78</sup> (Leiva Wenger 2001a, 12, my emphasis).<sup>79</sup> The narrative is sometimes related in the second, and sometimes in the third person, as in the following passage:

– Abo... Jaime låtsas darra. – Vi får se vem som är rädd.  
 – Ja, vi får – säger **jag**, säger **Felipe**, säger **han**, säger **Fällan**.<sup>80</sup>

(*ibid.*, 11, my emphasis)

The language in these various threads is tailored to the recipient of the information. In doing so, it indicates to the reader what aspect of his personality the protagonist/narrator is currently projecting. For instance, when talking to Julia, he uses fewer CUV terms. The language used in the dialogue between the members of Felipe’s group, as reported in Felipe’s narration of the events to the reader, is reminiscent of the language used by The Latin Kings in their lyrics. Compare, for instance, the following line, from ‘The Latin Kings’ *Botkyrka Stylee* “**shuno** spelar bonanza fett **len**”<sup>81</sup> (The Latin Kings 1997b, my emphasis), with this passage from the text: “**Shunon** sover – skrattar Bollen – **Ey** Fällan, vakna **len**. **Eo!** Med eller utan?”<sup>82</sup> (Leiva Wenger 2001a, 11, my emphasis). Indeed, similar use of slang

<sup>78</sup> “Sometimes **he was** tired and that’s why tried **I** to hide when **he** saw them coming from the other direction.”

<sup>79</sup> Note also here the use of non-standard non-inversion of subject verb order: “därför jag försökte”, where elsewhere the subject and verb are inverted in accordance with Standard Swedish grammar: “ibland var han” – a feature of *rinkebysvenska* as described by Kotsinas and discussed in Section 2.1.1

<sup>80</sup> “Abo... Jaime pretends to tremble. We’ll see who’s scared. Yeah, we will – I say, Felipe says, he says, Fällan says.”

<sup>81</sup> “Man’s takin’ the piss bruv.”

<sup>82</sup> “Man’s sleepin – laughs Bollen – Eh Fällan, wake up bruv. Yo! With or without?”

terms closely associated with CUVs occurs in quotations from 'The Latin Kings' lyrics within the text "*riktig gigant jävla betonghiphop, ingen jävla keff topplistpop*"<sup>83</sup> (Leiva Wenger 2001a, 15, orig. italics, my emphasis). This alignment of the in-group dialogue and the music that soundtracks their interactions bears out the role that references to The Latin Kings play in sign-posting friendship. This sign-posting is also observed by Behschnitt, who notes the way the narrator's memories of listening to The Latin Kings with friends are contrasted with the his conversations with his (new, non-suburban) girlfriend (Behschnitt 2013, 186).

The mood and the rap references change as Felipe finds out that he will be attending his new school in central Stockholm: "Vad ska du med den skolan len, ska du bli Södergrabb, hälsa Petter. *yo jag blåser hål i topp fyrtis lista*"<sup>84</sup> (Leiva Wenger 2001a, 15, orig. italics). The distinction here between Petter, a rapper from the Södermalm district of central Stockholm, and The Latin Kings, with relationship to the suburbs, is indicative of the distinction that some have drawn between the different forms of rap that have emerged in Stockholm. On the one hand, rappers such as The Latin Kings and Ayo have played on their association with the suburbs – using a combination of language, thematic content and attitude to carve a niche for themselves that casts them as 'outsiders', communicating marginal experience to a wider audience (as discussed in Chapter 3). On the other hand, Petter is described as "en medelklasshjärte, en liten snubbe vars helylleimage inte skadas hur mycket champagne han än hinkar på Stureplan"<sup>85</sup> (Strage 2001, 322), as he "utstrålar samma blandning av lågmäldhet och busig charm som Ulf Lundell i början av sjuttioalet"<sup>86</sup> (ibid.). This contrast is reflected in the characters' reference to these acts.

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<sup>83</sup> "Real heavy fuckin concrete hip hop, no fuckin stupid top chart pop."

<sup>84</sup> "What do you want with that school blud, man's gonna be a Söder man, say hi to Petter. *yo I blow a hole in the top forty charts.*"

<sup>85</sup> "a middle-class hero, a little dude whose pure wool image remains intact regardless of how much champagne he downs in Stureplan [a notorious nightclub district]."

<sup>86</sup> "radiates the same combination of understatement and mischievous charm as Ulf Lundell [one of Sweden's best-loved songwriters] in the early Seventies."

By using the language of The Latin Kings in his narrative, both through lyrical quotation, and by incorporating it into the dialogue of his characters, Leiva Wenger plays upon an interesting phenomenon. He marks the language of his characters as being at once a CUV form commonly spoken in certain parts of Stockholm, and as the performance voice of a successful rap act who shaped their career around their association with a particular suburban milieu. The young men's language use thereby becomes simultaneously an affirmation of group identity and friendship, and a sense of belonging to a larger cultural phenomenon, that is, the culture of the '*betongförort*' (concrete suburbs), the positive cultural contributions of which had, until the arrival of The Latin Kings, been little acknowledged in the Swedish media.

## Section 5.4 Rap and personal identification

Anyuru's association with The Latin Kings seems to be more personal. Inasmuch as it is possible to determine what any writer is doing when they make a particular reference, it seems as though Anyuru is pointing to a personal, and perhaps political, relationship with Dogge and his fellow band members. The text of Anyuru's poems is informed by Stockholm CUVs in certain ways – he includes snippets of dialogue, such as this one:

Grabben med röd keps och  
chilensk accent med runda,  
framtunga konsonanter  
känner lillbrorsan, han  
skickar upp en hand och hälsar  
rakt upp ur solens innandöme  
(att skriva in sitt eget namn  
i en dikt: *Johannes, vad händer, aide,*  
*que pasa weon?* Att göra den till sin  
sanning)<sup>87</sup>

(Anyuru 2003, 36, orig. emphasis)

Here, he signals his personal involvement with a multilingual environment, but marks out his ambivalence towards being subsumed within a biographical reading of his own poetry.

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<sup>87</sup> “The kid with the red cap and/ Chilean accent with rounded/ front-loaded consonants/ knows my little bro, he/ sticks up a hand and sends a/ greeting straight from the sun's core/ (to write your own name/ into a poem: *Johannes, what's happening, bruv/ que pasa weon? / to make it your own/ truth*)”



This is indicated by the way Anyuru chooses to draw attention to the decision to literally write himself into the poem. It is no straightforward matter to include one's name in a literary text, as this will give the text the appearance of being autobiographical and encourage the reader to interpret the work as such, thereby blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. This type of biographical reading is one that writers such as Jonas Hassen Khemiri and Marjaneh Bakhtiari have resisted vocally, as can be seen from the following two excerpts from interviews with the authors:

Vi vill stoppa in människor i fack och sätta etiketter på dem. Men när någon försöker göra mig till en 'Förorts-Jonas', då får jag andnöd.<sup>88</sup>

(Khemiri, interviewed in Kellberg 2003)

Jag har ju inte skrivit om fjärilar. Hade jag gjort det och du hade frågat mig något om invandrare, då hade jag blivit skitsur. Men jag är rädd för att man gör den här boken till det man vill att den ska vara, att den ska ge en 'inblick'.<sup>89</sup>

(Bakhtiari, interviewed in Kalmteg 2005)

Anyuru's references to Dogge and The Latin Kings' lyrics hint at a reaction that challenges the negative imagery surrounding the suburbs, injecting it with a shot of sensitivity and sadness:

... 'brott vi inte gjort än'  
... Dogge  
dina pistoler,  
ditt vemod'<sup>90</sup>

(Anyuru 2003, 34).

This reaction also suggests the possibility that language might be a way to challenge this negativity. Anyuru's tone is frequently oblique, making it difficult to draw any clear conclusions. Indeed, Anyuru reinforces this ambiguity by including the following quote from Neil Gaiman in the epigraph of *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*: "I learned that sometimes what you do not understand, what remains beyond your grasp in a book, is as

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<sup>88</sup> "We want to put people into pigeon-holes and put labels on them. But when someone tries to make me into some 'suburb-Jonas', I start seeing red."

<sup>89</sup> "You know, I've not written about butterflies. If I'd done that and you'd asked me something about immigrants, I'd have been bloody angry. But I'm afraid that people make this book into what they want it to be – that it will give an 'insight'."

<sup>90</sup> "[...] 'crimes we haven't done yet' [...] Dogge/ your pistols/ your melancholy"

magical as what you can take from it” (Gaiman, in Anyuru 2003, 7). Despite this, an attempt at interpretation can be rewarding, as in the following passage:

Spänningsfälten som finns runt orden  
smäller till  
och byter laddning  
när språket bryts sönder, byggs upp igen  
och bryts sönder på nytt: *dom anklager oss för brott vi inte gjort än  
välkommen till förorten*<sup>91</sup>

(Anyuru 2003, 56, orig. emphasis)

These lines refer, in my reading at least, to the creativity of language, and to its potential to create a spark that could lead to change. We see how the words are broken down, and reinterpreted, and in this process, they shift in meaning as a result of their use in a new context. This new context could be the use of street language in rap, or the use of rap lyrics in written poetry. The re-contextualisation of words can bring about new readings, by new audiences, and challenge existing norms. By taking Botkyrka slang, and applying it creatively in their performance style, The Latin Kings asserted the idea that this style of language had a place on their fans’ stereotypes as well as on the streets of their local area. Furthermore, by taking The Latin Kings’ lyrics and applying them in written form in his poems, Anyuru asserts that their style has resonance in the pages of a poetry collection, and on the bookshelves of Sweden’s homes, as well as on teenagers’ stereotypes.

Anyuru describes The Latin Kings in the following way in the foreword he wrote for *The Latin Kings Texter*, a volume of their lyrics that was published in 2004: “De har vidgat de osynliga ramen som finns i varje samhälle, den som avgör vad som är värt och tillåtet att berätta och hur”<sup>92</sup> (Anyuru 2004, 8). The role that Anyuru assigns The Latin Kings here, i.e. that of social innovators opening up the invisible, yet still very present structures that define social narrative, is a reprisal of The Latin Kings’ emblematic status as ‘voice of the suburbs’, which I referred to in Chapter 3 and Section 5.2. This is a theme that recurs frequently in references to The Latin Kings, and Anyuru’s re-statement of it in the context in question

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<sup>91</sup> “The force fields around the words/ snap back/ and switch charge/ when language is broken down and built up again/ and broken down once more: *they accuse us of crimes we haven’t done yet/ welcome to the suburbs*”

<sup>92</sup> “They have expanded the invisible space that exists in every society, the one which determines what’s worth telling and allowed to be told, and how.”

could be dismissed out of hand as the kind of flattering comment appropriate to a volume celebrating The Latin Kings' lyrical talent. However, if one takes this in the context of Anyuru's many references to The Latin Kings and their lyrics in his poetry, the statement carries more weight. He seems to identify in The Latin Kings an element of innovation that has the power to change the structures of society in some way, to 'open' them, thereby allowing people to tell new stories, in new ways. And it is these new ways – the 'how' that Anyuru mentions, that is so important to the current study. One aspect of this 'how' is The Latin Kings' use of language – the way they opened the boundaries of which styles of language appeared in the public realm. As they were the first to use it creatively in the public eye, their use of language, whether as a means of personal expression, or as a performative tool, has paved the way for others to express themselves or to develop their performance voice.

## Section 5.5 Rap as identity category

Jonas Hassen Khemiri's treatment of rap within his work is more ambivalent than either of the two writers discussed in Sections 5.3 & 5.4. Khemiri has spoken at length about his personal love of rap and the formative role it played in the development of his own identity as a writer and as an individual. An example is his appearance on Radio Sweden's programme '*Sommar*', an enduring format in which well-known Swedes are given an hour and a half of airtime on Sweden's national radio. During the programme, Khemiri dedicates a variety of rap tracks to friends and family, indicating his deep involvement with these tracks by allowing the programme's content to be guided by the songs he has selected, as he discusses memories triggered by those songs (Khemiri 2004). These memories include how "det var jag och G som upptäckte musiken ihop på allvar"<sup>93</sup> (ibid.), and how "det var först här, i början av sjuan, när jag och G började hänga i fritidsgårdens Dj-bås natt efter natt"<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> "It was me and G who discovered music together for real."

<sup>94</sup> "It was here, at the beginning of our teens, that G and I started hanging out in the youth club's DJ booth night after night."

(ibid.). Through these references, Khemiri indicates his affection for hip hop, both in terms of its formative influence on his own identity, and on his friendships.

The fact that Khemiri's interest in hip hop developed at a young age is also pivotal to his interest in wordplay and language. He mentions US rapper Nas as a major influence: "det fanns musik och det fanns musik och så fanns det Nas första skiva Illmatic som jag tror på lång sikt förändrade min relation till orden"<sup>95</sup> (ibid.). He describes Nas' "sätt att kamma och klippa i texten, ordlekarna, referensblandningen samtidigt som han lekte fram sina fyra dubbelrim på två rader"<sup>96</sup> (ibid.). There is a clear respect and admiration for Nas' technical verbal abilities, and Khemiri goes on to describe how this drove him to start rapping himself, before realising that his talent lay in telling stories through the written word, rather than the rapped one. Khemiri focuses on technical aspects of language in rap throughout, rather than other factors such as content or musical accompaniment. This indicates a link between the technical creativity of Khemiri's linguistic playfulness and that of rappers such as Nas. The role of linguistic dexterity in rap is explored in detail in Chapter 3, in the context of the subcultural capital this affords to the rapper. My reasons for referring to it here are slightly different, though. After talking about Nas, Khemiri goes on to play a track by Swedish rapper Organism 12, saying that: "Litteraturvetaren i mig viskar att låten består av en lek med homonymer – ljudliknande ords dubbelbetydelser"<sup>97</sup> (ibid.). In self-consciously applying what he perceives to be a literary term to describe rap, Khemiri reinforces the overlap between rap and literature.

Corina Lacatus takes this one step further, finding in Khemiri's novel *Ett öga rött* the presence of a fundamental structural influence from hip hop, as well as an influence at the level of thematic content:

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<sup>95</sup> "There was music and there was music, and then there was Nas' first album Illmatic, which I believe changed my relationship to words in the long term."

<sup>96</sup> "Way of combing and cutting the text, the wordplay, the mixing of references at the same time as he came up with four double rhymes in two lines."

<sup>97</sup> "The literary scholar in me whispers that the song is made up of a play on homonyms – the double meanings of sound-alike words."

On a structural level, *An Eye Red* anchors itself in the tradition of global hip-hop, while thematically, it aligns itself with the more specific version of Swedish hip-hop set in Stockholm and representing the émigré experience.

(Lacatus 2008, 113–4)

She also comments on how: “[The main character, Halim’s] language is inspired by The Latin Kings’ rap rendition of the slang spoken in the streets of Northern Botkyrka” (ibid., 98). I would like to briefly unpick Lacatus’ comment here, as I find that of all the texts I have analysed in this chapter, Khemiri’s is the least directly influenced by rap in terms of structure and theme, and the influence of The Latin Kings’ language is somewhat questionable. Despite Khemiri’s statements about how rap has influenced his relationship with language, the structural elements Lacatus refers to regarding *Ett öga rött*, such as “hip-hop’s articulation of everyday life” (ibid., 96), “sampling and self-referentiality” (ibid., 113) are less apparent to me in Khemiri’s text than in Leiva Wenger or Anyuru’s texts. One major theme in the novel is the problematisation of authenticity, created through Halim’s sometimes startlingly apparent boasting and hyperbole. Halim is the epitome of the unreliable narrator, despite his occasional confidences to the reader that he has previously misrepresented events. The only thing that is clear is that Halim lives in a fantasy world of his own creation. This contrasts with Lacatus’ reference to the articulation of everyday life, which I read as relating to hip hop’s reputation for ‘keeping it real’. As discussed in Section 3.2.1, the idea of ‘keeping it real’ is as problematic in hip hop as it is here, in Khemiri’s novel. This may actually indicate another link between hip hop and *Ett öga rött*, though not in keeping with Lacatus’ analysis: it is possible that Khemiri was just as influenced by rap’s fantasies about itself as Lacatus suggests he was influenced by its realism. Similarly, her comment about sampling seems less than assured, when one bears in mind that intertextual references are present in a great deal of literature, and Khemiri’s text is neither particularly marked out by borrowings from other sources, nor by self-referencing.

In the *Sommar* interview, to which Lacatus refers in order to back up her claims, Khemiri makes little mention of Swedish rap and no mention at all of The Latin Kings. Indeed, when he does mention Swedish-language rap, it is with reference to how much he listened to Organism 12 during the writing of *Ett öga rött*, not The Latin Kings. Organism 12’s complex rapping style differs vastly from Dogge’s cheeky, slightly clumsy rapping, both in

terms of form and content.<sup>98</sup> Lacatus also states that Khemiri frequently “mentioned hip-hop culture as the primary source of inspiration for the debut novel, *An Eye Red*” (ibid., 113), but she then fails to give examples of the occasions on which he did so. To judge from the *Sommar* interview and others I have read (cf. Grode 2011), the inspiration Khemiri has drawn from rap is a more general one. There is a consciousness, during textual analysis of the kind Lacatus and I are involved in, that it is not sufficient to take a text at face value, to, as Khemiri advises: “läs texten och bara texten och titta gärna lite extra på äkthetsproblematiken”<sup>99</sup> (Khemiri 2004). This paradox – the desire that the text should be treated as self-sufficient, combined with the need to back-up the interpretation with further evidence, can, if not treated carefully, lead the analyst to apply a biographical reading to the author, as discussed in Section 4.3

Khemiri made another comment during his *Sommar* programme, one that relates to such biographical readings. He talked about the reception that *Ett öga rätt* received and the way that this reception was, by and large, overly literal. He described it as categorising both him and his book in a way that he was extremely uncomfortable with. Referring to the song he has just played, he says that

“[d]et är också en låt som passar perfekt att lyssna på när omgivningen ställer krav på att man ska välja medan deras skapade identiteter. Men jag kommer aldrig tvinga in mig i någons box. Inte svenne-Jonas, inte blatte-Jonas, inte Handels-Jonas, inte klocksäljare-Jonas, inte FN-Jonas, inte ens hiphop-Jonas. Bara Jonas [...]”<sup>100</sup>

(Khemiri 2004)

While it is important to retain a critical distance from an author’s description of their work and the reception of their work, I feel this comment is an apt illustration to accompany my

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<sup>98</sup> Although interestingly, the latest album by Organismen (as the rapper is now known), 2014’s *Alla kungar bär inte krona* (Not all kings bear a crown) features a song called ‘Jag och min guzz’, a further example of a rapper using that term.

<sup>99</sup> “Read the text and the text alone. And make sure you pay extra attention to the authenticity issues.”

<sup>100</sup> “It’s also a song that is perfect to listen to when your surroundings call on you to choose between their constructed identities. But I will never force myself into anyone’s box. Not *svenne*-Jonas, not *blatte*-Jonas, not *Handels*-Jonas (Handelshögskolan is a Stockholm business school where Khemiri studied briefly), not clock salesman-Jonas, not UN-Jonas, not even hip hop-Jonas. Just Jonas [...]”

criticism of Lacatus' reading of *Ett öga rött*. It seems to me that what Lacatus has done is put Khemiri into the 'hip hop Jonas' box, and in doing so, has overstated the direct involvement of hip hop in his work. It would be interesting to find out whether my analysis of this situation is correct or not, having unpicked Lacatus' argument in this way. A number of points she makes are thought-provoking and would, indeed, reinforce my argument about the rap/literature interplay. Still, I have attempted to stick to the text and only the text in my analysis, in order to avoid making similar mistakes.

Turning to *Ett öga rött* itself, a contrast arises between the assumptions that other characters make about Halim's interest in hip hop and the interest that he himself demonstrates through his narration. Halim himself makes no mention of hip hop in connection to his own interests, although he does refer to other people's interest in it. However, other characters seem convinced that hip hop is the way to form a bond with Halim. These other characters include Alex, a teaching assistant who imagines that he can pique Halim's interest in his studies and personal development through rap, and Kristoffer, a schoolmate who singles Halim out, imagining that he will share his enthusiasm for The Latin Kings. This latter example is worthy of a little more exploration: Halim has come, uninvited, to a schoolmate's party. He has little in common with the other guests. His party debut culminates awkwardly, as he is expelled from the house. Just beforehand, a strange interlude takes place, in which The Latin Kings play a not insignificant part. In the passage from which this quote is taken, Halim is describing to the reader the dangers of alcohol and the effect of it on his classmates:

Kristoffer var perfekta exemplet. Istället för tjock och lite tjejblyg han vrålade refränger och spillde rödvinsflaskan på bokhyllan. Sen han försökte klämma Jessica på tutterna men hon blev arg så istället han satte på Latin Kings och vinglade på dansgolvet. När han såg mig i soffan han vrålade: 'Blend dom! Halim, BLEND DOM, BLEND DOM'.<sup>101</sup>

(Khemiri 2003, 157–8)

I interpret this scene as follows: Halim shows nothing but contempt for Kristoffer, and certainly no sense of comradeship or affiliation (in contrast to the role played by The Latin

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<sup>101</sup> "Kristoffer was the perfect example. Instead of being fat and a bit shy of girls, he bawled out the choruses and spilled the bottle of red wine on the bookshelf. Then he tried to grope Jessica's tits but she got angry, so instead he put on Latin Kings and lurched around the dancefloor. When he saw me on the sofa, he bawled: Blind them! Halim, BLIND THEM, BLIND THEM."

Kings in Leiva Wenger's story analysed in Section 5.3). Kristoffer, on the other hand, singles Halim out for his rendition of Dogge's chorus – connecting Halim with an appreciation of hip hop and with the suburbs of which he was, until recently, a resident. However, Halim shows no interest in the music or in Kristoffer's attentions, pushing him away absent-mindedly. Kristoffer and Alex's expectation that Halim, as a young man with parents born outside of Sweden, and a background in the suburbs of Stockholm, will be interested in rap, is indicative of the simplistic association of The Latin Kings with the suburbs and with their 'multiethnic' residents.

## Section 5.6 From Microphone to Page – oral and literary interactions

Johannes Anyuru's debut poetry collection *Det är bara gudarna som är nya*, from 2003, was acclaimed by critics fascinated by the way Anyuru fused suburban imagery with Greek myth. Anyuru likened the language in *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* to:

när Homeros sätter på sig hörlurar och lyssnar på Latin Kings! Och allt tillhör mig och allt får jag sampla och scratcha in och jag kan inte säga något mer om den saken.<sup>102</sup>

(Anyuru, wwd.se author page)

The poems borrow characters and themes from the Iliad, as well as quoting from The Latin Kings' lyrics and frequently referring to Dogge from The Latin Kings. In doing this, Anyuru brought The Latin Kings' lyrics into a written context. The lyrics direct the reader's attention towards a peripheral subculture, but locate this at the heart of one of the most 'literary' of text forms, poetry. Added to this is the fact that Anyuru places them alongside Homer, the very centre of European literary tradition, which is itself rooted in orality. But what does this mean for the slang Anyuru is effectively translating from an oral to a literary form? And what role do The Latin Kings themselves play in this translation act?

Walter Ong argues for two categories of orality – primary orality, which occurs only in cultures where the concept of literacy does not exist at all, and secondary orality, which

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<sup>102</sup> "when Homer puts on headphones and listens to The Latin Kings! And everything belongs to me and I can sample and scratch in everything and there's nothing else I can say on the matter."



occurs in contemporary society, and which is “sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (Ong 2002, 10–11). Although Ong allows for the possibility that “many cultures and subcultures, even in a high-technology ambiance, preserve much of the mindset of primary orality” (ibid., 11), I would argue that most rap, aside from perhaps freestyling, can only be categorised as secondary orality. This is because of the heavy reliance by rappers of the opportunities for planning and refinement offered by writing.

In his foreword to *The Latin Kings Texter*, a paperback collection of lyrics from The Latin Kings’ four albums, Anyuru refers to this tension between the spoken, performed word, and the written one:

Latin Kings texter tillhör naturligtvis en tradition av poesi *skriven för munnen och för mikrofonen* snarare än för baksidan, och alla försök att placera in dom i ett skriftligt litteraturhistoriskt sammanhang är kanske snarare ett uttryck för ens egna preferenser och tankar än för verkliga samband.<sup>103</sup>

(Anyuru 2004, 8, my emphasis)

A point of note here is that the lyrics are ‘written’ to be performed orally. Herein lies a translation act in itself – as explored in Section 3.1.2, rap as performance language differs from colloquial speech, even when it associates itself with colloquial language as closely as The Latin Kings’ rap does. It is perhaps helpful here to think in terms of Ochs’ twinned concepts of ‘planned’ (written) and ‘unplanned’ (spoken) discourse (Ochs 1979). The absence of many of the features of spoken language (repetition, redundancy, hesitation, etc.) in rap performance can be explained by the fact that rap lyrics are generally the result of a great deal of planning. This planning may involve decisions to include CUV or other colloquial features to achieve specific effects, but the contrast between a planned performance or recording and a freestyle is evident in all but the most skilled rappers, as freestyles often break down specifically because of a rapper’s self-conscious awareness that they have exhibited the traits of unplanned discourse listed above.

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<sup>103</sup> “The Latin Kings’ lyrics belong, of course, to a tradition of poetry written for the mouth and the microphone, rather than for the page, and any attempt to place them in a written literary context is perhaps more an expression of one’s own preferences and thoughts than of actual connections.”

The use of colloquial language in poetry written for the page requires a further translation act. Given that Anyuru was so inspired by The Latin Kings and their use of language, by which route does this language arrive on the page? The passage from spoken to performed to written word involves acts of selection that foreground certain language features. For instance, the pronunciation central to a given accent is difficult to represent on the page, meaning that this may be abandoned, as in the case of Anyuru's work. On the other hand, recognisable words and phrases are given precedence as they have the power to immediately signify a particular social phenomenon. Poetry uses language in a different way to prose fiction, but for the purposes of the overall argument of this thesis, it is worth looking at Tannen's examination of fiction writing and its blending of both spoken and written language elements. In her analysis, Tannen states that this blending represents the fact that the author is trying to create a given situational context, frequently that of human interaction. However, this involves careful selection of salient features, as noted above in the context of Anyuru's poetry. Tannen uses the terms *involvement* and *integration* to refer to the key characteristics of spoken and written discourse respectively (Tannen 1980, 209). Involvement refers to that quality of spoken discourse that engages the speaker and the listener personally in what is being said. Integration is a characteristic of written language attributable to the relative slowness of writing and reading and the opportunities this offers for complexity (spoken language is 'fragmented' by contrast). Fiction is able to combine these factors in order to involve the reader in the events, mood and emotions of the narrative. Thus, according to Tannen: "somehow, the written text [of fiction] represents something that seems more spoken than it is by blending some features of spoken language with others of written [by combining] the *involvement* factors of spoken with the *integration* of written" (ibid.). If we think about this in relation to the work of The Latin Kings and Anyuru, we can see that elements of this process occur in both. As with fiction, both rap and poetry

[borrow and embellish] upon some aspects of spoken language – detail, direct quotation, description of action, as well as prosodic and rhythmic features such as parallel constructions [e.g. repetition] and sound touchoffs [e.g. alliteration]. However, [they eliminate] other aspects of spoken language – some because they are inefficient (hesitations, some repetitions), and some because they are impossible to reproduce in writing (expressive phonology) [although this last point is not true of performed rap]

(ibid., 214)

Graham Chia-Hui Preston states that: “[h]ip-hop music and culture have been primarily presented and then transmitted through aural and/or visual rather than written forms” (G. C.-H. Preston 2008, 261). In his thoughtful discussion of rapper Nas’s engagement with the technology of writing, he notes that “rap is meant to be heard, not read,” (ibid., 261-262) and that this “can be borne out by noting that most rap albums do not feature the lyrics in the liner notes” (ibid., 261). What happens, though, when rap is written down? One answer to this question would be that it becomes fixed, no longer open to casual reinterpretation, or the listener’s mishearing and re-formulation of words or sounds. Perhaps it also loses some of the *involvement* discussed above – involvement that may be communicated through the aspects of the aural delivery. In the case of *The Latin Kings texter*, a 2004 book of the group’s lyrics, ‘difficult’ or unfamiliar terms are clarified (and in the process, codified) by a glossary, thereby rendering them comprehensible to a wider ‘out-group’ audience.

In addition to fixing the meaning of certain terms, the availability of the texts as written artefacts removes them further from the flow which characterises rap performance. The reader who is acquainted with The Latin Kings’ music can augment their reading through their internal rendition of the beats and samples of the songs’ instrumentals, and the rhythm of Dogge’s flow. For anyone unfamiliar with the songs, however, the words will be free to assume a rhythm of their own in the reader’s head, or may simply be read as prose lines, without rhythmic quality or emphasis. Turner observed a similar disjuncture between the written and the spoken word when reading Grime lyrics written by some of his research subjects: “when reading their words off the page, it was not immediately apparent how their words were meant to be delivered rhythmically” (Turner 2010, 145). This suggests that when rap is written down, the process is accompanied by the removal of one of rap’s integral elements, flow. Despite this removal, I would be loath to suggest that the printed lyrics can be viewed simply as a poetry collection.

The lyrics recorded in *The Latin Kings texter* differ from poetry ‘written for the page’ in a practical sense: the printed form of the lyrics is ancillary to the aural form. The published book effectively has secondary status to the performances and recordings that preceded it. This is reinforced by the meta-imagery presented in the book: the pictures, the quoted lines, the images of microphones and other musical paraphernalia associated with The Latin Kings’ role as rap performers. The words as text cannot be fully removed from the words

as performance, whereas for a poet such as Anyuru, the printed book of his first poetry collection is the primary artefact through which his audience will experience the texts. This is also the case with Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novels, for instance, or Alejandro Leiva Wenger's short stories (although this is complicated by the fact that popular film versions of Khemiri's *Ett öga rött* and Leiva Wenger's *Elixir* have been made – a fact that would be an interesting topic for further study).

A rap is also essentially a performance. Although this is complicated by the way rap (and other music) is listened to – frequently in private, via a pre-recorded medium – the performer is still necessarily present in the listening experience. However, if one assumes that a rap cannot be considered a text because it is also a performance, then one must also question the notion that a short story is 'only' a text. Just as rap is generally listened to in the form of a musical recording, a story is generally read from a printed page (or indeed, a screen) which has visual and textural elements. Thus, a written text has a materiality, or at least a visual aspect: the visual qualities of the written form in which most of its audience will encounter it plays a role in how it is interpreted, just as the aural/performance components of a rap will affect its interpretation.

For the purposes of this thesis, I think it important to consider the texts primarily on the basis of their textual characteristics. This means isolating lyrics from the accompanying instrumental track, although not necessarily from the more musical and formal elements of rappers' delivery. In fact, my argument is based on form alongside the texts' narrative content. This naturally includes the rap's rhythmic elements, and visual aspects in the case of written literary texts. I argue that these factors are as important in shaping the reader's understanding of the text (though perhaps in a subconscious way) as the narrative context, the sociocultural context of the works, and the use of linguistic register or style. For example, I have explored the visual construction of some texts (e.g. Leiva Wenger's *Borta i tankar*) as both integral to its meaning, and also, at times, a conflicting factor in the work's communication.

Of course, visual elements play an important role in the packaging and communication of rap too. The material or digital imagery of video and packaging is an integral part of the musical experience for a vast percentage of listeners. However, in order to limit the scope

of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on factors that are directly relevant to the texts as verbal entities. Musical, or aural elements may likewise play a part in the live readings or audio recordings of literary texts, but as with the visual elements accompanying rap music, I am treating these elements as secondary to the texts themselves.

## Section 5.7 Conclusion: Intertextuality and identity

As discussed in Section 5.5, Corina Lacatus describes Khemiri's novel *Ett öga rött* in terms of its hip hop characteristics, even going so far as to suggest that "the novel could be considered the extended prosaic replica of a rap song" (Lacatus 2008, 113). As stated, I found little in the novel to support this interpretation. However, I feel there is more of a case for reading the work of Anyuru and Leiva Wenger from this angle, if cautiously. Both writers' work could be said to demonstrate Mansbach's "intellectual democracy through collage" (Mansbach 2006, 93, as discussed in Section 5.1) to some extent, with their use of borrowing, sampling, cutting up and layering intertextual and intermedial references, with varying degrees of visibility.

Mansbach himself says that he is influenced by this 'collage' aspect of hip hop: "My goal is to write fiction that works the same way: that builds layers of reference and meaning and plot and dialogue and character, tweaks the levels of the mix for smooth reading but still allows you to dissect the individual elements and analyse them" (Mansbach 2006, 94). He states, however, that 'hip hop literature' should definitely not be seen to be about "the words usually ending in 'er' instead [terminating] in 'a'" (ibid., 96), or subject matter that revolves around "characters who are young, urban and Black, or at least two out of three" (ibid., 96). It is not even about "any book aimed at a demographic more notorious for purchasing CDs" (ibid., 96).

This last point suggests that writers' intertextual relationships with hip hop may not be limited to superficial, clichéd aspects of hip hop. I would like to return at this point to one of the core object for this thesis in analysing the interplay between CUVs, rap and literature, that is, to aid the translator in working with texts featuring CUVs. The fact that writers' use of hip hop is multifaceted could be useful to the translator, who may find that a

merely 'linguistic' translation approach results in a text that fails to capture the 'intellectual democracy' of hip hop in the way the original text had done. Alternatively, the translator's main use for hip hop may be the linguistic common ground between the source texts and the rap lyrics they reference. This assumes that the two types of text are using language, or at least particular terms and phrases, in the same way.

As Anyuru argues, The Latin Kings showed many young people during the 1990s that they were entitled to a voice (Anyuru 2004, 8). In doing so, they also formulated that voice, and set the tone for the discussion. Thus, when authors such as Anyuru came to inscribe their own interpretations and characterisations of contemporary Swedish society in their work, it is fair to say that they were doing so, at least partly, through a linguistic and expressive filter provided by The Latin Kings and other rappers of their generation.

**PART III: TRANSLATING CONTEMPORARY URBAN  
VERNACULARS**





## Chapter 6 Extraordinary Everyday Language: Translation Studies on standardisation, non-standard literary dialect and the role of the translator

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The biggest problem [...] is not that particular speech varieties — Creole, Jòal — cannot be rendered in a similarly sociologically meaningful variety in a target language. It is the fact that because of [this inability], authors fail to communicate their concerns about racism, histories of colonial oppression and marginalisation, the sensitivity of certain topics due to such histories, because such histories ‘charge’ specific ways of using language [...]

(Blommaert 2006, 173)

The aim of the next three chapters is to further investigate the literary use of contemporary urban vernaculars (CUVs), concentrating on the ways they are dealt with and used by translators. They do so by pairing theoretical approaches with more practical questions posed by empirical studies of translated texts and translation processes. The overall object is a cohesive response to the challenge of translating this kind of non-standard language. The three chapters bring together the what, how and why of the translation process: what do translators actually do when they encounter CUVs in literary texts, how do they go about it, and why do they do it this way?

Although CUVs are not very frequently represented in literature, and are rarely translated (I have been able to find only four texts in Swedish that have been translated into English), they are increasingly represented in the media (especially television), in music, and in film (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). It seems fair to argue that the more attention CUVs attract, the more widely they will be recognised and acknowledged in society in general, and the more likely they are to be represented in literature. If they are more widely represented in literature, it is also possible that translators will more frequently be faced with the challenges CUVs present. Therefore, questions about whether to translate them, how, and the specific challenges of translating them are becoming increasingly pertinent. The focus is primarily on literary translations from Swedish into English, but I will also make use of examples and discussions focusing on English to Swedish/Scandinavian, as well as some other language combinations, where relevant.

This chapter in particular consists of a discussion of some of the key theoretical considerations and difficulties faced by translators working on literature containing non-standard, regionally- and culturally-specific language, including contemporary urban vernaculars. This discussion consists of two main elements: a survey of theoretical

approaches to standardisation in the translation process, and a survey of case studies analysing the translation of non-standard language.

The analysis of translations of CUVs and multi-ethnic youth language varieties is not a major sub-field of translation studies; indeed, I have been unable to find more than one or two studies discussing the translation of texts similar to those I am working on.

However, as a linguistic category, CUVs have much in common with dialects, as discussed in Chapter 1, as part of the suite of geographically and/or culturally-specific language phenomena that translators typically deem the most complex aspect of their craft. The respected translator of French and Spanish literature, Frank Wynne, commented on this when discussing his translation of Matías Néspolo's Buenos Aires-based thriller *7 Ways to Kill a Cat*:

When dealing with slang, translators are usually advised to stick to what [translator] Anthea Bell has called “nonspecific demotic”; that is, a lexical register that is not tied to a particular country or locality. In the case of *7 Ways to Kill a Cat*, this was both unrealistic and undesirable; the colour and life of the book, and its humanity, come from the crackle of dialogue. I was worried that trying to find an equivalent register for the street slang risked producing something that sounded like an episode of *The Wire*.

(Wynne, interviewed in Johnson 2012)

This connection makes it possible to look to scholarship on the translation of dialect in order to provide a theoretical backdrop that is relevant to the empirical elements of this chapter. However, there are certain ethical factors involved in the translation of CUVs that may not be encountered in other forms of dialect translation. Therefore, I have sought to include dialect translation studies where class, ethnicity or other power relations were indexed by the non-standard language in the text.

## Section 6.1 Deformation, Standardisation and Invisibility in Translation

In previous chapters, I have established a definition of contemporary urban vernaculars, and discussed some of the forms these have taken in Swedish and UK literature/creative writing over the past ten years or so. However, I have not yet fully explored the use of CUVs in translation, nor how this use represents another stage in the wider process of CUVs being translated, in a broader sense, from the street to the microphone and onto the page. This section lays the initial theoretical groundwork for

the empirical analysis of CUVs in translation. It does so by surveying accounts of standardisation in translation in general, in order to provide a basis upon which to discuss more specific case studies that concern the translation of non-standard language in particular.

### Section 6.1.1 Toury and the Law of Growing Standardisation

Toury states that: “in every community, phenomena of various types, linguistic and non-linguistic alike, which have semiotic value for its members, undergo processes of *codification*. Sets of codified items form *repertoires*, i.e. aggregates governed by systemic relations, which determine the relative availability of items pertaining to such an aggregate for any particular use within the culture” (Toury 2012, 303). He uses this concept of the repertoire to formulate his law of growing standardisation, as follows: “in translation, source-text textemes tend to be converted into target-language (or target-culture) repertoremes” (ibid., 303). Toury refers to ‘textemes’, features which occupy a specific position in the relationships integral to the text, and ‘repertoremes’, decoded by Anthony Pym as features from the ‘stock held in waiting’ of a given linguistic repertoire (Pym 2008, 314). Toury argues that in a source text (ST), repertoremes used in a text become part of a network with other signs that is particular to that text. They become *textemes* because of their position within that new relationship. For the translator, creating these networks anew is an often insurmountable task, to the extent that: “textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored in favour of (more) habitual options offered by a target repertoire” (Toury 2012, 304) and “in translation, items tend to be selected on a level which is *lower* than the one where textual relations have been established in the source text” (ibid., 305). So not only do translators tend to standardise texts by eroding the relationships within them, they also omit elements that cannot be made to fit, as well as lowering the level of complexity within the text.

However, he does acknowledge that “in translation, repertoremes may also be converted into textemes, inasmuch as the end product is accepted as a *text* to begin with” (ibid., 308). For this to be possible, the translator can either reconstruct the relations and functions obtaining in the ST, or construct them anew, using “new, ad hoc webs and functions” (ibid.). This is particularly relevant for the translation of non-

standard literary dialect, and will be brought to bear in analysing some of my texts later in this chapter.

### Section 6.1.2 Berman's translation deformations

Berman's 1985 essay 'Translation and the Trials of the Foreign', gives a more detailed account of the effects of translation on texts. It was translated from the French and included by Venuti in his seminal *Translation Studies Reader*, first published in 2000. Berman was writing at the height of the 'cultural turn' in translation studies – the point at which the cultural and political implications of the translation act were brought to the fore by scholars such as Hermans, Toury, Bassnett and Lefevere. In this essay, he applies a 'negative analytic'. He analyses the 'deformations' inflicted by translation on a text, which he perceives as having a negative impact on the text's style, its aesthetic make-up. Berman's essay hinges on a key theoretical question about what the particular task of translation is – whether it is 'merely' the "restitution of meaning" (Berman 2012, 252), or something at a more 'literal' level, a "labour on the letter" (Berman 2012, 252).

Berman classifies the deformations into a number of categories. For the purposes of this study, I focus on the categories that are relevant to the questions of status and social meaning tied up in the use of CUVs in literature. As I perceive it, these categories are: ennoblement, qualitative impoverishment, the destruction or exoticisation of vernacular networks, and the effacement of the superimposition of languages (ibid., 246-251). Many of Berman's categories might be seen to represent specific instances of Toury's 'growing standardization'.

I would like to begin with the first of these deformations: ennoblement, and its counterpart, popularisation. Berman explains ennoblement of prose as a "rhetorization" which produces "'elegant' sentences, while using the source text, so to speak, as *raw material*" (ibid., 246, orig. emphasis). This results in a text that matches the literary standards of the target language, but may lose much of the style present in the source text. Ennoblement relates to standardisation, particularly in cultures with a strong tradition of elite literary conventions – Berman talks specifically of the "French 'classicizing' translation" (ibid., 244), i.e. making the text conform to the more formal style of French literary convention. However, he emphasises its relevance to other languages too (ibid., 244). Ennoblement differs slightly from standardisation, in that it

involves the translator's conscious or unconscious 'refining' of the text, rather than simply the removal of its peculiarities. In fact, ennoblement may make a text less standard in terms of the vernacular forms of the language, while bringing it more in line with the conventions of what Määttä refers to as "standard literary dialect" (Määttä 2004, see Section 6.2.1 for more detail regarding Määttä).

The related, but opposing, phenomenon of popularisation artificially popularises the style of the ST, having: "blind recourse to a pseudo-slang [...] or to a 'spoken' language which reflects only a *confusion between oral and spoken*" (Berman 2012, 247, orig. emphasis). This last point is not elucidated, and it is unclear exactly what Berman means by distinguishing between oral and spoken in this way. However, his statement that "the degenerate coarseness of pseudo-slang betrays rural fluency as well as the strict code of urban dialects" (ibid.) suggests that Berman is referring to a type of imagined vernacular, or attempt at popular language, which fails to do justice either to the vernacular stylisations of the ST, or the vernacular styles of the TL.

Another useful category is Berman's concept of 'qualitative impoverishment', in which the text loses 'texture' and 'richness' in the translation process. This occurs when a word with multi-layered connotations and/or iconic qualities is replaced with, say, a plainer synonym, for instance the translation of a word meaning 'to stride' with 'walk'. Translators themselves may be unaware that this process is occurring, and yet, if it occurs consistently throughout a text, it "decisively effaces a good portion of its signifying process and mode of expression" (ibid., 247). The notion of surface and texture is important in the consideration of texts that use language as a means of characterisation, scene/tone-setting and other ways of connoting meaning.

Linked to the coupled concepts of ennoblement and popularisation is the 'destruction or exoticisation of vernacular networks'. Here, Berman refers to prose works which are "rooted in the vernacular language" (ibid., 249) or written in language that "aims explicitly to recapture the orality of vernacular" (ibid., 250), rather than 'cultivated' language. Berman provides examples such as the removal of diminutive forms, common in everyday speech in many languages; the replacement of verb with noun phrases (he gives the example of the Peruvian 'alagunarse' (lagoonifying, perhaps!), becoming in French 'se transformer en lagune', (transforming into a lagoon)); and so on. Berman discusses the strategies translators use to preserve this vernacularity, for instance using transference, or italicising words in the target text (TI) that are non-

standard, finding that such practices unduly stereotype vernacular forms. Berman criticises the practice of recontextualising, with a local TL vernacular translating an SL vernacular, on the grounds that: “a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating into another vernacular. *Translation can only occur between ‘cultivated’ languages.* An exoticization that turns the foreign from abroad into the foreign at home winds up merely ridiculing the original” (ibid., 250). Using TL vernaculars to translate vernaculars in the SL is not unproblematic, but there are a number of issues with this statement. Yes, vernacular language is geographically and temporally specific, and yes, it is less likely than the national/local standard language to have been codified with a standard orthography. There are examples, though, some of them discussed in this study, of translations that effectively use local vernacular features to render the style of the ST, and replicate important connotative aspects of the text (See 6.3.2 for further discussion of this).

The final category I would like to discuss is ‘the effacement of the superimposition of languages’. This refers to different registers or dialects of one language, as well as to other actual languages used in a text (he mentions Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* in this context – arguably the most extreme example of language superimposition ever published). Such heterogeneity is often standardised or ‘smoothed out’ in the translation process – something noted by Berman as well as other scholars discussed in Section 6.3.5. As Berman puts it: “this is the central problem posed by translating novels – a problem that demands maximum reflection from the translator. Every novelistic work is characterized by linguistic superimpositions, even if they include sociolects, idiolects, etc.” (ibid., 251). And indeed, Berman finds that certain translators employ different kinds of TL features to reflect the different kinds of SL features, and even the different languages superimposed within the ST, something he perceives to be difficult, but worthwhile (ibid., 252).

In Berman’s view, there are certain norms that govern translation, and indeed any type of writing. These norms are specific to the geographical and temporal setting in which the writing is produced. However, Berman states that despite the potential shifts in these norms, the deformations of translation have tended to stay the same (ibid., 257). The accuracy of this statement can only be gauged by looking at translations and comparing current with past tendencies. While a historical survey of translation is not the task of this study, my analysis of contemporary translations, contextualised by

translators' own reports of their translation processes and other scholars' case studies of non-standard language translation is intended to test this theory further.

### Section 6.1.3 Venuti – Fluency in translation

Another scholar who has identified standardisation as an almost universal feature of translations is Lawrence Venuti, whose work on the visibility or otherwise of the translator has been much debated. Pym, for instance, finds fault with several aspects of Venuti's argument, including what Pym views as an overly theoretical approach and questionable statistical analysis (Pym 1996), while Snell-Hornby finds Venuti's arguments "fundamental and generalizing" (2006, 146), and considers their focus on the Anglo-American context problematic (*ibid.*, 147). Venuti famously bases his main premise on Schleiermacher's conception of the two types of translation: taking the reader to the foreign-language author (foreignisation, in Venuti's terms), or bringing the foreign-language author to the reader (Venuti's domestication). He also brings in Berman's negative analytic of translation deformations. Venuti issues a 'call to arms' to the effect that translators should resist fluency in their translations in order to render their part in the production of the TT visible, thereby potentially opening the target culture up to the possibilities the source culture has to offer, and ultimately producing more open societies, as well as improved working conditions for translators. Resisting fluency is possible, Venuti argues, because as "readability in translation need not be tied to the current standard dialect of the translating language" (Venuti 2008, 121).

Despite Snell-Hornby's criticism of Venuti's Anglo-American bias, it does not present too many problems in the current context. Indeed, the challenges presented by the Anglo-American publishing market are key to this discussion, and many of Venuti's comments about the balance of power within that market are applicable to the translations analysed here.

For this study, one of Venuti's most useful points is the idea that:

Both foreign text and translation are derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, the foreign text is the result of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations [...]

(*ibid.*, 13)

This emphasises the fact that both the ST author and the translator are working in a temporal, geographic, literary and personal context which influences both the production and the reception of their translation. No work is wholly original. But equally, every work, whether source text or translation, is the unique product of one producer, affected by all the influences that producer has been exposed to. Thus, whatever conventions exist regarding the use of non-standard language in writing, they are potentially open to challenge by the particular producer of that text, be that author or translator.

The prescriptive nature of Venuti's 'call to action' stems from his desire to challenge the practices of the publishing industry as a whole, and translators in particular. My own position is not completely aligned with Venuti's. I would hope, through my research, to be able to show the benefits of translating non-standard language as such, rather than standardising or omitting it. This applies particularly in cases where the use of language in the text is geared towards provoking the reader to analyse the assumptions readers make about social relationships. But instead of prescribing a particular approach, I hope to provoke the translator to reflect on and evaluate their own practice so as to ensure their work does not have a negative impact on the marginalised communities they may be representing. This is in line with Morini's argument that translators should take the potential performative impact of the 'text act' into account: "If a translator aims at 'doing what the source text does' in the target language – with all the obstacles posed by linguistic and cultural barriers – he/she must translate a 'text act' rather than a mere text [...]" (Morini 2008, 37). However, it also takes into account Graves and Thorup Thomsen's statement that: "not all [...] linguistic features could or should be translated into the target language. Translating is, after all, not always simply about establishing equivalence, as languages are not transparent systems but have different formal organisations and (therefore) different organisations of reality" (Graves and Thorup Thomsen 2004, 239). Translators are often keenly aware of these 'different organisations of reality', and it is my hope that translators reading my analysis will be encouraged to fully apply their knowledge of these while considering ways to align them in such a way that the overall effect of CUVs in the ST will be made visible in the TT.



#### Section 6.1.4 Text type and analysing translation

Before moving on to the next section, I would like to add a brief note about the text type, as the texts I analyse include theatre texts as well as prose, which can potentially affect reading and analysis. Theatre translation poses additional translation challenges, as Bassnett-McGuire stated: “theatre text exists in a direct relationship with the performance of that text” (Bassnett-McGuire 1985, 87). I will go into this in more depth when I come to discuss *Invasion!* in Section 8.3.1, but there is a specific point that should first be made: the matter of the theatre text as spoken and acted. Certain elements of the text, for instance, the rhythmic, sonorous or prosodic elements are essential to the performability of the play. As Bassnett-McGuire writes: “the translator is effectively being asked to accomplish the impossible – to treat a written text that is part of a larger complex of sign systems, involving paralinguistic and kinesic features, as if it were a literary text created solely for the page, to be read off that page” (ibid., 87). Snell-Hornby further explores the qualities that make translating drama difficult, describing its multimodal character as a text which is primarily designed to be heard and seen. The most useful point made by Snell-Hornby for this study is as follows: “For the actor his/her lines combine to form a kind of idiolect, a ‘*mask of language*’, as a means of expressing emotion through voice gesture and movement” (Snell-Hornby 2006, 85). So a theatre text, as well as being a text that exists as such, is re-construed and re-interpreted every time it is performed – giving it a life beyond the page and meaning that a translation may be transformed by its performance. Bassnett-McGuire warns analysts of play text translations to be vigilant, because: “once it is written, the play acquires a solidity and prominence, and, in the case of Shakespeare, is then treated as a literary text and read as such” (Bassnett-McGuire 1985, 88).

But theatre texts are not alone in causing complications to the analytical process. All genres present their own unique challenges to the translator, and to the analyst of translations. Berman observes that because it is less important for a novel to “[look] like a work of art” (Broch 1966, 68, cited in Berman 2012, 243) (when compared to poetry), translation ‘deformations’ may pass unperceived or be accepted by the reader. This is because as long as the prose flows or appears natural, and appears to communicate the content of the ST, it will often be considered good on a superficial reading. Thus, when analysing prose translation, the reader must take additional pains to avoid being misled

by the apparent ‘naturalness’ of the translation, instead recognising the processes operating on the text at a deeper level.

## Section 6.2 Theorising dialect, non-standard language and CUVs in translation

The discussion of CUVs in Chapters 1 and 2 outlines the ways in which these language varieties index and create social and regional identity. Chapter 4 explores how these identities are explored and represented in literature. This indexing and representation has an impact on readers’ reception and understanding of literary texts, and the translator, when faced with such texts, is faced with a challenge: whether to try and replicate this impact, and if so, how to do it. Some scholars, such as those discussed in the previous section, have argued that translators tend towards standardisation when faced with non-standard language. This section moves on from the previous discussion of standardisation at a more general level to look at theoretical responses to the translation of specific types of non-standard such as dialect and slang. It explores the extent to which standardisation occurs, and whether some types of non-standard language tend to be standardised more than others. It also looks at other tendencies emerging from the translation of non-standard language in literature, and provides tools for the textual analysis to follow in Chapter 8. The section consists of two main sub-sections. First, it asks what is so special about non-standard language in translation, and discusses the translation challenges presented by the contrast between the codified nature of standard language and the non-codified nature of non-standard language. Secondly, it considers the strategies that have been outlined by various scholars of non-standard language in translation.

### Section 6.2.1 What is special about non-standard language/CUVs in translation?

I would like to begin with a note about terminology. Throughout this chapter, I refer to standard and non-standard ‘literary dialect’. According to Ives, literary dialect is defined as a means “to represent in writing a speech that is restricted regionally, socially, or both” (Ives 1971, 146). However, Määttä presents a different definition. For him, literary dialect is more general: it is a mode of text employed in literary works – one

which relies on certain conventions and is recognisable to readers: “novelistic discourse is [...] considered a dialect insofar as it is characterized by the presence of stylistic features different from the norms of standard language” (Määttä 2004, 320). Although the former definition is much more widely referred to, I am intrigued by Määttä’s reading of the term, and it is in this sense that I use it here. Määttä also qualifies the term further: “within this literary dialect, a distinction between standard literary dialect and non-standard literary dialect is necessary” (ibid.). I use the term ‘non-standard literary dialect’ extensively throughout this chapter, as I see it as a relatively neutral, general term with which to discuss all the forms of non-standard language I refer to in their literary incarnations.

But where does the distinction lie and why does it exist? Why do writers use non-standard literary dialect in the first place? Many scholars agree that its use originates in the need to signify themes and characteristics without mentioning them in so many words, or to bring these themes and characteristics to life. Ramos Pinto discusses the signifying role of non-standard language in literature:

Authors generally take advantage of linguistic stereotypes easily recognised by the average reader, making sure that certain assumptions and images will be triggered and, consequently, contribute to the description of the characters in literary texts, who are differentiated, not only by what they say, but also by how they say it – to be more specific – by the linguistic variety they use.

(Ramos Pinto 2009, 290)

Ramos Pinto acknowledges, however, that producing a wholly authentic representation of any given language variety (assuming such representation is even possible!) is unlikely to make for readable or enjoyable prose. This is due to the unplanned and inconsistent nature of speech, and the need to emphasise certain stereotypical features in order to facilitate recognition of the variety by the reader. As a result, “dialects and accents in literary texts are [generally] literary re-creations that are only marginally concerned with accuracy” (ibid. 290). The author can select such elements as s/he sees fit: “[s]ince the literary recreation of accents and dialects has no pretensions of being accurate, the degree of linguistic mimicry depends on the author’s aesthetic, narrative, thematic, stylistic or functional objectives” (ibid. 291-2).

Määttä views non-standard literary dialect as playing a key structural role in the text he analyses, William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*: “non-standard language is part of the polyphonic structure and ideological construction of the novel: it reflects and

creates [...] narrative point of view or narrative focus, indicating through whose perspective the events and speech are described” (Määttä 2004, 319).

Federici talks about how non-standard language can create a ‘voice-print’ for a given character or narrator, an idiolect which also enables the author to evoke a given social setting: “Characters, then, not only have their own unique ‘voice-print’, but may embody the ‘voice-print’ of speakers located within another *lect* defined by similar characteristics, such as geography, class and so on, that is, a sociolect” (Federici 2011, 8).

Even when these voice-prints and signification are effective, however, the degree of linguistic creativity required to create it, and the rarity of written representations of the variety may make even the ST a challenging read. As Thomson describes, the orthographic representation of Scots in Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting* required sounding out, even for Scottish readers, a reminder of the familiarity of written Standard English, and the sudden exoticism of otherwise familiar spoken forms when seen in print (Thomson 2004, 62). Indeed, Thomson explores the contradictions inherent in an idea that any of these colloquial varieties can create a unified representation of a Scots community, because such an “assumed linguistic authenticity [...] is unavoidably rooted in the local, producing identification – a textual community – with micro-ethnicities that intersect with class, gender, and so on, thus undermining any sense of a homogeneous ethnic nationalism” (ibid., 60). Indeed, the same might well be said of attempts to represent a given community’s experience by using CUVs in literature. In both cases, there is a degree of *intralingual* translation involved, as individuals used to reading the standard written variety (be it English, Swedish, or anything else), are brought face to face with a written representation of apparently impenetrable spoken language.

As mentioned previously, non-standard literary dialect often presents particular difficulties to the translator because of its geographical and cultural specificity. Such difficulties arise as a consequence of the *indexicality* of language, the “projections of functions onto form – the fact that specific forms obtain specific functions, and that such functions can be multiple (one form can have a referential function, alongside an aesthetic one, a gendering function, a function of politeness, and so on) and context-dependent [...]” (Blommaert 2006, 164). These indexicalities, Blommaert argues, are local to a community of users, and ordered into hierarchies (ibid., 165). All language is

indexical, and therefore geographically and culturally specific, as any translator or language learner will attest. However, the particular difficulty of translating non-standard language relates to a) the complex ‘nesting’ of the language’s indexicality within the particular social, historical, geographical and linguistic context in which it was produced, and b) the contrast between this and the written ‘standard’, as taught in schools, recorded in dictionaries, and widely reproduced throughout society by a host of institutions and agencies. This written standard will have gone through a process of codification, developing norms and conventions over many hundreds of years. Trudgill states that standardisation consists of three processes: determination (making decisions about which languages/language varieties are suitable for which purposes in a society), codification (the acquisition by a variety of a recognised and fixed form), and stabilising (in which a once diffuse language variety becomes more focused and fixed) (Trudgill 1999, 117). Although many elements of it will remain contested, it appears neutral; is stripped of its strangeness, even if, in reality, it was originally based on a regional or culturally-specific style of speaking. Non-standard literary dialects, on the other hand, do not have an “explicit norm” (Määttä 2004, 321).

Blommaert explores this contrast in the context of written representations of multilingualism, describing how in spoken language, such linguistic hybridity often passes unnoticed (cf. Thomson 2004, 61), but as soon as ‘mixed’ or ‘hybrid’ language is written down, “what sounds like one language when spoken now looks like two very distinct languages on paper” (Blommaert 2006, 170). Blommaert goes so far as to question the very notion of hybridity in this context, arguing that it “is seen as hybridity only for those who did the representing, that is, those who drew hybridity into a codified, normative and institutionalized field of representational stability” (ibid.). That is, the hybridity stands out as a result of the standardisation processes that written language has undergone.

Indeed, although I myself draw heavily on the standard/non-standard contrast, I also have concerns about it. For instance, in talking about the lack of ‘explicit norms’ in non-standard literary dialect, Määttä makes the implicit assumption that all readers are equally able to access and apprehend the connotations of standard literary dialect. This is problematic. People writing the written standard will have been taught the conventions of that standard form through their education, and the majority, and especially those whose writing makes it into print, will follow its conventions.

Furthermore, literary dialect draws heavily on the written standard of the language in question, while making use of conventions that reflect the function and form of literary works. But while this is all true, it ignores the fact that individuals who have different levels of education or different backgrounds may have very different reactions to standard literary dialect when they encounter it, and they may not recognise its connotations or norms. Furthermore, dialect and other forms of non-standard language contain norms and conventions which are frequently acknowledged, not only among their users, but also by those less likely to use the forms in question in their own speech. So, assuming that standard literary dialect is universally translatable, or indeed to go as far as Berman and assert that only “cultivated language” can be translated (Berman 2012, 250), is to see only part of the picture. As Määttä acknowledges, translating into an existing dialect appears to work relatively well in a community in which there is a tradition of writing in dialect” (Määttä 2004, 321).

Having said all that, it is still the case that in the majority of instances, the writer of non-standard literary dialect is required to codify their non-standard literary dialect themselves. They must create their own norms and conventions, even if the writings of other authors making use of similar non-standard varieties may provide the building blocks with which these norms and conventions are established. This is especially the case if such representations are part of a wider literary movement, such as Scots literature. But even in cases where there is a tradition of consensus on how to represent non-standard literary dialect, individual authors will have specific objectives, some of which may require a novel written representation of a specific variant. This must be based on something, since it has not been passed down to them by education in the way that the standard language has. The representation may be based on the author’s own experiences in their upbringing or daily life (hearing the spoken form around them/speaking it themselves), or it may consist of research conducted by the author (visiting places or consuming media forms in which the form is spoken, or talking to people who speak the form themselves).

If the translator is to reproduce the non-standard-ness of the ST (assuming he/she does not standardise the language in the translation process), the above representation must be renewed in the TL. Määttä argues that: “while translators may be experts in identifying the social distribution of dialects in both the source and the target languages, each dialect is connoted differently not only within the larger speaker and reader

communities but for each individual speaker and reader” (ibid.). I would argue (and the findings of my survey in Section 7 support this) that many translators experience difficulty understanding non-standard forms in the first place.

For instance, the translator may not have encountered the form in the course of their exposure to the SL. Foreign language teachers might also understandably be keen to promote only the ‘standard’ form of the language in order to avoid ‘confusing’ their students or teaching them ‘bad habits’. Moreover, low prestige varieties such as CUVs are commonly marginalised in society, often being used by communities who live in peripheral locations, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Add to this the fact that translators may have difficulty keeping up to date with linguistic change in the SL or the TL, depending on where they live or what media they consume, and the fact that they may not have ready access to explanations of terms or usage. See 7.1.1 for a discussion of this issue.

### Section 6.2.2 Where in the text is non-standard language used?

Given the non-codified status of much non-standard language, and its primacy as a spoken form, there is a tendency by both authors and translators to foreground its use in dialect and resort to standard literary dialect in narrative passages. Writing about Québécois translation, Brisset interrogates the way translators have attempted to challenge this, in their belief in the political imperative behind asserting the status of Québécois as a separate and complete language, distinct from Metropolitan French and capable of fulfilling all expressive functions. Her analysis focuses on the rendering of drama texts into Québécois. As discussed in Section 6.1.4, drama translation is complicated by the form’s destabilisation of the written word through its hybrid spoken/performed/written nature. One of Brisset’s main concerns is what she sees as the inconsistency inherent in the “diglossia between the translation [into a distinctively Québécois sociolect], on the one hand, and the preface and instructions to the directors or actors, on the other. The justification for the ‘Quebecization’ of foreign texts is written in a language that no longer bears any trace of its *québécoité*” (Brisset 2012, 308). use of Metropolitan French in stage directions and translator’s notes, while in that same translator’s note referring to Québécois as a distinctive language of a distinctive people,

a people which has a much greater understanding of Québécois than of Metropolitan French (*ibid.*, 307).

Brisset is particularly concerned with the political implications of a translator who at once identifies with, and distances himself from the public for whom his translation is created, but when talking about drama translations in particular, are there not certain ways in which such a ‘diglossia’ could be justified? One that springs to mind is that the actual spoken text of the play reflects just that: spoken language, in which case, a greater resonance is achieved for the audience if the translation is in a variety of language that is familiar and has a greater chance of carrying with it the necessary connotations. This is not necessary for the stage directions and other notes, in which the tone would be expected to be a more formal one.

Thomson draws attention to the role Scots can play when used throughout a literary work. This might mean, as it does in the case of Scottish writer James Kelman, not only “using ‘dialect’ for the reported speech of his characters while the narrator ‘interprets’ them in standard English” (Thomson 2004, 60), but actually creating a narrative voice that “becomes part of the consciousness of his characters” (*ibid.*). As I understand it, the effect of this is to recontextualise Scots, making an ethical decision to foreground it as a variety that has a right to function in any linguistic context, and not be excluded from the ‘authority’ granted to the narrative voice. This resonates with the desire among the translators discussed by Brisset to see writing in which Québécois is able to fulfil any literary function. It also has echoes in the literature discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 8, in which a variety of voices come together to create the texts.

### Section 6.3 Translator strategies for dealing with non-standard language

There are a number of ways of analysing translation strategies in texts, many of which involve categorising the types of strategies applied in any one text or corpus of texts. I have already discussed Berman’s and Venuti’s analysis of the conscious or unconscious strategies adopted in the translation of literature in general, but there are also a number of strategies that apply specifically to the translation of non-standard literary dialect. For instance, Federici divides translators’ approaches to dialect into two categories: conservative and experimental. The conservative approach he describes as not



“forc[ing] the norms” of the target culture, by respecting target language expectations, and avoiding challenging it with non-standard variants (Federici 2011, 10). This is broadly in line with Venuti’s concept of domestication, but I would argue that the emphasis shifts from Venuti’s focus on the potential for cultural exchange to a focus on the potential for linguistic creativity in literary dialect. Federici’s second category, the experimental approach, consists of “trying to reveal the differences in the source language” (ibid., 10). This is equivalent to Venuti’s ideas about foreignisation, or resisting fluency. It means, according to Federici, translating with a creative impetus to solve the impasse presented by non-standard literary dialect. Federici believes the translator must resist eliding the “relevance and significance of the idiolectal features” (ibid., 11), in order to get the most from their capacity for characterisation and their “intrinsic semiotic importance” (ibid.).

Epstein surveys translations into the Scandinavian languages of a number of English-language children’s books that feature dialect, including, most prominently, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*. She describes specific strategies for rendering dialect in the TT. I have found that much of her analysis coincides with that of other theorists, and I have therefore selected the strategies that strike me as most relevant: compensation, replacement, representation, adaptation and standardisation (the others are deletion, addition and explanation) (Epstein 2012, 203), discussing them in the context of other theorists’ perspectives.

### Section 6.3.1 Compensation

Non-standard literary dialect in the ST must sometimes be compensated with non-standard language and dialect in other parts of the TT, since it: “may not be possible for linguistic or other reasons to retain in translation the exact same words or phrases in dialect as are in dialect in the original” (Epstein 2012, 205). Venuti states that non-standard language in the TT need not be immediately in sync with that in the ST, indeed, the effect of the switches between formal and informal registers, standard and non-standard literary dialect can remain the same on a macro level (Venuti 2008, 122). Stolt agrees, stating that when using compensation as a strategy, “equivalence is safeguarded not on the level of single words, but on the level of the entire text to be translated” (Stolt 2010, 10), meaning that the overall effect for the reader can remain the

same. His analysis applies specifically to German and Hungarian translations of English-language texts containing slang, and he foregrounds compensation as a strategy for translating slang, as he finds that the typically ‘dynamic’ nature of slang (ibid., 9), and the fact that due to differing cultural and linguistic conditions in the source and target cultures, “slang expressions do not always have equivalents in other languages” (ibid.). He further finds that the translations he analyses tend to avoid literal translations of ST slang terms that would produce different stylistic effects in the TT, instead adapting the content of the slang to reflect the TL conditions, while retaining the expressive effects of the ST slang use (ibid., 19).

The phenomenon of compensation brings to mind the ‘operations’ Berman mentions when talking about the “*positive counterpart*” (Berman 2012, 242, orig. emphasis) to the “*negative analytic*” (ibid.) discussed in Section 6.1.2. Does compensation “[constitute] a sort of counter-system destined to neutralize, or attenuate, the negative tendencies [deformations]” (ibid.)? Thomson implies that this can be the case. An example she encounters is the occasional creation of TL-specific linguistic patterning in the Danish translation of *Morvern Callar*, which compensates the translation’s loss of ST linguistic patterning (Thomson 2004, 66). Thomson also argues that such operations “may also be found in the novel’s non-linguistic intertexts, such as rave music, and the shared bodily practice of dance, expressed through the rhythms of language” (ibid., 69), particularly because much of the “expression of community” (ibid.) in the novel “resides not in the ‘realistic effect’ of phonetic transcription of dialect [...] but in the *metonymy* of a polyphonic superimposition of languages” (ibid.). So, if the novel foregrounds the effects of such a superimposition, then reproducing these intertexts may be a more fruitful strategy for the translator than doggedly attempting to reproduce linguistic expressions of community. This is something that relates back to the discussion of literature’s intertextual relationship with rap, as discussed in Chapter 5. Thinking about the literary texts that draw on this intertextuality, is it possible that the translator could foreground similar effects by evoking the mood and the rhythms of hip hop in their translation?

### Section 6.3.2 Replacement

Replacement is a strategy in which “geographically, socioeconomically, culturally, stereotypically, or emotionally” (Epstein 2012, 203) ‘matching’ TL dialects are used to translate the dialect of the source language. Epstein finds evidence of northern Swedish dialectal terms being used to translate northern English dialect (ibid., 217), although they were used very sparingly: according to Epstein, the characters “just say a word or two in dialect in some places”. Epstein suggests that the effect of including these few dialectal terms was simply “to make the reader understand that these characters do not speak in the standard form of the language” (ibid.). Jäckel also discusses replacement in the subtitling of Mathieu Kassovitz’ 1995 film *La Haine*, and finds that subtitlers used a variety of styles, including black American slang to render the characters’ *verlan* slang (Jäckel 2001, 227). Jäckel finds the use of African American English (AAE) was justified in the case of *La Haine* for two reasons. Firstly, African American popular culture and language have had a strong impact on the *banlieue* communities represented in the film, and traces of this influence are present in the film and the language used in it. Secondly, she cites the familiarity and accessibility of American English for English-speaking audiences, which represents a major advantage for distributors of English-language subtitled versions of films (ibid., 228). However, she feels that the use of American English (albeit a non-mainstream variety) in subtitling is problematic, as it reinforces the hegemonic status of the USA (ibid., 229).

There are two difficulties with the replacement approach. One is the potentially jarring effect, identified by Ramos Pinto (see ‘Adaptation’ below), of a character, in a book set in the source culture, using a TL dialect. The other occurs “when the translator is faced with source and target countries that have different sorts of regions or stereotypes about those regions, or with languages that are spoken in more than one country” (Epstein 2012, 204). Berman also finds this approach unsatisfactory, as discussed in Section 6.1.2. However, the examples I analyse in Chapter 8 show that, where conditions are right, using replacement can produce TT effects comparable to those in the ST.

### Section 6.3.3 Representation

Representation “involves representing how a certain character does not use the standard, accepted language through word choices [...] and/or grammatical and/or orthographic ‘mistakes’, although these errors would not necessarily be the same ones as in the original text, because of the obvious differences in language style and usage” (Epstein 2012, 206). Epstein draws particular attention to orthographic representation, describing it as “a way of showing readers how words are pronounced, which will allow them to hear the dialect in their heads as they read” (ibid., 206). This is a good point, as anyone who has ever read a book written in non-standard language will attest to the value of reading aloud, or at least consciously thinking the pronunciations through on the basis of the way the text is written down. In fact, due to the lack of orthographic conventions surrounding non-standard language, it can initially be difficult to understand non-standard orthographies without doing so. This representation involves a degree of analysis and sensitivity from the translator about which elements of the non-standard language are to be represented.

Mezei finds translators marking the transposition of English words from the Québécois ST into English Canadian TT with italics in the TT: “so that the reader is aware of the context of the source text and acknowledges that he or she is reading a metatext” (Mezei 1995, 138). Using English in a Québécois text is frequently a political decision, and to leave this unmarked in the TT would be to let this political act go unnoticed. In order to avoid this, the translator must try “to create an open target text, open to differences, open to varieties of meanings, open to both the original cultural reference system and the one in the process of being created. In order to accomplish this, the translator must make use of textual devices such as italics, parentheses, translator’s notes, additions, conscious alterations, and explanatory phrases” (ibid., 145). Mezei finds that in doing so it is possible “to create translations sensitive to both the source text and culture, and to the new reader” (ibid., 146).

Ramos Pinto analyses and maps various strategies employed by Portuguese translators working on Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. She found that representation was a frequent means of rendering non-standard language, with marked distinctions depending on the medium in question – i.e. whether it was intended to be read in printed form, staged or serve as an on-screen translation (i.e. subtitles). In written translations, Ramos Pinto found that written forms of oral discourse represented a common means of implying

that non-standard discourse was in use. This applied “even though they would not be considered non-standard in Linguistics, simply because they represent a deviation from the written norm” (Ramos Pinto 2009, 301). As a result of this, more markedly non-standard language was used in translations for the stage, in order to accentuate the ‘non-standard-ness’ in a context where oral discourse represents the norm. Ramos Pinto also discusses the issue of subtitling non-standard language in film, where the ST (the audio) and the TT (the subtitles) are seen and heard simultaneously. She finds that in cases where the audience of the translation are able to understand both texts, this could lead to the translation being thought of as poor if certain non-standard features are omitted. She also highlights the fact that this might also apply to book translations of well-known or classic texts (ibid. 301-2).

#### Section 6.3.4 Adaptation

Adaptation of dialect terms involves “keeping the same word while attempting to make it follow the target language’s grammatical rules or orthography [...]” (Epstein 2012, 206). Although adaptation did not occur very frequently in the texts she analysed, Epstein finds that it can be “profitably employed” when the ST term and the TT term are similar (ibid., 228). Examples of this type of adaptation will be discussed in the text analysis of *Montecore* in Section 8.2.1.

On a related note, Ramos Pinto finds evidence, in the translations she analyses, of the use of features that do not exist in the target language, but which may either exist in the source language (transference), or be neologisms created by the translator in order to get around “the fact that the target system and public do not easily accept the idea of having foreign characters in foreign territory speaking national non-standard varieties [and that] in certain cultural contexts, the suspension of linguistic belief might not be activated in relation to non-standard varieties, even if it is normally activated in relation to the standard variety” (Ramos Pinto 2009, 295). This is similar to Frank Wynne’s stated strategy in his translation of Matías Néspolo’s Buenos Aires-set novel *7 Ways to Kill a Cat*, of which he says: “[b]y preserving Hispanic words, but making their meaning clear contextually, it was possible to keep the clipped rhythm and cadence of the dialogue, something of the flavour of the novel and the sense of ‘otherness’” (Johnson 2012). This production of otherness that does not exist in the original can lead to the

text becoming overly exoticised, but employed sensitively it can be a way to introduce SL concepts without diluting them. As Wynne states, the translator must provide sufficient context to enable the transference (or indeed the innovation) to be understood. The strategy also entails a degree of trust that the reader will recognise the contextualisation, and remember the meaning of the term the next time they encounter it (ibid.).

### Section 6.3.5 Standardisation

Finally, Epstein notes that:

It seems as though standardization is a common strategy for translating dialects in children's literature, but the effect it has on the reader and its success as a translatorial strategy make it a questionable choice. [...] TL readers may not understand the characters and the plot nearly as well as readers of the source text without the information that dialectal language offers them.

(Epstein 2012, 233)

Ramos Pinto also detects a movement towards standard language in translation, and attributes it to: “the common association made between standard variety and written discourse” (Ramos Pinto 2009, 292), even finding that “the target public may express dissatisfaction with the use of non-standard varieties in such a prestige medium as writing” (ibid.). But with this in mind, she is not wholly opposed to standardisation, suggesting that it: “need not compromise the logic of the plot” (ibid. 292) in cases where the non-standard language is not an integral part of the plot itself.

Englund Dimitrova formulates a model for dialect translation, with a structure in which already-codified forms occupy the centre-ground and non-codified forms, including those with “higher degrees of orality and individuality” occupy the periphery (Englund Dimitrova 2004, 134). Using this structure, she finds a movement towards the centre, comparable to Toury's ‘growing standardisation’. The model, based on Englund Dimitrova's translation research over several years, uncovers the following tendencies:

- ☞ “Non-codified variants of the SL” tend to be translated with “codified variants of the TL”.
- ☞ If “non-codified variants of the TL” are used, the tendency is not towards marked, recognisable TL dialect, but rather towards “some other non-codified variety or register”.

- ∞ If this second is true, the tendency is to use colloquial markers, as these markers are closer to the codified variants.

This suggests an overall move towards standardisation and a resistance to innovation in writing – translators prefer to use already-codified forms, and even when non-codified forms are used, these tend to be colloquial forms, which, as Ramos Pinto states (see ‘Representation’ section above) may not actually be ‘non-standard’ as such, but seem non-standard in writing because readers do not frequently encounter them in a written context (Ramos Pinto 2009, 301). This will be discussed further in the following section.

## Section 6.4 Stigmatisation and non-standard language in translation

As I have explored above, non-standard literary dialect is an important aid in the creation of literary style, characterisation, plot and so on. As such, it should arguably be prioritised, or at least seriously considered, when a text is being translated. There is an additional element to be considered when it comes to the translation of CUVs and other kinds of non-standard language that index characteristics such as class, age, or ethnicity: the possibility that the translation of non-standard language can play on, and even accentuate, the stereotyping and stigmatisation of characters or social groups. If not handled sensitively, such stereotyping could reproduce inequality, or at least undermine narrative devices that highlight and challenge it. Epstein finds that, in Scandinavian translations of *Huckleberry Finn*: “the examples [...] tended to either erase or exaggerate the dialect, with deletion being more common for white characters and exaggeration more common for black ones” (Epstein 2012, 233). The language of the character Jim, for instance, was translated with many more non-standard features than any of the white characters in the book, even when these characters had markedly non-standard speech in the ST. Ramos Pinto noted that in the twelve translations she analysed, non-standard language was frequently used to denote lower social status and educational level. Jäckel detects a similar trend. The language of the main characters, three young men, was simplified in the American English subtitling of *La Haine*, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes about the ability of young people in black and immigrant communities to communicate and use a range of language (Jäckel 2001, 229).

This is comparable with Määttä's findings of French translations of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Määttä analyses the French translations of non-standard literary dialect in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, concentrating specifically on the way non-standard literary dialect is used to signal narrative perspective. He finds that this narrative perspective is obscured by standardisation, with the result that the ideological framework of the novel is partially erased (Määttä 2004, 334). The book has four narrators, three of whom are white characters in the novel, members of the same family; the other is an omniscient third person narrator. The extent to which the narrators cast the novel's black characters as exotic Others is dictated by their emotional proximity to those characters, and indexed by the degree of non-standard-ness with which they represent the characters' speech (ibid.). But the French translations tended to standardise the non-standard language of white characters, and amplify the non-standard-ness of black characters, while at the same time levelling off the differences present in the different narrators' representations. Racial slurs made by characters and narrators were also played down, thereby further annulling the construction of racist ideology in the narrative perspective. This suggests the possibility that translators were unable to identify the full significance of the representations of dialect they were translating, as their translations rendered void Faulkner's subtle signalling of narrative point of view. If a translator's choices indeed have sufficient power to alter such fundamental features of a novel as narrative perspective, then the translation of dialect, especially where marginalised or persecuted groups are concerned, must be particularly sensitive.

The next example is perhaps less about non-standard language than about Berman's concept of qualitative impoverishment, but it has implications for the ethics of translation which is useful in the context of CUVs. Venuti presents the example of Henning Mankell's 1991 novel *Mördare utan ansikte* (*Faceless Killers*). He discusses the racism of the protagonist Wallander, describing how his 'ambivalence' is depicted "through a shifting racial lexicon" (Venuti 2008, 156) which includes a range of terms to refer to black people. Each of these terms is used in a situation which has sexual overtones, for example erotic dreams, or the news that his daughter has a Kenyan boyfriend. They each have different connotations and different levels of offensiveness or neutrality: 'färgad' (coloured), 'negress', 'svart' (black), and 'Afrikanen' (the African) (ibid.). As Venuti remarks, the 1997 English translation by Stephen.T. Murray erases Wallander's racial ambivalence and the tension created by it by replacing all of these



terms with 'black', and "what becomes most apparent in the translation [...] is Wallander's sexual fetish for race" (ibid., 157). As Venuti further argues, depictions of racism must be handled carefully by translators. The subtlety with which racism is challenged internally within a text can be a matter of a few words. Erasing that subtlety can have unintended consequences, especially considering that fact that, as Venuti states:

Because the problem of racism is not specific to Sweden, this theme can travel into other cultures, and readers might succumb to the equivocal means that Mankell uses to generate suspense: the novel provokes and reinforces the reader's anxiety about immigrant crime even as it seeks to question the ethnic stereotyping on which that anxiety rests.

(ibid., 156)

In the Swedish version, the problem of racism is brought into view as previously mentioned, through Wallander's ambivalence and uncertainty. In the English translation, the straightforwardness of 'black' neutralises Wallander's racism, potentially letting it go unnoticed.

Venuti's approach to an ethics of translation is an intriguing one, suggesting that the translator's ethical responsibility when dealing with sensitive subjects such as racism is to highlight, or at least not to erase, the linguistic clues that signal the various characters' views and perspectives on the racism at play. This approach could be extended to develop a more cohesive way of thinking about translating stigmatised or marginalised language varieties.

It is perhaps debatable how far the translator's ethical responsibility can stretch, given the many practical constraints they face, such as tight deadlines, financial limitations, the sometimes conservative input of editors, etc. Despite this, the translator's understanding of social and linguistic context can play a key role in ensuring that the finished translation captures the social and linguistic subtleties of the ST, thereby communicating the text's meaning as fully as possible.

## Section 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined various responses among Translation Studies scholars to the issue of non-standard language in literature. It has highlighted key terms such as Toury's 'growing standardisation', which predicts that translations will, as a rule, move less-

standard style towards the standard; Berman's concept of deformation, the common negative effects of translation on a text; Venuti's call to resist fluency in translation in favour of the visibility of the foreign culture in the text. Each of these concepts provides a valuable basis on which to critique the translations in Chapter 8.

Furthermore, I have outlined more specific examples of translation scholarship responding to the translation of non-standard language in literature, using Määttä's terms 'standard and non-standard literary dialect'. This discussion has categorised common responses to non-standard literary translation, using strategies encountered by Epstein in her analysis of the translation of dialect in children's literature. This categorisation also provides a basis for my analysis in Chapter 8. Lastly, I have discussed the possible implications of not translating, or not *sensitively* translating non-standard language in literature, arguing that it can lead to the stigmatisation of the individuals or communities represented in the text. This theme continues in the next chapter, as I look in greater depth at the role of translator ethics, and the impact of these on translators' practice, and begin to suggest possible steps for the translator to take when working with texts featuring CUVs.

## Chapter 7 Translator Identity, Translation Practice, and Non-standard Language

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This chapter consists of a discussion of ethics and positionality in the translation process, with a more empirical approach to the question of translatorial identity and the implications of this for translation ethics. This is coupled with the results of a survey conducted with practising literary translators from a range of languages into English, as well as a small number of more focused interviews conducted by email. The purpose of the survey and the ensuing conversations with translators was to gain a better understanding of how the translators viewed the challenge of translating literature featuring non-standard language, what strategies they employed when dealing with such literature, and why they chose these strategies.

The survey was conducted anonymously, in order to encourage respondents to provide rich and useful data without fear of repercussions. However, some respondents chose to give their contact details so I could contact them with further questions. One of those who did so is the translator of two of the texts analysed in Chapter 8.

Additionally, I have been in contact with the two other translators featured in that chapter. Where relevant, I have sought to understand the translations in the context of these translators' stated translation objectives or strategies. However, it should be borne in mind that the pairing of stated aims and actual outcomes can be misleading for a variety of reasons, not least the subjectivity of textual analysis, and the role of hindsight and changing perceptions of one's own work processes in the reporting of translation techniques.

### Section 7.1 Translation of non-standard language, positionality & personal ideology

#### Section 7.1.1 Translating as knowledge creation

As we can see from Section 6.3, there is a great diversity of responses to the question of how to translate non-standard language in literature. An investigation into these different responses brings to light the personal nature of both the translation process and critical responses to the translated text. Any translation requires that the translator make choices, and these choices potentially affect the social implications of the text as

well as the aesthetic qualities or connotations, as discussed in the previous chapter. Many of these choices will be ideological, i.e. they will reflect the worldview of the translator in question. Translation choices are more likely to be ideological in cases where the translator is confronted with literary language that intentionally marks itself out as different from perceived 'standard' forms. The choices involved are to be viewed as ideological because the translator is required to make assumptions about the nature of the language used and the people using it: assumptions that will be traceable in the final translation and which will affect the connotative outcome of the translation. The translator may have intentions to cast the language of the people speaking it in a particular light, depending on their own views and understanding. To quote Maria Tymoczko:

The ideology of a translation resides not simply in the text translated, but in the voicing and stance of the translator, and in the relevance to the receiving audience. [...] These aspects of a translation are motivated and determined by the translator's cultural and ideological affiliations as much as or even more than by the temporal or spatial location that the translator speaks from.

(Tymoczko 2003, 183)

And these affiliations can be problematic when it comes to marginalised groups. As Gentzler and Tymoczko have stated, "translators, as is the case with many community leaders, often find themselves simultaneously caught in both camps, representing both the institutions in power and those seeking empowerment" (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, xix). As translators navigate this complex position, they may find themselves engaging with the text and their translation process in very challenging ways:

In traditional models for the analysis of translation, scholars assumed that the translator had knowledge of both the languages and cultures in question and that the translator translated in a linear fashion from the source to the target text. Scholars who have taken the power turn, however, have come to realise that in polyvalent and multicultural environments, knowledge does not necessarily precede the translation activity, and that the act of translation itself is very much involved in the creation of knowledge.

(*ibid.*, xxi).

This issue of knowledge creation is particularly pertinent here, both from the perspective of creating knowledge in the target culture, and also for translators themselves as they create knowledge to use in their own work. CUVs are an emerging phenomenon, or at least, a phenomenon which is only beginning to be represented in written form in such a way as to give a voice in wider society to the producers of the phenomenon. Being, as they are, an index of in-group identity, and one which is quite highly policed by members of the speech communities that use them, CUVs are not

particularly open to outsiders. Their vocabulary and syntax are not documented in any widely-available dictionaries (note the uproar and debate sparked by the 2004 inclusion of the *MU* terms *guss* and *keff* into the SAOL (See Sections 2.1.2 and 3.3.2). While there are a number of wiki-style online dictionaries that feature slang and CUV terms (urbandictionary.com and slangopedia.se are two examples), these are not officially verified, and may as such provide misleading definitions. An example is the Urban Dictionary entry for ‘nang’, meaning cool/good, a word popularised in MLE settings by 2003, which attributes the origin of the word as follows in Figure 7-1:



Figure 7-1 (urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nang)

There is no way of determining whether this etymology is accurate or not, but the entry had gained almost 1300 ‘thumbs up’ accreditations as of 6 June 2014, meaning that it is the first viewable entry for this term, and the authoritative one, in spite of the strong possibility that it could be apocryphal. It is also possible to ascertain the meaning of terms simply from online searches by

interpreting the term in use, but this places a heavy emphasis on the translator’s interpretative skills. The lack of verifiable information makes locating reliable definitions for these words taxing work, especially for less internet-savvy translators.

As shown by the survey conducted as part of this study (discussed in Section 7.2), many translators felt they had to adopt strategies in order to decipher the terms they were confronted with while translating non-standard literary dialect. Indeed, I was surprised by the number of respondents who, when answering a question designed to elicit data regarding their strategies for rendering non-standard literary dialect in the TT, instead provided information about their strategies for understanding the ST. This suggests that the translation process where CUVs are concerned is very much a knowledge creation process, in line with Gentzler and Tymoczko’s comments above. It is also one in which the translator must be aware of his/her own positionality in relation to the communities

or individuals being represented. Ultimately, there is an element of trust in this relationship, a topic which is discussed in the next section.

### Section 7.1.2 Trust and the representation of otherness

Bassnett emphasises the trust implied in the reading of translations, a “trust we place in translators and on translation as a creative act that necessarily involves reconstructing otherness for the target readers” (Bassnett 2008, 85). This trust applies to any translation – the otherness being integral to the foreign text that is being translated, but it takes on a double layering in those cases where the text deals with communities who are additionally othered within the source culture. This is certainly the case with CUVs, and Bassnett’s comments imply that the translator has a responsibility to show extra sensitivity towards this double otherness in order not to misrepresent it. In tandem with Gentzler and Tymoczko’s comments above, this means that the translator should take such steps as are necessary to ensure they understand the text sufficiently well, that they have created sufficient knowledge in themselves, to be worthy of the reader’s trust.

Authors make use of their knowledge of society, and: “Knowing the social stereotypes and assumptions readers may share with the rest of the society they are part of, [they use] fictional varieties with the expectation that this will encourage certain reactions and assumptions which will aid characterisation” (Ramos Pinto 2009, 291). But authors should be aware that in doing so, they are contributing to stereotypes about the group being represented. Carbonell Cortés describes what happens when the self receives knowledge from a text created by an Other, or about an Other. The Self processes the new knowledge by ascribing it to “stored, culturally-determined categories”, which in turn, “coalesce into ideologies” (Carbonell Cortés 2006, 51), given sufficient repetition over time. If a translator is to make use of the stereotypes and culturally-determined categories created by the author, without misrepresenting communities or individuals, they may need to look beyond the text itself to understand how their own ideologies interact with the ideologies present in the text.

### Section 7.1.3 Translator positionality

A translator's personal choices are key to his/her production of each text on the basis of the textual information found within the original. These choices may rely on theories of translation relating to the specific form or themes of the text, but will never be identical for different translators:

Given the pressures and blandishments exercised and offered by his/her society, each translator will be attracted to different qualities in the source texts he/she works with, and will render those qualities in idiosyncratic ways. Any translation theory, whether 'cultural' or 'linguistic', must take that element of personal responsibility into account if it does not want to be lured into the old traps of exhaustiveness and scientificity.

(Morini 2008, 46)

As we see, the translator is not a passive conduit for the text, and elements of their personality, experience and background will interact to shape their translation choices: "Though such subjective aspects of translation as the translator's biographical, psychological, ideological and professional background – her positionality – are rarely reflected upon, they certainly have an impact on the final text" (von Flotow 1995, 32). Von Flotow describes how her own cultural understanding influenced her ability to render the floweriness of a text by Italian/Québécois writer Bianca Zagolin: "[i]nstead of seeing these problems as purely stylistic or content-based [...] I suggest that they result from a clash of ethnicities, a problematic of cultural and ideological differences, a problem of positionality" (ibid., 42). That is to say: von Flotow found that she, as a 'German immigrant', was unable to render the poeticism of the writer's prose into her North American English, because either she, or the English language, was unable to capture Francophone culture's "elaborate approach to the banal" (ibid., 44). This issue of the translator's positionality leads to the question of whether there is a general tendency for members of the literary translation to fit a certain profile as regards age, class, gender, ethnicity, and so on, and what impact this positionality has.

### Section 7.1.4 The 'who' of translation

Douglas Robinson asks the questions: "Who translates? Who writes? Who controls the act of writing/translating? Whose voice speaks when 'we' write/translate?" (Robinson 2001, 4). He does so with a rather more philosophical object than the one behind my questioning. But his phrasing is useful, even if his understanding of the questions is

different. The issue of who *translates* CUVs is connected to the issue of who *writes* CUVs, and by extension, of who ‘controls’ the act of representing CUVs and ‘speaks’ when CUVs are used in writing. Additionally, other factors may come into play. Lefevere asserts the importance of the translator’s ideology in shaping the “image of a work of literature as projected by a translation” (Lefevere 1992, 41). He views this ideology as either coming from within the translation: “[does] he/she willingly embrace it” (ibid.), or being imposed, “as a constraint by some form of patronage” (ibid.). The translator’s ideological approach to the translation dictates the strategy they employ, and therefore the solutions chosen to overcome linguistic or cultural issues in the text. In addition, the contemporary poetics of the receiving literature will shape the reception the text is met with (ibid.).

I would like to acknowledge at this point that literary translators occupy a relatively precarious economic position, frequently work under unfavourable contractual conditions, and are frequently under-acknowledged for their work, as argued so vocally by Venuti (2008, 8–10). Few literary translators can survive from literary translation alone, and it may take many years for a translator to establish a stable career, although there is little opportunity for career development in a financial sense. Additionally, the creative freedom of translators is sometimes restricted by the editorial process and the commercial concerns of the publishing industry. Despite this, translators occupy a privileged position in some respects. Even allowing for the intervention of editors and other agents in the publishing process, it is ultimately the translator’s words that make it into print, their choices that dictate how the author’s words are represented.

Also, while economic capital may be low among translators, levels of education are generally very high, with a significant proportion of the respondents to the survey I conducted holding a PhD, and a high proportion holding at least some form of postgraduate qualification. This might well be expected from people who have built a career based on the written word, but it indicates a very high level of access to cultural capital, and as such, a certain ‘voice’ in society (cf. Bourdieu 2010, 415). The modal age bracket of survey respondents was 50-59, and a large proportion were women. Anecdotally, I can attest to the somewhat limited demographic spread of translators in the UK, although I acknowledge the limitations of this as evidence. At a recent widely-marketed event in London aimed at early-career translators, a glance around the room showed that the vast majority of faces were white, while organisers confirmed that the



attendance list featured 73 women and only 17 men (Ruth Martin, personal correspondence 2014). But do such considerations affect translators' approach to translating literature in general, and translating literature featuring CUVs in particular? Does it mean they are less likely to have contact with or understand the youth cultures that produce and disseminate CUVs, and if so, does this affect their ability to translate such texts? How does this relate to the relationship between the writer's identity and their ability or 'right' to write CUVs into their texts, as discussed in Chapter 4.4?

I would argue that the age, class, level of education, gender, or ethnicity (among other factors) of a translator may all have an impact on their experience and understanding of CUVs, and literature that draws on them. As Epstein states, in her discussion of the translation of dialects: "[t]ranslators' own opinions and knowledge about and experiences with dialects may influence the ways in which they understand and translate them" (Epstein 2012, 202). Her framework might be applied to any kind of geographically, socially or culturally-specific language variety. The idea of the translator as wielding a degree of power, as belonging to a sector of society that is able to exert such power over other sectors of society (e.g. 'minorities'), is implicit in the following lines: "Translations have much to reveal about how given cultures think about certain types of people. When a translator presents a minority character as 'deficient', in a way that said character was not depicted in the source text, this blatantly suggests a racist (ab)usage of power" (Epstein 2012, 210). In Section 4.1, I discussed the tendency in writing to mark low-status varieties as non-standard more than high-status ones. The same power struggle over the means of representation could be seen to be at play here.

The issue of translator identity and class integrates with this sensitivity in the representation of marginalised communities in a conversation about translation in the context of the Indian caste system and the literature of the Dalit (untouchables) in Mukherjee et al. The authors of the article explore the paradox resulting from the appointment of a high-caste translator to translate into English ("the language of globalized imperialism" (Mukherjee, Mukherjee, and Goddard 2006, 3)) the voice of the "minoritized other" (ibid.) in a volume dedicated to Dalit writing. They discuss the way Alok Mukherjee was put in the position of "working to attack the very standards that have enabled him to rewrite the text into the language of power" (ibid.). Here was a member of the power-wielding high caste representing low-caste writers, and engaging, together with the author, who collaborated in the translation, "in a process of self-

education and social transformation” (ibid.). Although it is not explicitly stated in the article whether this process of discovery was mutual, it becomes clear that it was. For instance, Mukherjee explains how, as a high-caste Indian, he had certain ideas about what literature, and in particular autobiography, was – primarily an individualistic exercise, centred on “domestic disappointments, lost love and the protagonist’s coming into consciousness and so on” (ibid., 9). Faced with the autobiography of a Dalit, in which “a collective experience [...] is embodied in one individual” (ibid.), Mukherjee had to rethink the meaning of literature itself. Additionally, Mukherjee had to deal with the implications of his own privilege: “As a beneficiary of the social order which [the author] Limbale wishes to ‘reject,’ how do I translate faithfully without letting my feelings, my emotions, indeed, my selfhood interfere and, thus, knowingly or unknowingly distort what he is saying?” (ibid., 10). This was important not least at the level of language:

[The language of the text] had a particular texture, and certain structural, syntactical, logical and philological particularities, which were not necessarily consistent with the norms of language and expression to which I was accustomed due to my class, caste and training. There would have been a great temptation to “normalize” Limbale’s way of expressing himself, that is to say, make it more like the language of the sophisticated theorist. By no means am I saying that Limbale’s ideas were not sophisticated, but that he had chosen a particular way of expressing them in order to foreground his subject position and his politics. I had to become conscious of his strategy, and to immerse myself in it, in a sense, to get out of my skin.

(ibid., 10)

Mukherjee took his task very seriously – working closely with the author to ensure the text met with his approval and did not misrepresent the Dalit experience. In this case, the ST author, as a Dalit writing autobiographically about Dalit life, has extensive knowledge about the experiences he is representing, and might therefore be said to be writing ‘authentically’. Mukherjee certainly frames it that way. But many authors write about ‘minoritised’ communities from outside of those communities, as discussed in Section 4.3. How does the translator’s positionality differ from that of the author’s? Does it differ at all? As seen in the discussion of Tony White and Stephen Kelman, an author’s writing process can rely on a great deal of research. Research can play much the same role in the work of the translator. Could research enable translators to engage more deeply with the text, allowing them to perform a kind of ‘authenticity’? Could this form part of an ethics of CUV translation?

## Section 7.1.5 Key questions for translation analysis

Based on this discussion of theoretical perspectives on the translation of non-standard language, I perceive the main issues facing translators of CUVs to be as follows:

- ⌘ Are translators able to actually understand CUVs in the ST?
- ⌘ If so, are they able to recognise and understand the sociolinguistic significance of CUVs in use in literature? (Who are translators/what are their frames of reference?)
- ⌘ Do they have personal views about the use of CUVs in literature?
- ⌘ How do translators go about rendering CUVs in the TT? What tools or sources of help are at their disposal?
- ⌘ Are translators able to draw on local CUVs? What are the alternatives to using local CUVs?
- ⌘ What impact would these different approaches have on the TT?
- ⌘ What restrictions are imposed by circumstances beyond the translator and the author?
  - Editorial concerns
  - Economic concerns
  - Format concerns
  - TL market norms

I have sought to use these questions in shaping my analysis of the survey results discussed in the next sections, as well as my textual analysis in the next chapter. Let us now turn to the survey responses provided by practicing translators on questions regarding their perceptions of non-standard language use in literature and their approaches to translating such literature.

## Section 7.2 ‘The Best Advice’: Surveying translators’ approaches to non-standard language in contemporary literature

“[D]ialect is always tied, geographically and culturally, to a milieu that does not exist in the target-language setting. Substitution of an ‘equivalent’ dialect is foredoomed to failure. The best advice about trying to translate dialect: don’t.”

(Landers 2001, 117)

In light of the discussions in the previous sections, the advice above seems somewhat redundant. And yet, it was published in a serious, practical handbook for aspiring translators, a guide which has been cited by a number of scholars (e.g. Sanchez 2009, 320; Epstein 2012, 201), and cannot be disregarded altogether. Landers is very definite in his advice, but he offers no suggestions as to how to deal with this problem, instead choosing to side-step it ('don't'). And while Epstein did find examples of texts in which dialect passages were simply deleted from texts (Epstein 2012, 212), and Ramos Pinto argued that in some circumstances, standardising dialect would not be detrimental to the text overall (Ramos Pinto 2009, 292), in general, ignoring non-standard literary dialect is seen as problematic by scholars. Most of the studies I refer to here find that translators generally attempt to at least replicate some of the effects. So Landers' 'best advice' highlights for me the difficulty of giving the translator hard-and-fast advice on how to deal with non-standard literary dialect; making me question whether such a prescriptive approach is possible at all. Given that theorists seem unable to agree on the question of how non-standard literary dialect is to be translated, it seems sensible to look in more detail at what translators say about their own experiences, practices and decision-making processes, and then formulate suggestions towards a kind of 'best ethical practice'. In other words, what do translators themselves say they do, why they do it, what are the potential benefits and drawbacks of such approaches, and how can other translators use this information to shape their own strategies?

This section presents the results of a survey I conducted into translators' strategies for dealing with non-standard language in literature. The purpose of the survey was to investigate translators' attitudes, approaches and solutions to the issue of non-standard language, in particular slang, dialect, and youth language. While these different types of language may be doing quite different things in any given text, the challenge they present to the translator is the same: they are, to use Landers' formulation, "always tied, geographically and culturally, to a milieu that does not exist in the target-language setting." I attempted to bridge gaps I encountered in the research on dialect translation, with an appreciation of the role an individual translator's experiences have on their translation practice. This was something that became increasingly important in my research as I looked into theories around the positionality of translators and the effects this has on the texts they produce (as discussed in Section 7.1.3). I found that much of the work I was encountering theorised translators as a group without really scratching the surface of how translators as individuals related to the texts they were translating. In

the context of texts featuring language with strong ethnic, class or age overtones, in particular, I felt this to be important. My own experience attending translation events and talking to other translators tells me that the translation profession has a certain ethnic, class and age profile, that is: predominantly white, middle class and middle aged. While this need not necessarily influence translation decisions when faced with the kinds of texts my research focuses on, the discussions of positionality I had encountered told me not to assume that this was the case. As a result, I decided to ask translators about their experiences, to find out for myself.

One of my secondary objectives was to find out whether translators who had worked with texts featuring CUVs or youth language would demonstrate an awareness of the literary lineage of such varieties – would they mention rap or spoken word poetry in their explanations of the variety? Would they refer to rap or other forms I see as key early stages in the codification of such language? Would they head straight for dictionaries in order to find the meaning of these terms, or would they rely more heavily on internet sources and less ‘official’ routes to determine the meaning of language varieties that are often fluid and resistant to fixed definition?

The survey consisted of an online questionnaire which was disseminated to translators into English from any language. The decision to collect responses solely from translators working into English was primarily one of practicality – I have access to networks of translators based in the UK and US, so dissemination was more straightforward. It was also a methodological choice aimed at limiting the variables that might come into play as a result of differing expectations with respect to translated texts in the target culture. Readers in English speaking countries have access to similar proportions of translated literature, and exposure to similarly low levels of foreign language mass media. Other countries, for instance, with a higher proportion of translated literary and audio-visual texts in mass circulation, may have different expectations which could impact upon translators’ approaches to texts. Other potential influences common to into-English translators are the overarching literary landscape and conventions in the English-speaking world. An example might be conventions relating to the prevalence of non-standard language in English language literature and other cultural artefacts. Additionally, given the focus of this thesis on Sweden, the survey dissemination was primarily directed towards Swedish to English translators, with a secondary focus on translators working into English from the other Scandinavian

languages, as they tend to work under similar conditions, and in a similar literary climate.

### Section 7.2.1 The questionnaire

For full details of the questions included in the questionnaire, please see Appendix 1. Here I present a summary of the survey questions and the overall findings, followed by a discussion of the most interesting findings of the survey for the purposes of this study.

In order to find out about translators' approaches to non-standard language in literary texts, I asked them to select a particular text they had worked on, and to provide information about that particular project. I asked them to define in which way the language of the text was non-standard, and the rough 'proportion' of non-standard language in the text, in order to gauge the significance of such language (for example, a slang term or two here or there provides a different challenge than that posed by large sections of the text being written in a highly idiolectal version of youth language). I also asked questions about what role they thought this non-standard language played in the ST and whether and why they felt it was important to convey this role in the TT. I then asked them to specify their practical strategies for dealing with the ST language: did they consult the author, friends or relatives? Did they look online, or use other media representations of non-standard language to find solutions to problems they encountered. Finally, I asked them to give information on their publisher/editor's reaction to their translation and on the reception of their translation among reviewers and the public in the target culture. I also asked practical questions in order to assist the analysis of the results.

### Section 7.2.2 Respondents

The survey was disseminated through personal contacts and a number of email-based, translation-related mailing lists based in the UK, the USA and in Canada. In some cases, respondents passed the survey link onto other translator colleagues.

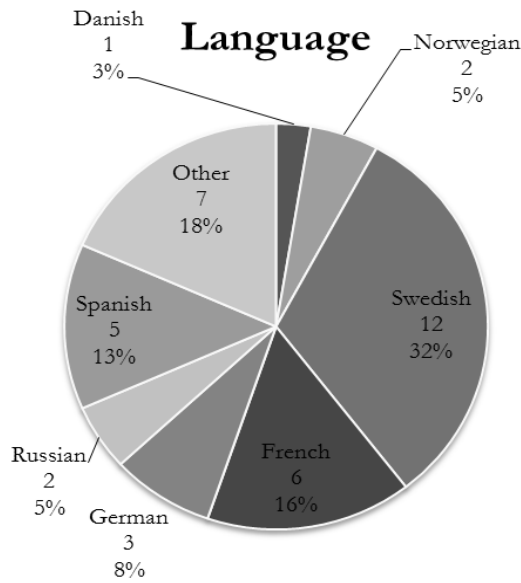


Figure 7-2

In total, 35 full responses were received. Additionally, a number of incomplete responses have been included where this was deemed (a) relevant and (b) not deleterious to the quality of the data. All respondents were literary translators working into English, from a wide variety of languages, in order to provide a wide enough pool of potential respondents. However, there was an emphasis on collecting data from translators working from

Swedish and other Scandinavian languages, and as a result, 12 of the 35 full responses were from Swedish to English translators, while a further 3 were from translators working from Norwegian and Danish (see Figure 7-2 for a breakdown of ST languages). The survey collected some personal information, so that translators' strategies could be correlated against their age, level of experience, level of education, etc.

Respondents belonged to every age group from 18-24 to 70-79 years of age, with the modal value being 50-59 years (Figure 7-3). This age profile may reflect the fact that literary translation is often a profession to which people come after having a number of other careers. There are undoubtedly many factors behind this, but two major ones are likely to be the low-paid but flexible nature of the work, and the fact that literary translation is viewed as a profession that can be entered at any stage in life.

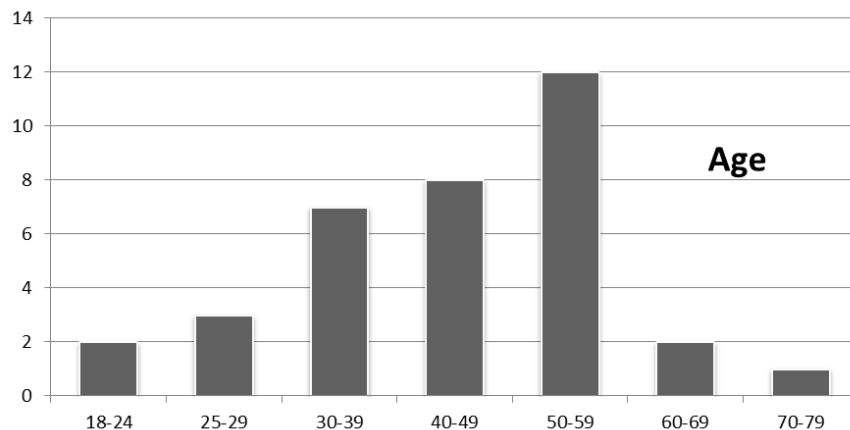


Figure 7-3

The proportion of respondents with advanced levels of education was high, with just under a third holding PhDs, and levels of experience (measured in years spent translating) varied from 1-35, with 12 being the mean figure (Figure 7-4). The over-

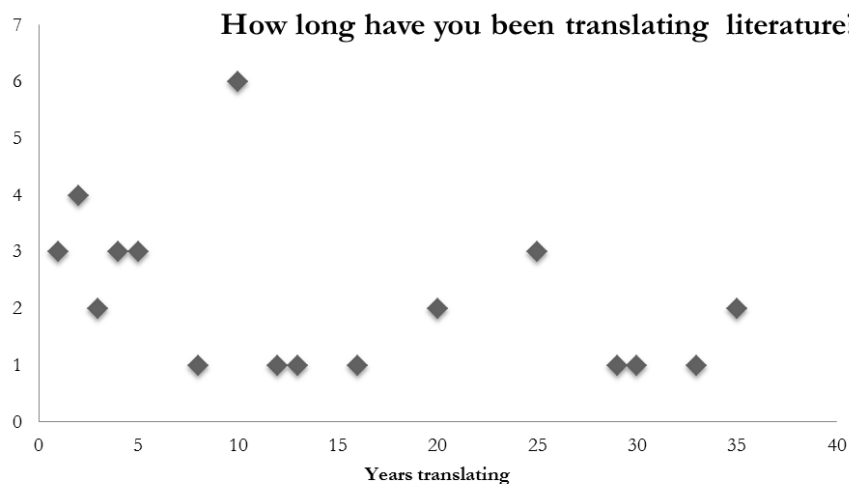


Figure 7-4

representation of relatively inexperienced translators may be a result of the very positive uptake by members of the ‘Emerging Translators’ Network’, an online forum on which comparatively inexperienced translators exchange knowledge and information. However, it should be borne in mind that no data was collected regarding the number of translations published. This means that the ‘experience’ data is of limited use, as some translators who have been translating a relatively short time may have completed or published a large number of translations, meaning that they may have more translation experience than others who have been translating for a long time but on a less intensive basis.

### Section 7.2.3 Results: text & language type

In order to classify responses to later questions about translators’ strategic decisions, I felt it would be useful to collect information about the format of the text, and the ‘types’ and proportion of non-standard language found in that text. The definition of ‘non-standard’ language was intentionally left relatively open, partly in order to find out what translators themselves classified as non-standard, and partly to avoid unintentionally excluding classifications. The purpose of the survey, after all, was to find out how translators approach language that differs from a perceived standard, rather



than addressing any one type of non-standard language in particular. The rationale behind this was that translators of any kind of non-standard language would have to adopt novel strategies in order to overcome the lack of literary dialect to translate into.

### Format of text

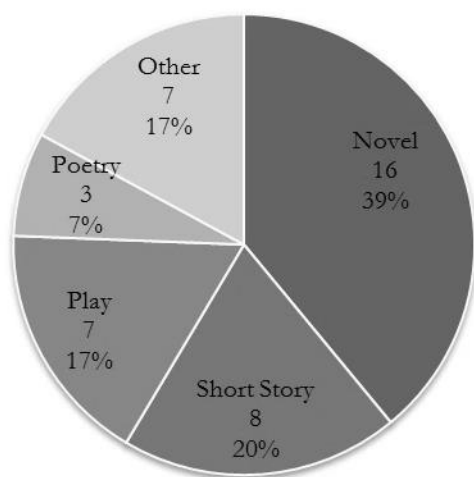


Figure 7-5

The questionnaire asked respondents to pick a particular text they had worked with, and give answers in relation to their approach to translating this text. Figure 7-5 shows the proportion of different text types. ‘Other’ included different types of non-fiction as well as a computer localisation and a novel excerpt. The format of the text did not appear to have any impact on the approach the translator took to the non-standard language in the text.

Question 4 asked what ‘type’ of non-standard language the text had featured, with a few suggested, but undefined types (regional dialect, slang, urban vernacular, youth language), and the option to provide an alternative or elucidate the reply, thereby leaving the categories rather open. I hoped that by doing this, I would give respondents the opportunity to define what they understood as non-standard language. Figure 7-6 shows an overview of the distribution of non-standard language types, although it should be borne in mind that the distinctions made by respondents were qualified with further explanations, and respondents who selected ‘Other’ gave a wide variety of categorisations.

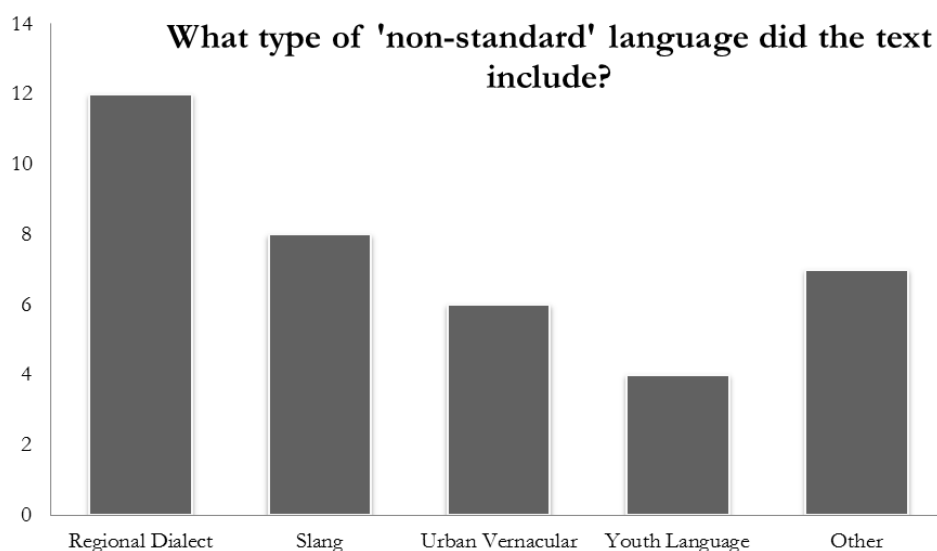


Figure 7-6

Many of the respondents added that the text had combined a variety of different types of non-standard language, with one stating that “While the texts contained examples from all of these categories, urban vernacular was the most widespread and the most challenging to translate” (Swedish play, urban vernacular). The categories ‘urban vernacular’ and ‘youth language’ were more commonly selected by translators from Nordic languages than from other languages. While there is no obvious explanation for this, it could be evidence of the high profile of contemporary urban vernaculars in the Nordic region, and in particular, the very high profile of Swedish literature featuring them.

### Proportion of the text in non-standard language

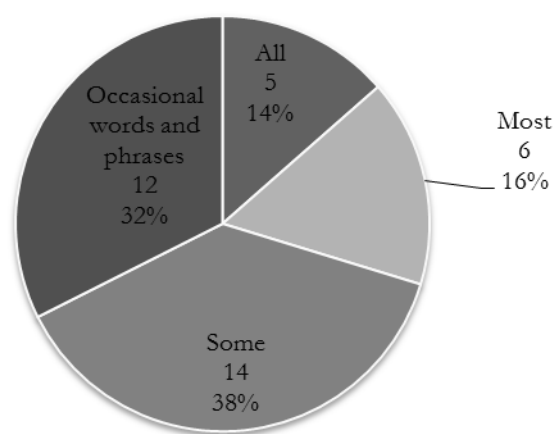


Figure 7-7

Responses to the question about the proportion of the text featuring non-standard language varied. As can be seen in Figure 7-7, the majority of respondents indicated ‘occasional words or phrases’ or ‘some of the text’. It could be deduced from this that non-standard language is generally used as a stylistic accent in literature. However, a significant minority did indicate that that ‘most’ or ‘all’ of the text was written in non-

standard language. I have looked particularly at the strategies of these translators, as it seemed likely that those confronted with extensive use of non-standard language in a source text would be obliged to put more work and consideration into finding a consistent strategy to deal with this. However, I did not find any particular correlation between proportion of non-standard language, the need to replicate the function of that non-standard language, and translation strategy. This could be due to the fact that almost all respondents appeared to take *any* amount of non-standard language seriously, and attempt to render this in the TT, using any means possible in the process.

Bearing in mind the translator’s position (as discussion in Section 7.1) in the transfer of the text’s meaning, it is well worth considering the question of whether translators are

aware of the significance of the language used in the text, and whether they are committed to replicating this language in light of that significance. In response to the open question, ‘In your opinion, what was/were the function(s) of ‘non-standard’ language in the text?’ there was a wide range of responses. I have grouped these into categories to aid analysis. The figures for each category are shown in Figure 7-8.<sup>104</sup>

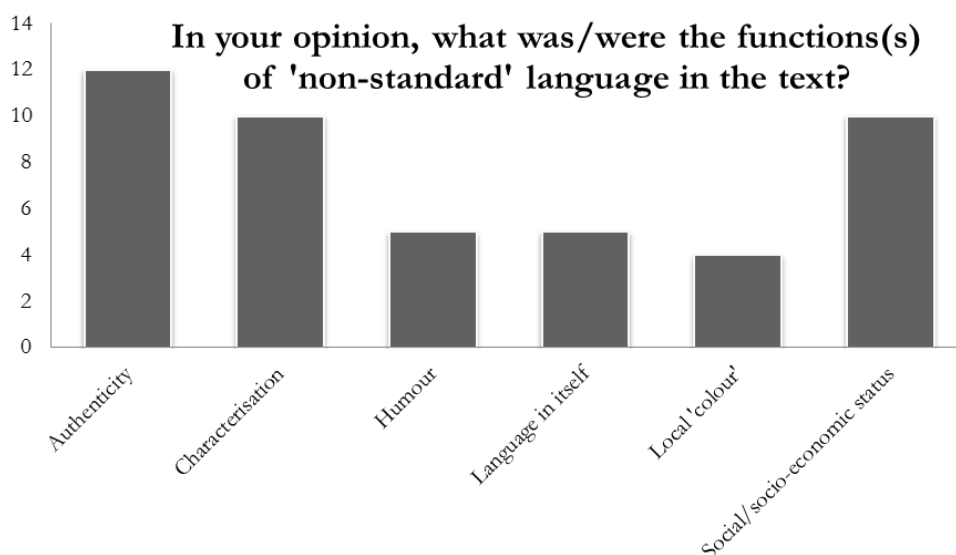


Figure 7-8

The categories reflect a range of considerations, including stylistic, narrative, cultural and socio-political functions. Each of these is important, but for this particular study I would like to function on the last function, and more specifically, the representation of the depiction of social or socio-economic status. As I have discussed in this thesis, one of the functions of contemporary urban vernaculars in literary texts has been their indexing of membership in or affiliation with a particular social group. This indexing has often been used to serve political ends (Anyuru and Khemiri are good examples of this). Therefore it is of particular interest to this study to investigate translators’ responses to comparable uses of non-standard language.

Ten respondents felt that the function of the non-standard language in the source text was to emphasise matters related to social or socio-economic status. Of these, I interpreted the responses of five translators as suggesting that this emphasis was

<sup>104</sup> As some of the responses fit into more than one of the categories, the chart shows absolute numbers in each category, and thus the total number of responses is more than the total number of respondents.

politically motivated, that the author was seeking to express political views or even effect change through their work. One, for instance, stated that: the non-standard functioned to provide: “gritty realism. But mostly a political statement: our sub-language deserves to be a literary language” (Québécois novel, urban vernacular). Another indicated that:

The non-standard language is strongly linked to characters’ sense of identity; the ones that use it are very aware of their use of language and how they use that language to relate to others around them, either by forming a group based on non-standard language, or contrasting themselves to those who do not use the language. It’s also used to play with the audience’s perception of the characters.

(Swedish play, urban vernacular)

One translator made an interesting point about culturally-bound expectations regarding the literary form:

[Non-standard language] is used in speech to develop character and also to create a sense of setting. The use of dialect and non-standard language in Chinese texts is often relatively limited as there is a very developed convention around the idea of ‘literary language’ as a unified Chinese.

(Chinese novel, regional dialect)

This was the only time such an awareness of the contrast between source and target culture conventions was mentioned. One of the most intriguing elements of this was the use of included intralingual translations in the ST, and the role this played in the translation process: “I knew what the terms meant because interestingly the author chose to provide ‘Mandarin translations’ after the Taiwanese words he used in the text! [...] Considering the Mandarin translations above, I didn’t really need to do much research” (Chinese novel, regional dialect). This raises interesting questions about the role of such ‘multidialectalism’ within the text, especially in the context of the quote about expectations of literary language above. The respondent did not mention whether they had reproduced this intralingual translation within their TT, which suggests that they did not, but in not doing so, they would have removed a layer of information about language politics in China.

#### Section 7.2.4 Results: strategies and approaches

I would like to discuss the effect of the translator’s awareness or understanding of the author’s socio-political aims on their translation strategies. Of the five translators who felt that the aim of the language in the text was political, all felt it was important to

reproduce this political function. The reasons given included: “The different varieties of language used in the play are crucial to the audience’s understanding and reaction” (Swedish play, urban vernacular), “Because in my view a translation should give the reader the same ‘feeling’ as a reader of the original” (Swedish novel, slang), and even: “Otherwise, why do the book?” (Québécois novel, urban vernacular). In fact, all the ten respondents who indicated the social or socio-economic functions of language in the ST, emphasised the need to render these in the TT. Furthermore, only 3 of the total number of respondents did *not* feel it was important to reproduce the functions of non-standard language in the ST, indicating that translators are very sensitive to the perceived aims of the author in creating their text, and seek to mimic the effects of these aims in their translation.

Table 7-9 shows the responses to the question: ‘What approaches did you adopt when translating the text?’. Once again, respondents were encouraged to select as many options as appropriate, to reflect the fact that the translation process generally involves a multitude of different approaches. The mean number of categories selected by each respondent was 3.7. The category that most respondents indicated was ‘consulting other individuals (friends/colleagues)’, with respondents stating that they consulted both ST and TT native speakers and other translators when dealing with particularly difficult passages.

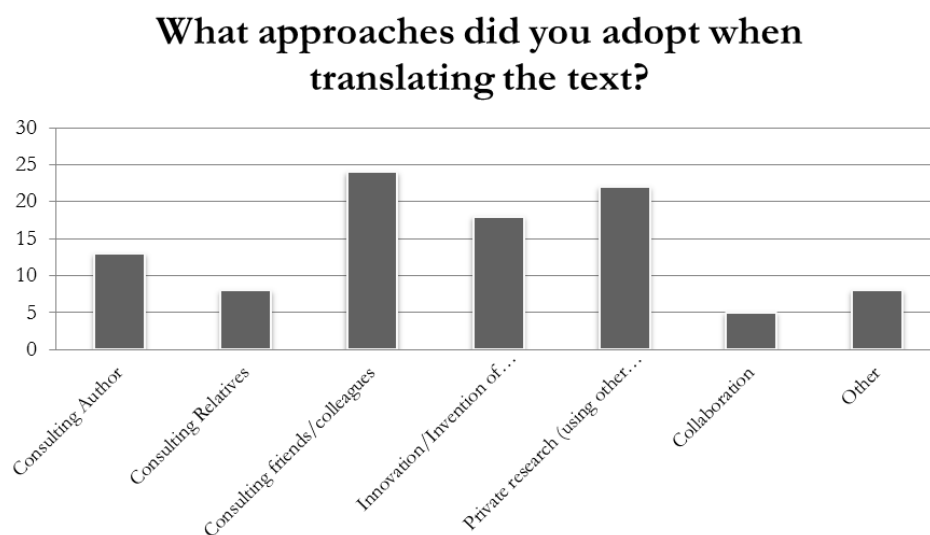


Figure 7-9

One surprising, and interesting result was the high incidence of respondents indicating that they used neologisms. Unfortunately, none of the eighteen respondents who selected this option provided any further detail on this in their answers, but the fact that

so many stated that they were innovating their own forms of language is interesting in itself, supporting as it does the case for translator creativity. Somewhat surprisingly, only around a third of respondents consulted the author of their text. Obviously, there are a number of potential reasons for this, including access to the author, time restrictions, and so on. The use of dictionaries of non-standard language and slang was mentioned a few times, with one respondent mentioning Urban Dictionary (cf. Section 7.1.1).

One respondent suggested that non-standard language in particular lent itself to multi-modal research: “the nature of non-standard language means that there is a wide variety of material available online and in printed and audiovisual media” (language not specified (French or Russian), novel, regional dialect). Another stated they “did attend performances of the play in Swedish, which gave strong impetus for my translation” (Swedish play, baby and toddler language). Three respondents stated that they had directly imported words from the ST into the TT (transference), with two of these expressly stating that the meaning of the terms would be clear from the context.

The question of translation strategy was intentionally left open, to allow translators to emphasise the importance either of strategies to come to grips with the ST, or to appropriately render the TT. Some of the translators emphasised the importance of understanding the source language and correctly gauging source language tone, rather than getting right tone in English. To me this suggests that translators are somewhat under-confident in their ability to recognise and correctly categorise the various registers and varieties of the ST. On the other hand, many seemed confident in their mastery of style and register in English, for example: “under ‘other’ I would include my own knowledge of Swedish and English slang – for the most part, the TL terms were already in my head and so I didn’t need to research the meaning of slang expressions” (Swedish autobiography, combination of youth language/urban vernacular/slang).

### Section 7.2.5 Results: responses and reception

Respondents reported varied responses from readers & editors. Some translators were concerned about the reception of non-standard language in their translations:

“Surprisingly good for the collection as a whole: great reviews and sales. However, hardly anyone singled out this story full of slang for particular praise. I wonder if it stumped many readers.” (French short story, urban vernacular). Another respondent

stated that: “it has had some very good reviews, but a glance online suggests that some readers of both the original and the translation were puzzled by the punctuation”, and that “[some readers] said it was confusing. The people who liked the book praised the beautiful writing, but didn't mention the punctuation.” (French novel, other – “very long sections punctuated entirely by commas”). It is interesting that the respondent mentions the original here – such references to original were rare, suggesting that translators make a clear division between the ST and their text.

The responses suggested that many editors and publishers shied away from non-standard language in the text. One indicated that: “This was a non-commissioned translation which we agreed to do as a speculative venture. So we sent the material to publishers and editors on spec”, and that the reception of editors to the language used was: “Difficult to determine. Publishers and editors sent the material back with comments like 'didn't work for me', when they ventured an opinion at all. In some instances we did highlight the uniqueness of the language we were translating” (Spanish poetry, other: “neologisms, archaisms”). One translator stated that in the editing process for the text they worked on, there was: “a long battle, in which they tried to standardise everything to US academic English” (Russian poetic memoir, slang)

However, in some texts, the editors or publishers appear to have allowed the translator a lot of freedom: “editor/publisher was fairly hands off and generally trusted my instincts” (Danish play, slang), with some being very positively involved in the text: “The editor was great - very attentive to the text and very responsive to input from the author and me.” (French novel, other – “very long sections punctuated entirely by commas”).

### Section 7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented theoretical discussions and translators' own responses to give a picture of the ethical and practical implications of translating non-standard language. While the focus has been on non-standard language in general, and not on contemporary urban vernaculars in particular, much of the discussion is transferable.

In order to bring together the discussions of this chapter, I would like to return to the 'key questions' posited in Section 7.1.5.

a) Are translators able to actually understand CUVs in the ST?

On the basis of the survey results, it seems that many translators are not immediately able to understand the non-standard language used in the ST, but will go to quite some lengths to familiarise themselves with the full implications and range of meanings of such terms in order to properly render them in the TT.

b) If so, are they able to recognise and understand the sociolinguistic significance of CUVs in use in literature? (Who are translators/what are their frames of reference?)

Nearly all the translators surveyed expressed the importance of reproducing the functions of the language, and all of those who categorised the language in their texts as carrying social or socio-economic meaning sought to reproduce this meaning in their translation. This would suggest that translators are sensitive to the social meaning of non-standard language, and that such meaning is within their frame of reference. Some translators also mentioned words such as ‘immigrant background’ and ‘social class’, suggesting an awareness of the specific role of contemporary urban vernaculars in literature, even where they did not explicitly refer to them using this term.<sup>105</sup>

c) Do they have personal views about the use of CUVs in literature?

Respondents did not express any particular personal views about the non-standard language they had translated; although the fact that so many thought it was important to reproduce its functions in the TT would suggest an openness to such language, and a willingness to see its use and significance more widely represented in society. None of the respondents expressed any explicit antipathy to the language they were translating, although a number did state that it was difficult to work with!

d) How do translators go about rendering CUVs in the TT? What tools or sources of help are at their disposal?

As can be seen from Table 7-9 in Section 7.2.4, translators take a wide variety of approaches to the practical task of identifying translation solutions. These include the contributions of others, most frequently friends and colleagues, but also family members and ST authors. None of the respondents specifically referred to consulting younger family members, or their friends’ children, which was something I had

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<sup>105</sup> Which is unsurprising, given its academic provenance and recent coinage.



expected to encounter, especially with regard to the translation of slang features and youth language. However, there may be many reasons for this, not least the fact that I did not specifically ask about the age of people consulted. Another reason could be the increasing availability of access to written sources of non-standard language online, as suggested by one respondent. Many respondents stated that they did use online sources, including online dictionaries (of both the formal, 'published' kind and the informal, crowd-sourced kind). Many also used other forms of audiovisual media, although again, there was unfortunately little additional detail provided in relation to this.

e) Are translators able to draw on local CUVs? What are the alternatives to using local CUVs?

Many respondents stated that they did use local forms of slang and urban vernacular to render the text in the TT. However, this was coupled with the use of transference, and, it would seem, innovation and invention of TL terms and phrases. Further evidence with regard to this question can be found in the text analyses in Chapter 8.

f) What impact would these different approaches have on the TT?

This is difficult to gauge from the responses received, although most of the translators who had received feedback from editors, press and the public seemed to feel positive about the text they had produced, and by extension, with the effect of the approaches they had employed. Again, further analysis regarding the effect of translation strategy can be found in Chapter 8.

g) What restrictions are imposed by circumstances beyond the translator and the author? (Editorial concerns, economic concerns, format concerns, TL market norms)

As stated in Section 7.2.5, some respondents did note reluctance and even resistance among TL editors and critics/readers with respect to the use of non-standard language. Some also mentioned the impact that time constraints had had on their ability to produce a translation that reflected the non-standard-ness of the ST. However, without further detail it is difficult to derive any reliable conclusion from the data.

Overall, I feel the data I have gathered suggests that translators go to great lengths to avoid standardising the non-standard language in the texts they translate. They seek to represent the foreignness of the text, the social relations of the cultural setting, as symbolised through linguistic relations in the text, but they are also keenly attuned to

the need to find solutions that work in the target language – they seek fluency, coupled with a sense of the author’s and characters’ voice(s), sometimes under significant time and editorial pressure. Most are pragmatic about this, and find creative solutions to problems where resources and time allow. I would be interested in conducting more in-depth research and interviews with the respondents and with other translators, in order to find out more about the specifics of their day-to-day working practices and how these compare with the comparatively more challenging task of translating non-standard literary dialect. However, I believe the information here provides an interesting initial insight into the complexity and consideration that are involved in the practical act of translation.

## Chapter 8 Analysing Contemporary Urban Vernaculars in Translation

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This chapter consists of a series of analyses of published English translations of Swedish literary texts that feature representations of contemporary urban vernaculars. These are translations of texts referred to elsewhere in the thesis: *Ett öga rött*, *Montecore* and *Invasion!* by Jonas Hassen Khemiri, and *Snabba Cash* by Jens Lapidus. Although excerpts from one or two of the other texts mentioned in the thesis have been published in English translation, I have not been able to find any such excerpts featuring CUVs. The analysis itself focuses on short passages from the texts. This allows the language use of the texts and the translations to be compared in depth. The passages have been selected because they feature particularly interesting examples of stylised features that reference CUVs or other products of multilingualism as discussed in Chapter 1, such as code-switching/mixing. An example of this is the character Kadir's characteristic style in Khemiri's *Montecore*. Although the primary focus of this chapter is the translation of literature drawing on CUVs, these latter examples have been included because approaches to the translation of these two types of text offer useful material for comparison and analysis of how literary translators deal with phenomena stemming from multilingualism.

Each passage is first introduced, and then a key is provided to indicate annotation of the categories of text-type highlighted in the TT and ST versions of the passage itself. The marked-up TT and ST of the passage follow this. The sections finish with a discussion of the particular CUV/non-standard features of that passage and the solutions that were found to deal with these in the TT.

The final part of the chapter synthesises the discussions of Chapters 6, 7 and 8, and asks whether there are any other approaches that translators might apply to their practice that would better equip them to respond to the challenges presented by CUVs in literature.

### Section 8.1 Ett öga rött

The first translation I would like to consider is Laurie Thompson's 2005 translation of an excerpt of Jonas Hassen Khemiri's novel *Ett öga rött*, entitled *An Eye Red* (Thompson

2005). The excerpt translation was undertaken at the request of a literary agency with the aim of selling the book to an English-language publisher (Laurie Thompson, personal correspondence 2014). The translated text was then published in the journal *Swedish Book Review*, along with a short commentary that explains some aspects of the thinking and the process behind the translation.

Thompson has employed innovative and creative strategies in his translation of Khemiri's prose, a task which the author himself has said to be impossible. As Khemiri told one interviewer: "Nej, jag tror inte att den [*Ett öga rött*] går att översätta till engelska. Det beror på att bruten engelska lätt blir etnifierad, det blir en viss sorts brytning."<sup>106</sup> (Winiarski 2011). Given the extent to which the language of *Ett öga rött* is integral to the 'message' and characterisation of the text, the translation of it would certainly seem to present major problems. In the commentary accompanying the translated excerpt, Thompson states that undertaking the translation involved a considerable learning process, aided by discussions with Khemiri (Thompson 2005, 3).

During this discussion, Thompson learnt that, contrary to critics' reports, the novel was not "written in 'rinkebysvenska', that is, incorrect Swedish as spoken by immigrants" (ibid.), but represented more a kind of dissection of the Swedish language, in which Halim, the protagonist, "purposefully gets expressions and constructions wrong in order to create an identity for himself, in order to express himself in a language he doesn't regard as being his own (despite the fact that he was born in Sweden)" (Khemiri, in ibid.). In order to deal with this use of intentional mistakes, Thompson says he developed a series of "certain recurrent errors, such as omitting the definite and sometimes the indefinite article, making word order mistakes, misusing the '-ing' form of verbs, and so on" (Thompson 2005).

However, in my reading of *Ett öga rött*, the 'mistakes' Halim makes are not simply arbitrary errors intended to distance his writing from a Swedish language that he feels alienated by. This reading is corroborated by several other scholars, including Nilsson, who states that: "Halim's primary means for 'being real ... when writing' – that is, expressing ethnic authenticity textually – is to use multi-ethnic youth language in his diary" (Nilsson 2013, 51; cf. also Källström 2011). As Nilsson states, far from being full

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<sup>106</sup> "No, I don't think it can be translated into English. That's because broken English tends to be given ethnic overtones, it takes on a certain accent."

of errors, the language of Halim's diary is part of an idiolect he has developed for himself which draws on the variety Thompson refers to as 'rinkebysvenska', as Halim attempts to align himself with the 'anti-establishment' reputation *multietniskt ungdomsspråk* has developed. The use of CUV elements reflects Halim's desire to associate himself with the Stockholm 'förort' (suburbs) where he and his family once lived. The desire is a reflection of his belief that these suburbs are somehow antithetical to the 'Swedish integration plan' he is so contemptuous of, and representative of his supposed non-Swedish identity. Källström finds convincing evidence of stylistic choices made by Khemiri that indicate that "Halim is deceiving, posing as someone he would (perhaps) like to be" (Källström 2010, 152), i.e. a tough rebel from *förorten*. The nods Halim makes to *multietniskt ungdomsspråk*, although they are in no way an 'authentic' reproduction of existing language, nevertheless act as references to a rebellious youth culture in a way that a translator would do well to bear in mind and attempt to echo. This chimes with Venuti's comments about the 'derivative' nature of both foreign text and translation (Venuti 2008, 13, cf. Chapter 6). Even though Khemiri may intend for his text to be distinct from *multietniskt ungdomsspråk*, the fact that he does include elements of this has effects he had not intended.

As such, Thompson's approach to the text is interesting, and he has clearly devoted a lot of consideration to finding a voice for Halim that connects with Halim's self-image. Thompson states that he employed a range of recurrent errors "of the kind made by somebody who knows the expression used is wrong, and knows perfectly well what it ought to be" (Thompson 2005, 3), although he does not elaborate on how these errors would be differentiated from errors made unintentionally. Before analysing what Thompson actually does in the text, I want to mention Thompson's caveat that he sought not to employ these errors consistently. Although he does not explicitly say why he made this decision, there are a few possible reasons. It is likely that employing the errors inconsistently would increase Halim's appearance of naivety, in the sense that the character is attempting to present a false image of himself that he is unable to sustain. Another factor is that inserting inconsistencies would stop the text becoming too 'planned' and constructed. Halim's text is a diary, a format which is generally spontaneously written, emotionally loaded and intended only to be read by the author. Therefore, the writing style of a diary is liable to change at any point: it cannot be assumed that the style will be consistent. In spite of this, though, the source text is relatively, if not completely, consistent. An example of this is the use of non-inversion

in Halim’s diary passages. “In *Ett öga rött*, noninversion is a main feature of Halim’s language and is used in all contexts where inversion is normally used in Standard Swedish. Outside what I call Halim’s language, noninversion is found in some of Halim’s direct speech, but is lacking in dialogue representing Arabic or Standard Swedish” (Källström 2010, 146). As implied by the quote above, however, Källström finds the consistency to be incomplete in such a way as to reveal the deception involved in Halim’s linguistic choices. It is also important to mention, as Thompson does, the many passages that are written in Standard Swedish with none of the stylisation Halim employs to assert his identity elsewhere. This is particularly the case when a conversation is taking place in Arabic or in Swedish, for instance between Halim and his father, or with school teachers, respectively.

I would like to turn now to Thompson’s text itself, to see how his strategies play out in the text. Looking at the following section from Thompson’s translation (followed by the equivalent passage from the source text), it is possible to identify quite a large number of different techniques and strategies adopted by Thompson. This specific section, from towards the start of the text, has been chosen because it contains a high frequency of non-standard stylistic elements of various ‘types’, in both the Swedish and the English text. These elements are highlighted typographically in a key before the table featuring the main quote.

The below passage features a large number of non-standard elements in both the ST and the TT, and these elements fall into a number of ‘types’. I have categorised these types; however, the categories used are based on my interpretation, and should not be viewed as definitive. Instead they provide a structure to aid the current analysis. Using them, I ask the question: to what extent do these elements correlate from ST to TT, and what effect does this correlation, or non-correlation have?

Table 1 (Key)	
Calibri	misuse of word class
<b>Bold</b>	<b>‘naïve’/foreign mistakes</b>
<u>Underline</u>	<u>Swedish influence – foreignisation</u>
Berlin Sans	word order
<i>Vivaldi</i>	<i>missing article/preposition/conjunction/ grammatical agreement</i>
Wiggle underline	<u>General idiolectal Halim-isms</u>

Line	
1     5     10	<p>We sat <b>quiet</b> while the fruit sellers shouted <u>bananas at bargain prices</u> and <b>dirty-cheap</b> cucumbers. At the same time <u>longer away</u> the niggers were playing Africa drums and the pigeons circled near the benches <b>in hoping for</b> more bread. Maybe for you it <b>sounds funnily</b> not to be ashamed <b>with sitting</b> on a bench talking to an old lady. And maybe the first time I <b>chattered</b> <i>Dalanda</i> I <b>felt also</b> <u>a bit so</u>. But <u>direct</u> you would <b>regret</b> if you knew her powerfulness. Dalanda knows everything about the history of the Arabs and <b>she it is</b> who has <u>told about that we have</u> <i>best</i> philosophers and <i>smartest</i> mathematicians and <i>fiercest</i> warriors. Also she has said that we Arabs are not like other Wogs <u>but more</u> civilized, and when she says that almost every time I have <u>coldest shivers</u> <u>in the back</u>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Thompson 2005, 5)</p>
1     5     10	<p>Vi satt tysta medan fruktsäljarna ropade <u>bananer till rea-</u> <u>pris</u> och superbillig gurka. Samtidigt längre bort <b>negreerna</b> <b>spelade</b> afrikatrumma och duvorna cirklade nära bänken för dom hoppades på mer bröd. Kanske för dig det låter konstigt man inte <b>skäms att</b> sitta på bänk och prata med <i>gammal</i> tant. Och kanske första gången jag snackade <i>Dalanda jag kände</i> också lite så. Men <b>direkt du skulle ångra om</b> du kände hen- nes mäktighet. Dalanda kan allt om arabernas historia och det är hon som har <i>berättat det</i> är vi som har <i>bäst</i> filosofer och <i>smartast</i> matematiker och <i>grymmast</i> krigare. Också <b>hon</b> <b>har</b> sagt vi araber <b>är inte</b> som andra blattar utan mera civili- serade och när hon <i>säger nästan</i> varje gång <b>det går</b> som <u>kal-</u> <u>laste</u> kår i ryggen.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Khemiri 2003, 11)</p>

### Section 8.1.1 Alternative use of word class

In several instances in the paragraph, Thompson has intentionally used the ‘wrong’ form of a certain word, for instance an adjective instead of an adverb, i.e.: “we sat quiet” (line 1), or vice versa, i.e.: “Maybe for you it **sounds funnily**” (line 4). This fits in

with Thompson’s stated strategy of “misusing the –ing forms of verbs” (Thompson 2005, 3), which can also be seen in this excerpt: “in hoping for more bread” (line 3). It seems to me that word class errors such as these are an attempt at replicating ‘learner language’, in which the speaker/writer does not completely master the syntax of the language in question. In this passage at least, the ST does not feature stylisations of this nature. To judge from this, Thompson has been using the strategy of compensation, discussed in Section 6.3.1. A similar tendency to Thompson’s use of learner language-like features is noted by Berthele in his analysis of German translations of *Huckleberry Finn*, and more particularly, the rendering of African American character Jim’s language. Berthele found many examples of ‘infinitive language’ – the use of the unconjugated infinitive of verbs where a conjugated form would be expected. An example given by Berthele is as follows, from a translation of the passage “I tuck out en shin down de hill en 'spec to steal a skift” (Mark Twain 1884, 53):

Ich Berg <b>hinablaufen</b> und	Ich <b>lief</b> den Berg <b>hinab</b> und
Schiff stehlen <b>wollen</b>	<b>wollte</b> ein Schiff stehlen
(TT solution using infinitive language/standard verb form, cited in Berthele 2000, 602)	

As Berthele states, “[i]n German literature this type of speech is widely used for the speech of idiots, savages, or, of course, for L2-learners of the German language” (Berthele 2000, 600). This means that “having Jim speak in infinitives portrays him as either foreign, uneducated or simple-minded” (ibid., 601), whereas in the ST, he simply speaks a different language variety.

### Section 8.1.2 Swedish influence – foreignisation

It is difficult to know how to explain the inclusion of apparently Swedish-influenced syntax in the TT. It is possible that some of it is the result of some carelessness by the translator, in line with Toury’s second translation law, The Law of Interference, which states that “in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to be transferred to the target text” (Toury 2012, 275). It is equally possible, though (given that Thompson is a very experienced and highly-regarded translator), that it is actually part of the translator’s strategy to render the text stranger-sounding in line with Venuti’s entreaty to resist fluency (as discussed in Section 6.1.3). This approach can produce interesting results in some circumstances, but it is arguable that it is



inappropriate with this text, especially as many parts of the text contain ‘foreignised’ elements in places where the Swedish text adheres more to Standard Swedish conventions, and other English phrasing exists that Thompson might have made use of. The translator’s strategy therefore appears to have diverged from that of the ST author, creating a subtly different type of text. On the other hand, if this is indeed a conscious strategy in the TT, it could be argued that harnessing the foreignising influence of Swedish in the TT might suit the text as a whole. Given that Khemiri’s use of language plays on what Swedish can do, and what forms it can take under the influence of ‘foreign elements’, perhaps it makes sense to use Swedish to subvert the English text, stretching the boundaries of what English can accommodate. This brings a meta-level of multilingualism into the translation.

### Section 8.1.3 Alternative word order

Non-standard word orders are found in both the ST and the TT sample. However, the Swedish makes frequent use of the subject-verb non-inversion which is a documented feature of both learner Swedish and MU (Ganuza 2011, 91). This usage persists throughout Khemiri’s novel, as discussed by Källström:

In *Ett öga rött*, noninversion is a main feature of Halim’s language and is used in all contexts where inversion is normally used in Standard Swedish. Outside what I call Halim’s language, noninversion is found in some of Halim’s direct speech, but is lacking in dialogue representing Arabic or Standard Swedish, where Standard Swedish is used.

(Källström 2010, 146)

There are five instances of non-inversion in this passage alone. There are no other types of non-standard word order in the Swedish. By contrast, uses of the non-standard word order in the TT are apparently arbitrary. There are three examples of non-standard word order in the TT sample passage, and only one of them overlaps with a non-inversion in the Swedish text. This lack of consistency is in keeping with Thompson’s stated aim of being inconsistent with the errors he used in his translation, but it puts Thompson’s text at odds with Khemiri’s consistent use of non-inversion. Additionally, it does not share the same frame of reference with Khemiri’s errors. Of course, this is no fault of Thompson’s. It is difficult to imagine a translation strategy that would mimic the effect of Swedish non-inversion in English, partly because of the connotations surrounding this non-standard syntax in Swedish. These connotations derive from the

fact that inversion is a grammatical feature that occurs in few languages apart from Swedish, meaning that non-inverted word order, in situations where inversion is called for, is a common feature of learner Swedish, due to it being difficult to acquire (Ganuza 2011, 91). Non-standard non-inversion is also one of the features of MU which has attracted particular attention in the media. As this feature is attributable to the structures of Swedish, a direct equivalent does not exist in English. However, my criticism of Thompson's translation here refers not to the lack of linguistic, but more to the lack of systematicity about Thompson's approach. The relatively consistent use in the ST of non-inversion creates a very specific sense of voice for Halim – as a character, he has chosen to foreground a particular feature in his writing. In my interpretation at least, this is a technique that Khemiri has intentionally employed. Given the prominence this technique achieved in Sweden, I would argue that the translator would do well to find a technique that mimicked a comparable effect with similar consistency.

#### Section 8.1.4 Missing articles/conjunctions/declensions

This type of non-standard feature occurs much less frequently in the English than it does in the Swedish version of the sample passage. This is the case throughout the text – Thompson's translation only occasionally replicates Khemiri's omissions. An example of the kind of omissions I am talking about is the following sentence: "Dalanda kan allt om arabernas historia och det är hon som har *berättat det* är vi som har *bäst* filosofer och *smartast* matematiker och *grymmast* krigare" (lines 8-10). This sentence features two different types of omission: conjunction (some har *berättat* [att] *det*); and declension (*bäst*[a] filosofer). In the English version of this passage: "Dalanda knows everything about the history of the Arabs and **she it is** who has told about that we have *best* philosophers and *smartest* mathematicians and *fiercest* warriors" (lines 7-9), Thompson has reproduced the staccato effect of the omitted declensions by omitting the definite article (we have [the] *best* philosophers), but does not replicate the missing 'att', instead choosing to insert two other non-standard elements: an alternative word order "**she it is**", and a phrase that seems to be a literal translation of the Standard Swedish phrase 'berättat om att', "told about that", despite the fact that this phrase is expressed differently in the Swedish. Once again, Thompson would appear to be using a

compensatory strategy, as well as replacement (cf. Section 6.3.2) in order to create the same level of ‘wrong-ness’.

### Section 8.1.5 General idiolectal Halim-isms

These features occur only twice in this excerpt, although similar not-quite-right expressions are used frequently throughout the text. I have marked them out separately from say, ‘naïve/foreign mistakes’ as I feel they do not necessarily represent ‘errors’ or alternative usages, but rather idiosyncratic expressions matching Halim’s personality. In this excerpt, Thompson has reproduced them in the TT, in such a way as to capture the ‘zany’ impression they are meant to give in the ST.

### Section 8.1.6 Other key issues

Another translation choice worth noting is the choice of the word ‘wog’ to translate ‘blatte’, a racial slur that has, to some extent, been re-appropriated by the people to whom it was formerly applied. The term has no direct translation in English, but I have seen it translated as ‘wog’ a number of times, for instance by Behschnitt: “the identity of the ‘blatte’, a denomination for immigrants and their descendants comparable to the terms *beur* in France, *Kanake* in Germany, or *wog* in Britain” (Behschnitt 2013, 177), and Leonard: “blatte is a general-purpose denigration of non-White Swedes, which in the process of being reclaimed by those to whom it was originally applied. American English lacks a close parallel; in Britain ‘wog’ is comparable” (Leonard 2006, 8, footnote 13). So, it seems as though ‘wog’ is viewed as acceptable as a translation of ‘blatte’ in some circles. Despite this, I find it lacking for a number of reasons. The first is that ‘wog’ is a very outdated term. I personally have never heard it used (I have heard *blatte* used a number of times in Sweden). Secondly, I am not aware that ‘wog’ has ever been reclaimed by those to whom it was applied, at least not in the UK. In my own translation work, I have occasionally translated *blatte* with the term ‘nigger’, but ultimately feel that its connection with slavery and express reference to blackness make it unsuitable. In such a case as this, where no translation is available, it seems reasonable to me to use a combination of transference – directly loaning the Swedish term – with some contextualising. This may seem a minor point to argue, but as a translator, my opinion is that getting the correct ‘feel’ for any racial slurs (and, additionally, swearwords) is essential to capturing the voice of the ST.

## Section 8.1.7 Discussion

This translation is essentially doing something subtly, yet significantly different to the ST. The TT creates a character who sounds semi-competent in the language. The ST depicts a figure who may be muddled, but is self-assured in combining his own inventions with elements of the slang he has picked up from the suburb where he once lived. The narrator/protagonist playfully contorts the language he writes in to create an identity for himself that stands in contrast to the ‘*svenne*’ (slang term for Swede – cf. *blatte*) identity he so detests. Thompson does refer to this playfulness, and states that he sought to reproduce it, but the overall impression of the TT is that the narrator is not completely in control of the game he is playing.

The translator is not necessarily able to replicate non-standard features with direct equivalents, or even indirect equivalents, in the same places in the text, and in the same quantity. This may be due to the different possibilities and conventions of the two languages, or it may be due to factors implicit in the translation process – time restrictions, for example. Such ‘staggered’ equivalence is exactly the kind of compensation discussed in Section 6.3.1, and as such, is a very useful tool for the translator, and is something Thompson makes much use of here.

As stated previously, this translation was commissioned by a literary agent to be marketed to English-language publishers, and was subsequently published in *Swedish Book Review* (*SBR*). The fact that this was commissioned as a marketing sample may mean that the non-standard language which earned the text so much attention and praise in Sweden was foregrounded, in order to sell the text on the basis of its unique style and provocative, topical content. The fact that the sample was then published in *SBR*, a not-for-profit outlet predominantly funded by the Swedish Arts Council may have meant that the translator was allowed greater creative freedom, whereas a more commercially-minded editor might have requested the text’s idiosyncrasies be standardised. While *SBR* does edit texts for publication, it is also keen to give translators creative free rein, as evidenced by the comments of Sarah Death, the editor at the time of writing, here:

With an experienced translator like Laurie [Thompson] it is a bit different [to editing an inexperienced translator’s contributions] – though I still comment on anything I am uneasy about. With the style of *Ett öga rött* being so different I do remember that we had some communication about it, and I seem to think I had the Swedish to refer

to as well – possibly a copy of the book was here temporarily, perhaps seeking a reviewer.

(Sarah Death, personal correspondence 2014)

Death, who was also editor at the time Thompson's translation was published, is clearly keen to provide as free a space as possible for translators, meaning that Thompson had the opportunity to experiment with the text in a way he might not have done had the translation been commissioned by a commercial publisher. Again, Death's comments support this theory – indeed, it seems that the uniqueness of the text was a major positive aspect:

We certainly didn't try to play down its experimental language or domesticate it for our readership. Norstedts were very excited because they felt it was the thing they had been waiting for, modern Sweden's first homegrown 'invandrarroman', and we presented it in similar fashion when talking to people, I think. I encouraged Laurie to write the introduction about how he tackled the unique language, as well.

(ibid.)

It seems that the approach was successful, to a certain extent (the novel was never bought by an English language publisher):

You may be interested to know, by the way, that in terms of number of enquiries to the editor about SBR items (we are talking about times when people still wanted things on paper and our website was not so developed), *Ett öga rött* has been second only to various Astrid Lindgren [renowned Swedish children's author] articles and translations over the years of my tenure as editor.

(ibid.)

These considerations are indicative of how the intentions behind the commissioning of a text can impact on the translation outcome, and determine whether non-standard language is replicated in the translation process, even in cases where the text's stylistic traits are essential for readers' understanding.

## Section 8.2 Montecore

Khemiri's second novel, *Montecore*, was published in the USA in an English translation by Rachel Willson-Broyles. Willson-Broyles was commissioned to do the translation on the basis of a translation 'beauty contest' staged by Khemiri's Swedish agents (Sarah Death, personal correspondence). I have not found much information about Willson-Broyles' translation strategies with this novel, although she did state in an email conversation that Khemiri had been very helpful during the process, answering the many questions she had about whether certain expressions were really words in

Swedish, or whether they were ‘Khemiri-isms’, and if so, what the root of the word was. The translation attempts to retain the varied voices of the source text, replicating Kadir’s French/Latinate stylisations, the Arabic-Swedish code-switching of the Khemiri family’s home life, and Jonas’s teenage experiments in slang (see Section 4.2.5 for more detailed analysis of the Swedish text). To analyse this more closely, I have selected one very short and two longer passages from the text for comparison.

### Section 8.2.1 Kadir’s idiosyncratic multilingualism

Table 2 (Key)	
Calibri <u>Wiggle underline</u>	Latinate-inspired words <u>General idiolectal Kadir-isms</u>

Line	
1	<p><b>Divinate</b> who is writing you these phrases? It is KADIR who is <u>snapping the keys!!!!</u> Your father’s most <b>antique</b> friend! You <b>memorize</b> me, right? My <u>hope is for your eagerly bobbing head</u>. The year <b>was numbered</b> 1986 when I <b>afflicted</b> you in Stockholm: your smiling mother, your <u>newly landed</u> small brothers, your proud father with his <u>fresh</u> photo studio. And you who assisted your father’s and my <u>learnings</u> in the Swedish language. Do you <b>memorize</b> our <u>rules of grammar?</u> At that time you were a corpulent, linguistically gifted boy with a well-developed appetite for ice cream and Pez candy. Now</p> <p>10 you are suddenly an <b>erected</b> man who shall soon publish his <b>premiere novel!</b> <u>Praise my gigantic congratulations!</u> Oh, <u>time ticks quickly</u> when one has <u>humour</u>, no?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Khemiri 2011, 3)</p>
1	<p><b>Devinera</b> vem som skriver dig dessa fraser? Det är KADIR som <u>knappar tangenterna!!!!</u> Din fars mest <b>antika</b> vän! Du <b>memorerar</b> väl mig? <u>Min förhoppning är ditt ivrigt guppande huvud</u>. Året <b>numrerades</b> till 1986 när jag <b>visiterade</b> er i Stockholm: Din leende mor, dina <u>nynedkomna</u> småbröder, din stolta far med sin <u>färska</u> fotostudio. Och så du som assisterade mig och din fars <u>lärdomar</u> i det svenska språket. <b>Memorerar</b></p> <p>5</p>

10	<p>du våra språkregler? Då var du en korpulent språkbegåvad pojke med välvuxen aptit på glassar och Pez-godisar: nu är du plötsligt en <b>erigerad</b> man som snart ska <b>publicera</b> sin <b>premiärroman!</b> <u>Prisa mina gigantiska gratulationer!</u> Ack, tiden tickar snabbt när man har humor, inte sant?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Khemiri 2006, 13)</p>
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This section of the novel is composed of letters sent to Jonas Khemiri, a fictional version of the author, by his father's old friend Kadir. The letters are ostensibly written in a stylised version of Swedish which bears the traces of Kadir's French and Arabic-speaking background. These traces consist primarily of the substitution of words with their Latinate equivalents – some of which exist in Swedish and others of which are invented by Khemiri. Thus, the Swedish 'minnas' (to remember) becomes 'memorera' (line 2). Although many of these words exist in Swedish, they are either used infrequently, belong in different registers, or have slightly different meanings (as with 'memorera', which means 'to memorise', but is used instead of 'minnas' by Kadir). Others, such as 'devinera' (line 1) (Fr. 'deviner' to guess/divine), are not standard forms in Swedish, but are likely to be decipherable to a Swedish reader due to their similarity to English and French equivalents. Generally in Swedish, '-era' forms of verbs are part of a more formal register, as attested to by Olle Josephson, Professor of Scandinavian Studies at Stockholm University: "Allmänt sett ger romansk morfologi fortfarande ett något mer främmande, lärt, formellt intryck än germansk morfologi, även om det inte gäller för varje ord. Det här är så grundläggande att det ofta inte ens nämns i ordbildningsläror"<sup>107</sup> (Olle Josephson, personal correspondence 2014). In Kadir's language in the text, there are frequent examples of novel formulations and usages commensurate with a highly competent, but not native, speaker's 'freedom' to innovate in their acquired language. The overall effect is one of exaggerated articulacy and playful, slightly clumsy formality.

The translation uses the strategy of replacement to reproduce a number of these features. As can be seen above, there are a large number of equivalent Latinate forms

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<sup>107</sup> "Generally, Latinate morphology still gives a somewhat more foreign, educated, formal impression than Germanic morphology, even if that's not the case for every word. This is so fundamental that it's often not even mentioned in texts on morphology."

corresponding to those in the Swedish – ‘divinate’ (line 1), ‘memorize’ (line 2), etc., which achieve the same overall effect of a slightly affected air of formality.

Another feature of Kadir’s letter-writing style is the use of slightly ‘odd’ formulations, something that is reproduced in the translation. Consider line 3(3) in the above passage. Here, ‘förohoppning’ and ‘hope’ are used in an unconventional way. This underlines Kadir’s position as relatively, but not fully, competent in the conventions of Standard Swedish.

Willson-Broyles has also preserved a great deal of the rhythm of the text, as well as the sounds of the words. This is partly because both the Swedish and the English text use many words derived from both French and Latin, and these words occupy a similar register, and are used with a similar frequency, in both languages. This means that the Swedish word ‘erigerad’ (line 8) can become ‘erected’ (line 10) thereby maintaining the aural quality of the word without losing the tone of the register or the effect created by this unusual word choice. In the same sentence, a number of alliterative features are preserved, with “snart ska” becoming “shall soon”, and “publicera sin premiärroman” becoming “publish his premiere novel”. A stylistic change is made, as ‘publicera’, a rather infrequently used alternative to ‘ge ut’, is translated with the very common English ‘publish’, which has no particular stylistic connotations. Overall, the translation of this passage reproduces the idiosyncrasies of Kadir’s voice, albeit with a few standardising tendencies, which the translator attempts to compensate for elsewhere in the passage, for instance in the translation of the standard ‘språkregler’ (line 7) with the idiosyncratic ‘rules of grammar’ (lines 7 and 8).

### Section 8.2.2 Blatte revolutionaries

Let’s turn to another section and another facet of the novel’s playful treatment of language: the voices of the teenage Jonas and his friends. An interesting example is the following passage, in which the young Jonas attempts to express his frustration through a partially-translated rendition of US rappers N.W.A.’s track ‘Fuck tha Police’:

“[...] Fuck tha police coming straight from the underground a young blatte got it bad cause I’m brown [...]”

(Khemiri 2006, 260)



“[...] Fuck tha police coming straight from the underground a young *blatte* got it bad cause I’m brown [...]”

(Khemiri 2011, 221, orig. emphasis)

This passage is written in English in the ST, directly quoting N.W.A.’s lyrics, but if we compare it with the track’s original lyrics in English, we see a subtle translation occurring in Khemiri’s quotation:

“[...] Fuck tha police coming straight from the underground a young *nigga* got it bad cause I’m brown [...]”

(N.W.A. 1988, my emphasis)

In Khemiri’s text, Jonas modifies the lyrics by replacing N.W.A.’s ‘nigga’ with ‘*blatte*’, thereby localising and personalising the track’s anti-establishment, anti-racist message. In using the Swedish term *blatte*, Khemiri is inserting a translation into the ST, one that has specific symbolic meaning for the character Jonas’s utterance, and for Khemiri’s novel as a whole. The translator’s decision to retain, but italicise, the word ‘*blatte*’ in this passage has the potential to create an awareness in the reader of the differing experience reflected in Jonas’s personalisation of N.W.A.’s lyrics. The effect of retaining the Swedish word is heightened by the fact that the lines are in English in the source text, a fact that will be apparent to the reader, either through familiarity with this well-known rap, or through the explicit reference to N.W.A. and the rap’s title in Khemiri’s text.

### Section 8.2.3 Performing contemporary urban vernaculars

Another instance of the influence of multilingualism can be seen in the following passage, in the speech of Jonas’s teenage friends:

Table 3 key	
<b>Broadway</b>	<b>Orthographic stylisation</b>
Courier New	MEU/youth slang vocab
<b>Bold</b>	<b>Arabic influence</b>
<i>Bradley Hand</i>	<i>Alternative conjugation</i>
<b>Berlin Sans</b>	<b>Word order</b>

Line	
1	And Imran starts the contest by saying: By the way I <i>have</i> Melinda’s mom over this morning and it was nice because she swallowed my sperm like yogurt because she was crazy hungry, bro. And Patrik

5	who right away wants to show that he's learned the game says: Sure, but your mum was at my house last weekend and she was so fat I swear she couldn't get out of the apartment [...]
10	And you say: <b>Tuskut</b> because ALL your moms are so fat they have their own area codes!
	(Khemiri 2011, 233)
1	Och Imran startar tävlingen genom att säga: Förresten jag hade Melindas mamma på besök i morse och det var nice för hon svalde min sperma som filmjolk för hon var fett svulten jao. Och Patrik som direkt vill visa att han lärt sig spelet säger: Visst men din mamma var <b>chos</b> mig i <b>chelgen</b> och hon var så fet jag <b>thvär</b> hon kunde inte komma ur lägenheten [...] och du säger: <b>Tuskut</b> för ALLA era mammor är så feta dom har egna riktnummer!
5	
	(Khemiri 2006, 274)

Although there are not a great number of examples for comparison here, the passage presents two problems for the translator. One is Imran's use of MEU-styled slang – “fett svulten jao” (line 4), which Willson-Broyles has translated as: “crazy hungry, bro” (line 4), arguably an odd choice given the fact that ‘fett’ and ‘jao’ are both loosely derived from the American English slang terms ‘phat’ and ‘yo’. It must be said that the meaning of ‘phat’ does not coincide with the meaning of ‘fett’ in this instance, but rather with the word's alternative usage as a positive adjective: something can be described as being ‘fett’ or ‘phat’, meaning that it is good, or cool. With this in mind, the decision to use the word ‘crazy’ instead is not illogical. On the other hand, ‘yo’ seems to be an entirely fitting translation for the term ‘jao’, and it is unclear why ‘bro’ was selected instead.

The second interesting stylistic feature here is when Patrick, who one day spontaneously claims to have a Chilean father, starts adding stereotypically Spanish features to his Swedish: a Spanish ‘j’ sound for ‘h’, indicated in the ST by a ‘ch’, as in “**chos** mig i **chelgen**” (line 6) and a lisping ‘th’ for ‘s’ “**thvär**” (line 7). The translation has

standardised these stylised spellings (lines 6-7), choosing not to reproduce Patrick's pronunciation, which is an expression of Patrick's desire to associate himself with a 'blatte' identity through his Chilean father. In both the ST and the TT, explicit reference is made to Patrick's stylistic affectation:

Patrick har lärt sig hur man trashtalkar motståndares mammor och ersatt sina överklass-i:n med trovärdig spansk brytning där h uttalas ch och s uttalas th.

(Khemiri 2006, 267)

Patrick has learned how to trash-talk the mothers of opponents and replaced his upper-class *i* with a believable Spanish accent where *h* is pronounced *ch* and *s* is pronounced *th*.

(Khemiri 2011, 227, orig. emphasis).

However, the lack of visual representation means that some of the comic effect of his doing so is lost. It is not clear why the decision to omit this orthographic representation of Patrick's vocal stylisations was made, but it seems that it would have been feasible to reproduce such widely-acknowledged stereotypical features in the TL. Patrick also uses the non-standard non-inversion of subject and verb so frequent in *Ett öga rött*: "hon **kunde inte** komma" (line 7). This feature is not reproduced in the TT. The effect of not reproducing these features is a tendency towards standardisation that elides the author's attempts to reproduce the comic effects of the character's speech orthographically. However, the translator compensates for this by inserting other non-standard features such as non-standard agreement of 'to have', where the Swedish uses standard 'hade' in: "Förresten jag hade Melindas" (line 2) and "By the way I *have* Melinda's" (line 2). It is not clear whether the translator has used this non-standard form to represent a specific function of non-standard American English syntax, but it arguably has a comparable effect to Khemiri's use of non-inversion, even though it lacks the latter form's recognisability (cf. Section 1.1.3)

### Section 8.3 Invasion!

Turning to Khemiri's 2008 play *Invasion!*, an additional issue arises – that of translation into different Englishes. *Invasion!* has been performed in, among other places, London, New York and Chicago, and the UK and US performances were staged using two different translations.

The first translation was commissioned as part of the Theatre Cafes series in 2008. The translator was Frank Perry, an experienced, UK-based translator of prose and drama from Swedish into English. He worked from the original Swedish script and developed his translation in collaboration with the company and its director (Frank Perry, personal correspondence 2011). The translation was published by Oberon Books. The second translation is by Rachel Willson-Broyles, and was commissioned in connection with a series of performances by The Play Company in New York in 2011 (Zinoman 2011). The translator worked from the published Swedish text (Rachel Willson-Broyles, personal correspondence 2014), and developed the play through a series of workshops and discussions with the company and director staging the play. The decision was made to re-locate the action to New York and adapt some of the content to that setting.

An important element to bear in mind when analysing this text is the geographical specificity of the translations, resulting from what Bassnett-McGuire calls the “dialectical relationship” between text and performance (Bassnett-McGuire 1985, 87). This play refers to itself specifically as a performance from the very outset by having members of the cast seated in the audience, disrupting the performance-within-a-performance of Almqvist’s *Signora Luna*, and talking about their experience of theatre-going. Indeed, this part must be updated for each venue, even within the same location/city, because it refers directly to features of the performance space.

On the other hand, in 2008 the Swedish version of the play text was published, and designed to be read, as part of a collection of Khemiri’s recent work. Publication in this setting gives the work the status of self-contained written artefact, similar to what Bassnett-McGuire describes when she states that: “once it is written, the play acquires a solidity and prominence [...] treated as a literary text and read as such” (ibid., 88), thereby risking the loss of recognition of the text-performance dialectic. In subsequently using this edition for her translation, Willson-Broyles ran the risk of such a loss of recognition. However, in working with the theatre group producing the play, any such loss could have been counteracted.

One instance where this came in useful is in a passage where a character is referred to as speaking a foreign language, and being interpreted onstage, by an extremely unreliable interpreter who has an agenda all of their own. The Swedish version states merely:

ÄPPELPLOCKARENS repliker på ett främmande språk (arabiska/persiska) och tolkas till svenska av TOLKEN.<sup>108</sup>

(Khemiri 2008b, 114)

The text to be spoken in that language is printed in Swedish. In the version of the translation published and performed in the UK, Persian is suggested:

*All of A's lines are said in PERSIAN (apart from the song-texts in English of course [a reference to the ABB A texts referred to in the scene]) and interpreted into English by C.*

(Khemiri 2008a, 42, orig. emphasis)

The text is given in English. In the copy I have of the version published and performed in the US (the publisher's draft manuscript of a script that was later published), the following stage directions are given:

In the next section, all of the APPLE PICKER's lines are in a foreign language (Arabic) and are translated into English by the INTERPRETER.

(Khemiri 2012)

The text of the Apple Picker's lines is itself written in an English transliteration of an Arabic translation. I wondered why this was the case, and Willson-Broyles explained that:

In the Swedish version, as it was/is performed, they use whichever foreign language the actor speaks (and it was up to the actor to just say it in that language. I think the assumption is that the actor is fluent in another language), but they hired a second translator to translate those lines into Arabic for the NYC production and the actor learned phonetically--so it got published that way. When they performed it in Chicago, I think they used another language entirely (possibly Hindi?) Or at least they started out that way... I don't remember if they ended up switching to Arabic.

(Rachel Willson-Broyles, personal correspondence 2014)

### Section 8.3.1 Relocations and local symbolisms

The relocation, or adaptation of a play is sometimes undertaken in order to encourage the audience's suspension of disbelief, and to make it more appropriate to a spoken-word setting where comprehension must be immediate and audiences are unlikely to have the opportunity or the inclination to look things up. Relocating a play to the country – or even city, in the case of *Invasion!* – where the play is being staged has the potential to make it feel familiar, to remove the difficulties discussed in Section 6.3.2 relating to the audience's or reader's rejection of local language in a non-local narrative.

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<sup>108</sup> For translation, see below.

It also has the potential to highlight the ‘universal’ message of a text, making it apply in a new context. An example of this is the following passage, in which a first-time theatregoer relates an experience he had before the start of the show:

Table 4		
Line		
1  4	D (Kalil)	And to that old slag in the entrance what was like ( <i>He imitates her accent.</i> ) ‘So all of <b>Hackney’s</b> here tonight then, darling’ when you saw us, don’t go thinking we didn’t hear you!  (Khemiri 2008a, 17)
1  3	Arvind Yousef	A-a-and to that bitch out in the hall who said something like ...  ( <i>Imitating the lady</i> ) She called you “ <b>Slumdog Millionaire...</b> ?” don’t think we didn’t hear!  (Khemiri 2012, 5–6)
1  4	B/Arvind  D/Yousef	O-o-och till den biatchen ute i hallen som sa något typ ...  ( <i>härmer tanten</i> ) “Hela <b>Rinkeby</b> är visst här ...” när du såg oss, tro inte vi inte hörde!  (Khemiri 2008b, 80)

Perry has made the decision to recontextualise Rinkeby (see Section 2.1.1). In his version, Rinkeby becomes Hackney, one of the locations where the MLE studies were carried out (See Section 2.2.3). This decision reflects the relative comparability of the two areas in terms of linguistic and ethnic diversity, socio-economic factors and so on, as well as the fact that Perry lived in Hackney at the time he was working on the translation. He explained how he used his own experience of the area as inspiration for his translation:

I was much more on my own with the multi-ethnic vernacular: I used to listen very acutely to conversations between young people on buses crossing Hackney and this provided me with a lot of ideas but not many concrete solutions [...] I did not look at other examples of vernacular translation while working on *INVASION* [...] I did consult my godson who was then in his early twenties and got some useful hints and tips about ‘multi-ethnic vernacular’.

(Frank Perry, personal correspondence 2011).

The fact that the American English version has elected to reference the film *Slumdog Millionaire* – thus creating an image of someone who has risen rapidly from a life on the streets to a high socio-economic bracket, indicates a resistance to locating the translation too much in a US setting, or in New York in particular. This is despite the fact that there are otherwise a large number of references to New York in the TT (cf. Khemiri 2012, 8, 9)

### Section 8.3.2 American English and contemporary urban vernaculars

I would like to look in more depth at a passage of dialogue featuring stylised youth slang. The ST encompasses a number of American English slang terms, some of which have been transposed directly into the English texts and others of which have been replaced with alternative terms.

Table 5 Key	
Calibri	English/American English influence on Swedish
<b>Broadway</b>	<b>Orthographic stylisation</b>
Courier New	MEU/youth slang vocab

Line		
1	D(Yousef):	‘Ey, that play last night... Senora [sic] Luna by Almqvist. You gotta admit it was mad <i>wack!</i> ’
	B:	And everyone’s like sure. Course it was...
	D:	‘I mean it, admit it was seriously fucked up!’
5	B:	Sure.
	D:	‘Come on, bruv, admit it sucked elephant balls’  (Khemiri 2008a, 18)
1	D/Yousef	Hey listen, that play yesterday, Señorita [sic] Luna by that Almqvist guy. Wasn’t it <b>maaaaaad</b> wack!
	B/Arvind	And everyone just. Yeah totally.
	D/Yousef	Wasn’t it mighty mighty shit!
5	B/Arvind	Sure.

	D/Yousef	Bro, it sucked elephant balls, am I right? (Khemiri 2012, 6)
1	D/Yousef	Hörrni den där pjäsen igår ... Señorita [sic] Luna av han Almqvist. Erkänn var <b>maaaaad wack!</b>
	B/Arvind	Och alla bara visst. Såklart ...
	D/Yousef	Erkänn den var <b>mighty mighty</b> keff!
5	B/Arvind	Visst.
	D/Yousef	Erkänn brushan, den sög elefantballish! (Khemiri 2008b, 82)

Both translators have captured the informality of Khemiri's text, but they have done so in slightly different ways. Willson-Broyles has stayed closer to the letter of the ST, replicating the expressive spelling and use of English words, e.g.: “**maaaaad**” (line 2) and “mighty mighty” (line 4), whereas Perry's version has removed or de-emphasised these. Additionally, Perry's version italicises “wack” (line 2), whether to indicate emphasis or to indicate that it is an American English word that has been transposed from the ST. The allegro spelling of ‘gotta’ (line 2) in Perry's text makes up for this to some extent, or at least indicates to the actors that they should emphasise the informality of the passage.

Both texts have also attempted to capture the CUV character of the ST, although I would argue that here, they have been less successful. The last line: “Erkänn brushan, den sög elefantballish!” (line 6) is a case in point. Both texts have found a suitable replacement for ‘brushan’, with ‘bruv’ and ‘bro’ both having much the same function as indicators of male camaraderie. However, the loss of the expressivity of the line-final ‘elefantballish!’ in both translations’ standardisations to ‘elephant balls’ removes that marker of *MU* speech noted in The Latin Kings lyrics, the ‘-ish’ ending. While it might be argued that ‘elephant balls’ is expressive enough in its own right, the lack of replacement or compensation for the ST's ‘-ish’ ending means that its extra layer of comedy is lost.



## Section 8.4 Snabba Cash

Jens Lapidus’s 2006 novel *Snabba Cash* is a thriller, a major bestseller in Sweden. It was adapted into a film in Sweden, the US and UK release of which was presented by Martin Scorsese (*EASY MONEY UK TRAILER* 2013), and the book was marketed as a hard-boiled crime drama, both in Sweden and in its English translation (first published in the US in 2011). As is characteristic with thrillers, the language of the text drives the plot and sustains its pace, rather than being the main focus of attention within the novel. This is true both of the ST and the TT. In order to achieve this, the translator, Astri von Arbin Ahlander, has sought to use language typical of US urban crime thrillers.

Expectations of language vary according to text-type. For instance, the use in *Easy Money* of US slang to translate Jorge’s conversation with a fellow prison inmate in *Snabba Cash* is less likely to jar with English-language readers because the novel builds on an American tradition of hard-boiled thrillers where such language is common. Lapidus himself has said that his book was an attempt to create a new genre in Swedish crime writing, one inspired by the clipped style and character-driven plots of James Ellroy’s novels (Carlberg 2008). Ellroy’s style is famously inflected with “heightened pastiche of jazz slang, cop patois, creative profanity and drug vernacular” (Timberg 2008), and Lapidus’s prose is clearly influenced by this in his use of Swedish. The familiarity of such language in the very popular genre of US thrillers can be seen as facilitating the use of comparable language in Swedish - making it more acceptable to use suburban Stockholm slang, for instance.

Table 6 Key	
<u>Underline</u>	<u>Swedish influence/foreignisation</u>
Courier New	MEU/youth slang vocab
<u>Double underline</u>	<u>localisation</u>
<b>Berlin Sans</b>	<b>word order</b>
<i>Bradley Hand</i>	<i>missing pronoun/grammatical agreement/alternative</i>
	<i>conjugation</i>
<i>Italic</i>	<i>missing verb</i>

Line	
1	Jorge silently agreed: totally <u>loco</u> to only dye your hair. Him, he was going to play it safe. He said, “ <i>Scad</i> nothing to lose. Bet he thought, Fuck, even if they get me, I won’t get more months. They

<p>5</p> <p>10</p>	<p>won't add to seven and a half.”</p> <p>“Playa almost made it. <i>Got</i> him in Helsingborg.”</p> <p>“Pushing the exit?”</p> <p>“Parently. Checked into a hotel with a fake name. When the Five-Oh <u>plucked</u> him, playa had a fake passport. Coulda worked. First to Denmark, then on. Homeboy probably got a stash somewhere. But somebody snitched. Tipped the Five-Oh off where he <i>be</i>. Probably somebody saw him at the bars.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Lapidus 2012, 19)</p>
<p>1</p> <p>5</p> <p>10</p>	<p>Jorge höll med för sig själv: fett klantish att endast färga håret. Själv skulle han spela säkrare än så. Han sa: “Han hade inget att losa. Han tänkte nog: va fan, även om de tar mig så får jag inte fler månader för det. De plussar inte på mer på sju och ett halvt.”</p> <p>“Men <i>han på</i> väg att lyckas. De tog <i>han</i> i Helsingborg.”</p> <p>“Var han på väg att sticka då?”</p> <p>“Tydligen. Han hade tagit in på hotell i falskt namn. När <i>aina plocka han</i>, <b>han hade</b> falskt pass på sig. Hade kunnat funka. Först dra till Denmark och sen vidare. Snubben har säkert stoppat under en del nånstans. Men nån golade. Nån tipsade <i>aina</i> var han var. Säkert nån som sett honom på krogen.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Lapidus 2009)</p>

### Section 8.4.1 Compensation as overarching strategy

In the above excerpt from the English translation of Jens Lapidus’ 2006 novel *Snabba Cash* (Easy Money), the translator von Arbin Ahlander seeks to reproduce the ST’s stylised prison parlance by replacement into an equivalent English language register – a tightly clipped American English that uses slang reminiscent of the television series *The Wire*. Von Arbin Ahlander’s translation does not seek direct word-for-word equivalences, instead using the strategy of compensation, ‘relocating’ the text linguistically (although it very definitely remains set in Stockholm) with roughly equivalent stylisations, rather than simply standardising. This compensation occurs on a sentence-by-sentence, or even section-by-section level, to reproduce the ‘feel’ of each part of the text rather than the specific words used in it. This sometimes means altering

the content slightly, as in line 5, where: “Men *han på väg att lyckas*” (But he about to make it) becomes “Playa almost made it”. The stylistic choice to omit the verb ‘vara’ from “han [var] på väg” is exchanged for the replacement of the pronoun ‘he’ with the stylised term of address ‘Playa’. Similarly, the Standard Swedish “Var han på väg att sticka då?” (Was he about to get away then?) is replaced with the phrase “Pushing the exit?”, a phrase I have not been able to identify as belonging to any specific slang lexicon, but which fits with the punchy rhythm of the dialogue in this section and sounds like something one prison inmate might say to another. This compensation is also in evidence in the use of representation of non-standardness through allegro spellings like “Parently” (line 7) and “Coulda” (line 8) to translate standard “Tydligen” (line 7) and “Hade kunnat” (line 8). It appears the translator has looked for the most appropriate place to create a sense of non-standardness in the TT in order to make the TT do what the ST does as well as possible.

#### Section 8.4.2 Using local replacements for CUV features

The narrator of *Snabba Cash* frequently accents passages focusing on Jorge with Spanish words or phrases, with examples not featured in this excerpt including: “*numero uno*” (Lapidus 2009, 17) and “*adios*” (Lapidus 2009, 22). No Spanish words or phrases are used in the ST version of the current excerpt, but in the TT the translator has played on this ‘accenting’, using the connotations of Spanish code-switching in US English, to approximate the MU “fett klantish” of Jorge’s mental dialogue with “*loco*” (line 1).

#### Section 8.5 Conclusion

In his ‘Law of Growing Standardisation’, Toury states that “in translation, items tend to be selected on a level which is *lower* than the one where textual relations have been established in the source text” (Toury 2012, 305). This idea is in keeping with Englund Dimitrova’s model of centralisation (Englund Dimitrova 2004, cf. Section 6.3.5), where she applies the concept specifically to dialect translation. For her, the most central level equates to Toury’s lowest level, and is the level referred to by Määttä as ‘standard literary dialect’ (cf. Section 6.2.1). If we examine how this applies to the texts considered

in my translation analysis, we can see that there are actually relatively few cases in which there is a movement to the lower/more central levels. This could be because:

- ☞ In the case of the Khemiri texts at least, the non-standard literary dialect is relied on to convey meaning, as the characters' linguistic identities are a tool with which Khemiri questions essentialist assumptions of authenticity and prevailing power structures in Swedish society. Therefore, for the translator to fail to transpose the network of features making up these identities would be to lose a powerful means by which to convey one of Khemiri's main reasons for writing the texts in the first place.
- ☞ While the 'networks of features' used by Khemiri draw on existing repertoires in the source culture, Khemiri's way of using them is sufficiently playful and distant from the norms of their usage that the translator can be relatively free to create a corresponding network of features that draws on the repertoire of non-standard target language forms in such a way that they become *textemes*, to use Toury's term (cf. Section 6.1.1).
- ☞ In the case of *Snabba Cash*, the repertoire of non-standard language in the hard-boiled thriller genre in the US and the UK, both in novels and in film, could be said to reduce the resistance to using such a repertoire as a translating language. This is similar to what Venuti finds in the English translation of a Japanese thriller he discusses, the intertextuality of which, "far from simply domesticating the Japanese text, brings into sharp focus what is different about Miyabe's novel [translated in 1996 as *All She Was Worth*], its culture-specific themes" (Venuti 2008, 163). To some extent, *Snabba Cash* does this too, as attention is drawn through characters' language to their various ethnicities, and the way they interact with each other and with the society around them.

Federici takes issue with Halliday's assertion that: "we can translate different registers into a foreign language. We cannot translate different dialects: we can only mimic dialect variation" (Halliday 2002, 2:169). Indeed, Federici states, not only do we translate dialects, "we may even translate them with dialects or sociolects of the target language [...]" (Federici 2011, 10). On first reading this, I felt inclined to side with Halliday. It is possible to translate between registers of different languages because most languages have equivalent registers for the equivalent appropriate contexts of each register. However, dialects emerge in specific contexts, and I therefore reasoned that though a

dialect in one language may be comparable with a dialect in another, the geographical specificity of each dialect means that translators can do little more than signify the presence of dialect and attempt to replicate the connotations this presence produces. On further consideration, however, I have begun to think that this does actually constitute translation of the dialect. For what is translation, if not the replication of connotations and meanings in a new language? In fact, the evidence I have gathered from the texts analysed suggests that translators are succeeding in making the TL readers aware of the presence of dialect, or in this case, CUVs, in the ST. This means that what Morini calls the ST author's 'text act' is being performed in the TT, at least from the perspective of their language use.

In the translations I have looked at, it seems as though non-standard versions of the TL are used – in *Invasion!*, the action is sometimes relocated, but even when not, local CUVs are used. In *Montecore*, there is some movement towards the centre, as can be seen from the removal of non-standard orthography from Patrick's speech (see Section 8.2.3). However, this is the only major instance I could find – Kadir's writing style is more or less just as lexically and morphosyntactically non-standard in the TT as it is in the ST. In his translation of *Ett öga rött*, Thompson even seems to render the text *more* non-standard, rather than standardising it. However, in the case of both Kadir's style in *Montecore* and Halim's diary writing in *Ett öga rött*, the variants are strongly idiosyncratic, rather than belonging to a particular marked variety, even if Halim's style pays lip service to the *multietniskt ungdomsspråk* of Stockholm's suburbs. This means that the translator is comparatively free to play with language. Indeed, this linguistic play was one of the key features behind the critical and commercial success of both texts in Swedish. Federici argues that translators' creativity is key in translating non-standard literary dialect, and that linguistic play makes up a significant part of this creativity, as he reminds us that among all the theorising and balancing of political implications, when it comes to translating dialect, "there is a playful element well beyond the intellectual challenge" (Federici 2011, 12).

On the basis of the tendencies I have observed in my analyses here and in Chapter 7, it may be possible to return to my earlier discussion of an ethics of CUV translation, and begin to outline an ethical pathway translators can follow when working with CUVs. Translators are invited to treat this pathway in the spirit it is intended, i.e. as constructive suggestions and tips on 'best practice', based on the research conducted

into CUVs and their use in diverse texts that forms the basis of this study. These suggestions are as follows:

- ☞ A key stage in the translation of literature featuring CUVs is developing an understanding of the social and political meaning indexed in those language varieties in the SL and the TL.
- ☞ However, it is also important that the translator seeks to uncover what role CUVs play in the particular text they are working with – is it one of social critique? Aesthetics? Characterisation? A combination of these? Something else altogether? Different author intentions might require the translator to approach the text differently.
- ☞ In fact, a key consideration is that the text must be treated as a creative work, one in which the story and the style of the author are paramount, rather than as a social document. For instance, all representations of CUVs can be treated as primarily idiolectal – they are employed to facilitate characterisation and voice. Each character that uses CUVs might be using them differently. The same character (or narrator, etc.) might also use CUVs differently in different contexts, or may sometimes not use them at all. Care should be taken to avoid erasing this difference in the translation process.
- ☞ The translator should be aware of their own positionality – i.e. be conscious of their social position and their own preconceptions in relation to CUVs and the individuals or groups that speak to them. That said, the translator should not be hampered by this awareness, instead using it to challenge themselves to look deeper into the text.
- ☞ A sense of playfulness is important in the translation of CUVs, bearing in mind their roots as a playful and informal mode of expression, and the fact that the main route of codification has been through creative forms.
- ☞ Many of the translators I surveyed or spoke to adopted a range of strategies in their translation practice. This indicates that the best overall strategy for CUV translation may be to take a mix-and-match approach, combining any or all of the approaches discussed in Section 6.3, or those taken by respondents to the survey in Section 7.2. In addition, other approaches may be relevant to the text at hand. In short, the translator should be open and imaginative, and allow themselves as much freedom to explore the text's linguistic possibilities as is feasible within the remit of their particular translation brief or contract. It may

even be possible to see the translator's task as somehow akin to that of the rapper – taking the raw material of the ST, and the source cultural references, and undertaking an intermedial exploration of these where the final text takes on its own 'flow'.

## Conclusion

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In the course of this thesis, I have considered the different forms that contemporary urban vernaculars have taken in a variety of creative writing produced in Swedish and English. I have considered potential reasons for these differences, as well as some of the social implications of representing CUVs in creative work. In this conclusion, I will draw together some of the threads running through the thesis – and, in the process, I assemble the considerations mentioned above into a cohesive picture of CUV use in rap, literature and in translation. In addition to this, I will revisit and reflect on what I see as the ‘translation’ of CUVs from one form to another, in the sense of Roman Jakobson’s three forms of translation, which I introduced earlier in the thesis. Finally, I will address a few possibilities for further study in relation to the discussions covered in this thesis.

### Key themes

CUVs confer authenticity, but can also highlight the performance of authenticity

In the Introduction, I highlighted the importance of authenticity for the various contexts in which I have analysed the use of contemporary urban vernaculars. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I outlined the ways in which contemporary urban vernaculars have come to be associated with authenticity. This is in part because of their emergent, spoken character – they are the product of a social phenomenon that is ongoing (and is indeed unlikely to ever stop): the interaction between speakers of different languages in multilingual contact situations. However, as highlighted by Coupland’s comments on sociolinguists’ over-emphasis of the authenticity of spoken language (as discussed in the Introduction), even spontaneous utterances can perform meaning in a way that challenges understandings of what authenticity is. Rampton’s concept ‘crossing’ (cf. Sections 1.1.2 and 2.2.2), where individuals ‘cross’ into language varieties that are spoken in their community but not by them, frequently involved performing identities that contrasted with the speaker’s own personal experiences and identities.



This challenging of simplistic ideas about where authenticity exists, or even what it consists in, can be further seen in the mantra of rap and hip hop: 'keeping it real'. As discussed, the meaning of 'real' becomes fluid when considerations of rap's history come into play. In order to keep it real, the rapper has a choice: should they portray their own experiences in their local communities, or should they seek to align themselves with a 'realness' through form that has roots in hip hop's origins in a geographically, temporally and culturally far-away context in the US, or even in western Africa? As can be seen in the cases of The Latin Kings and other Swedish rappers, creating the appearance of authenticity can involve a great deal of posturing and projection. On the other hand, it can also mean taking the opportunity to make a wider public aware of a way of life and a way of using language that is all about their own experiences, creating something new in the process. In the UK, MCs such as JME have also made local music styles, local language, and local experiences the hallmark of their performance style, and in doing so, they have pushed this local language into new localities and new realms.

In literature, contemporary urban vernaculars have brought unwelcome claims of authenticity into public discourse, and the ethnicity of the author has exposed a tendency to view authenticity as being connected with a particular social status. As Astrid Trotzig found in her analysis of literary critics' comments:

I fråga om Leiva Wenger, Anyuru och Khemiri är det fråga om ämnesvalen eller miljöerna som får oss att tro att deras biografi ska garantera en högre grad av autenticitet, i detta fall om 'förorten' och främlingskapet sett i ett 'invandrarperspektiv', än man skulle anta om författaren varit etniskt svensk. Endast 'invandraren' kan skriva 'äkta invandrarlitteratur' om 'förorten'.<sup>109</sup>

(Trotzig 2004, 26)

In contrast to the authors Trotzig mentions, no 'higher level of authenticity' was demanded of the white, 'ethnically Swedish' author Jens Lapidus when he used contemporary urban vernaculars in his novel *Snabba Cash*, although he did feel the need to explain how he was able to appropriate contemporary urban vernaculars as a literary style. Likewise in the UK, authors such as Stephen Kelman and Tony White have

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<sup>109</sup> "In the case of Leiva Wenger, Anyuru and Khemiri it's the question of choice of subject or environment that makes us think their biography will guarantee a higher level of authenticity, in this case regarding 'the suburbs' and Otherness seen in an 'immigrant perspective', than would be expected if the author had been ethnically Swedish. Only the 'immigrant' can write 'real immigrant literature' about 'the suburbs'."

asserted their ‘right’ to use contemporary urban vernaculars in their texts by referring to the fact that they have lived in communities where CUVs were spoken, thereby validating their status as ‘non-authentic’ users.

But how does this authenticity relate to translation? Does the translator need to be ‘authentic’ in order to do a good job? What would such authenticity even entail? Based on the results of my survey, conversations with translators, text analyses and on the theoretical sources discussed, it is apparent that translators often go to quite some length to translate contemporary urban vernaculars sensitively. They use strategies such as listening to and documenting contemporary urban vernacular speech in action, or asking younger relatives (as discussed in Section 7.2.3). Both of these strategies show a desire to achieve authenticity in the text by finding out as much as possible about contemporary urban vernaculars. Many also work closely with the ST authors in order to find out about their texts, a strategy that might also be seen to be about achieving an understanding of the ‘true’ or authentic character of the ST language. The discussion of translator identity and positionality in Section 7.1.3 points to the fact that translators can rarely claim to be speakers of contemporary urban vernaculars themselves. Does this mean that the translations they produce are somehow less authentic? I would argue no – as discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter 6, translation is a creative, imaginative act, and as such any claim to authenticity would be misplaced. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, there is a strong argument to suggest that authenticity is a characteristic that can be performed or assumed, as counter-intuitive as this may seem. Indeed, as I argued throughout Part II, claims to authenticity in any text are questionable, and there is no more reason to expect authenticity in a translation than in any other context.

### CUVs carry place associations

In all the literary and rap texts discussed in Part II of this thesis, location and relationships to local conditions are integral to the text. Swedish rappers The Latin Kings, for instance, sought to represent their home environment in the Stockholm suburbs, to put them on the map and to raise awareness of conditions in marginalised locations. This suburban theme has also been a reason for, and a symptom of their use of contemporary urban vernaculars. They have been defined as ‘förrortsgrabbar’ (suburban kids) in public discourse, but they have also played upon this and shaped

their own distinctive, marketable identity. This is paralleled in the case of London-based rappers who musically, thematically and linguistically have drawn upon local influences to create a cohesive identity closely associated with urban London. But within this, some rappers have sought to foreground competing representations – questioning the simplistic association of a musical and lyrical form with a single way of life. In some cases, contemporary urban vernaculars have moved beyond the local environment to be picked up in other locations. In some such cases (see the example of Manchester-based grime MCs Virus Syndicate in the Conclusion of Chapter 3), this has happened as would-be rappers or rap fans have sought to emulate a particular linguistic identity associated with London in order to better fit the mould of the grime MC.

In literature, contemporary urban vernaculars have been used to elicit particular local associations, such as in Anyuru's *Det är bara gudarna some är nya* (Only the Gods are New), discussed in Sections 4.3.4 and 5.4, in which CUVs represent a personal affiliation with the environment and experiences of the suburbs. A similar phenomenon occurs in Tony White's *Foxy-T*, in which a community in Tower Hamlets in London is evoked through the characters' use of language.

This theme is especially important for thinking about the translation of CUVs, because traditionally, non-standard language that indexes a particular geographical location has been viewed as particularly difficult to translate. As Berman states: “a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists any direct translating into another vernacular” (Berman 2012, 250). And yet, as discussed in Chapter 8, a number of translators have effectively extracted the CUVs of their Swedish source texts, transplanting them into another vernacular and in the process creating parallels between the local social connotations of the two contemporary urban vernacular styles.

### CUVs carry ethnic associations, despite being non-ethnic in character

In Chapter 1, I discussed a number of sociolinguistic considerations with reference to contemporary urban vernaculars, including terminologies and social assumptions connected with these language practices. However, I did not explore the issues of ethnicity and race in any great detail. This is partly because studies such as the work by Cheshire, Kerswill and others into Multicultural London English have moved the focus of discussion away from ethnicity, as can be seen in the following quote:

We explore whether the nature of a speaker's friendship group is a key factor in the diffusion of linguistic innovations, and whether this interacts with ethnicity. We hypothesise that speakers draw on a range of linguistic forms that cannot necessarily, or at least can no longer, be attributed to specific ethnic groups.

(Cheshire et al. 2008, 1)

The sociolinguistic studies have shown that white British and Swedish people in CUV locations are involved in CUV practices as well as their darker-skinned or -haired fellow residents, and that the feature pools from which CUV speakers draw their linguistic material have become equally accessible to all local individuals, regardless of their own repertoire of multilingual competence. Despite this, in public discourse there is still an undeniable association of CUVs with ethnic minority communities. This is attested to by the contrasting reception of white and ethnic minority authors representing CUVs, as discussed in Section 4.3.

Likewise, although the only rappers I have discussed here would probably be classed as belonging to ethnic minorities<sup>110</sup>, many of the people involved in grime and hip hop have been white. In Sweden, many white, 'ethnically Swedish' rappers have become commercially successful (Petter is a prime example), but arguably not using CUVs. In the UK, the white protagonists of grime have tended to be DJs and producers, rather than MCs. It is unclear whether this is attributable to the prominence of CUVs in grime MCing, but a perception of white MCs as being less authentic in using CUVs cannot be ruled out altogether.

### CUVs as innovation and style/art form

While political and social dimensions of the use of contemporary urban vernaculars have been prominent in my discussions, creative and aesthetic considerations are also a key factor. The discussion of rappers' role in popularising and, to some extent, codifying CUV forms relies on the assumption that these rappers are doing something creative and innovative in bringing these forms into a new arena, or putting them to new use as a musical force. This assumption is borne out by the playfulness and

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<sup>110</sup> Although The Latin Kings were white and had South American backgrounds, they themselves have attested to the fact that their dark hair and skin has attracted racial or ethnic slurs. In Sweden, the distinction immigrant/Swede has perhaps been more salient in terms of ethnic distinctions than it has in the UK.

inventiveness of rap as a form, something made integral in the form of ‘flow’ (cf. Section 3.1.2). But as wordsmiths, rappers such as JME have taken this innovative spirit further, honing their use of contemporary urban vernaculars through other textual forms such as Twitter which come with their own creative restrictions and potentials.

I have also discussed the stylistic potential of contemporary urban vernaculars in the context of literary works, describing how Alejandro Leiva Wenger has interwoven narrative threads and voices in *Borta i tankar* (Lost in Thought) to portray a complex emotional state, in the process foregrounding the creative potential of CUVs to voice emotion (Section 4.2.5, 5.3). Similarly, Khemiri’s characterisation of the character Halim in *Ett öga rött* (One Eye Red) evokes the linguistic creativity that can go into shaping an identity, both within the imagination of the protagonist, and on the page. The skill with which this identity was shaped, and the resonance of CUV forms in this particular identity, are attested to by the reaction in the Swedish media (discussed in Section 4.4.9 and 5.5).

As discussed in Chapter 7, the translators who responded to my survey, while noting the political implications of non-standard language use in literary text, generally emphasised the fact that the language used in the text constituted an integral part of the text’s aesthetic make-up, and as such sought to reproduce this role in their translations. The fact that several respondents stated that they themselves had innovated in their translations is a testament to translators’ creativity in linguistic problem-solving. One consequence of the translation of texts featuring contemporary urban vernaculars is a greater awareness in other national/linguistic contexts of the creativity of contemporary urban vernaculars in the source culture. A possible consequence of this, in turn, could be a rise in the status of such forms in both the source and the target culture.

### CUVs as political statement

The discussions of contemporary urban vernaculars throughout this thesis have emphasised (perhaps even over-emphasised) the characterisation of creative CUV use as a mode of expression for marginalised groups, who through that mode of expression find a voice and recognition among wider society. It may or may not be the case that creative writers using CUVs have genuinely changed conditions for CUV communities, but it is certainly the case that these writers and rappers have brought them wider

recognition. In making contemporary urban vernaculars more visible, “de har vidgat den osynliga ramen som finns i varje samhälle, den som avgör vad som är värt och tillåtet att berätta, och hur”<sup>111</sup> (Anyuru 2004, 8), to use Anyuru’s words in praise of The Latin Kings. In my discussion I have sought to avoid a simple dichotomy between the status of rap and literary forms. This is due to the fact that I see no conflict in viewing them simply as different modes of creative writing, with rap differing from poetry in a comparable way to the difference between poetry and the novel – I see them as points on a scale of personal expression. However, I am aware that this is not necessarily the prevailing opinion, and that rap is very much outside of the canon of literature, even if there are many who would argue for its inclusion. In light of this, I acknowledge Behschnitt’s comments, discussed in Section 5.2, relating to the role literature had in bringing awareness of The Latin Kings and their brand of Swedish rap to the attention of a new “cultural circuit” (Behschnitt 2013, 188). I say acknowledge because as Strage states, they themselves had made progress in this direction with the release of their first album, which caught the attention of the mainstream papers and Sweden’s main state radio station (Strage 2001, 341). However, it may be possible that through literature, they have found new listeners, and brought knowledge of their experiences of life in the Swedish suburbs, and the language that emerged there, to an audience who would never consider listening to rap, let alone visiting Norra Botkyrka. This last point is an important consideration, as broadening awareness of marginalisation is one factor in countering it.

## CUV Translation – an Ethical Pathway

Following on from this last point, the possibilities of extending a message beyond one medium and into another can be further amplified by the extension of that message across geographic and linguistic borders. In this thesis, I have discussed the textual, formal and political configurations and implications of CUVs in rap, literature and in translation. It could be argued that the impact of CUV use as a political tool can only be enhanced by awareness of this phenomenon as one that crosses borders. Therefore, the translation of literature featuring representations of CUVs can be seen as an important

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<sup>111</sup> “They have expanded the invisible space that exists in every society, the one which determines what’s worth telling and allowed to be told, and how.”

tool in the increased visibility of CUV-speaking groups and individuals across cultural and linguistic borders. However, as discussed in Part 3, the translation of CUVs is fraught with difficulty. There is a strong possibility that the qualities that index features of the settings in which CUVs emerged, such as multilingualism, could be erased in the translation process. In order to overcome the challenge of CUV translation, I have proposed a number of steps that the translator dealing with texts featuring CUVs could bear in mind while working on the text or in preparing to do so. These steps are potentially applicable to any language pair.

I have outlined the steps and discussed them in more detail in Section 8.5, but I would like to briefly reiterate the main considerations here in summary. The translator should ensure that they are aware to some extent of the social and cultural background to CUVs, and aware of their own social status in relation to these issues and the consequences this may have for their linguistic choices. In spite of this, they should not assume that representations of CUVs only have a political and social function. CUVs can be as much a creative tool for experimenting with form, style, etc as a political tool for engaging with social issues. Consequently, the translator should endeavour to echo the potential creativity of the ST and be playful and explorative in finding solutions to the problems posed by the text. Such exploration might involve referring to representations of CUVs in a variety of media, including music, television, literature etc., both in the ST and the TT. This exploration should not necessarily lead the translator to copy the language use they see represented in these media, but should rather provide them with linguistic material from which to pick and choose. It could also provide the translator with the confidence needed to put forth their own novel solutions, or to create a voice that captures the voice of the ST and conveys the function of the CUVs in the ST without necessarily using TL CUVs at all. Each translator will, and should, find their own strategies for overcoming the challenge of CUV translation. Most importantly, I would suggest, they should be bold and feel free to experiment with the text, and furthermore, they should fight their corner when faced, for example, with editors who would standardise the translation. To relate this back to the translator's awareness of the social, cultural and political issues that underlie the text: the translator will be most confident in their practice, and in promoting the results of their practice if they feel engaged in the ideas and issues behind the text, and if they have contextual information with which they can back up their choices.

## Overarching Translation Process

In the thesis introduction, I asked whether the many-staged movement of CUVs from spoken language of the street, to cultural product traversing national and linguistic boundaries could be thought of as an act of translation in an abstract sense, in the vein of Roman Jakobson's three translation types: interlingual translation, intralingual translation and intersemiotic translation. Below I use some of the examples I have discussed in this thesis to try and answer this question.

Intersemiotic:

As explored in Sections 1.2.4, 3.1.2 and 5.6, the constraints and allowances of spoken and written language differ. This means that contemporary urban vernaculars undergo changes as they pass from a performed, aural/oral form to written, visual/verbal one. This may apply both to the transition of features in spoken language onto the pages of a notebook as a rapper writes lyrics, as well as to the journey from performed rap lyrics onto the page of a novel. The verbal utterance is stripped of its cadence, its characteristic prosody, and the phonological elements that have been a key feature of contemporary urban vernaculars as described by sociolinguists such as Rampton and Cheshire et al. Instead, other features come to the fore. The sounds are translated into the target text: a printed page of lyrics, decorated with mock-graffiti and microphones to remind us that the source text was a musical act (as in *The Latin Kings texter* (2004), see Section 5.6).

Additionally, in a metaphorical sense, the concept of intersemiotic translation could be applied to the translation of the same cultural and social meanings into a new medium. Take, for instance, the discussion in Section 5.4, which considered the ways in which Anyuru translates concepts expressed in rap, such as frustration with the lot assigned to residents of the suburbs. Anyuru himself has stated that encountering The Latin Kings' view of the world enabled him to feel pride in the suburban environment he lived in. I argue that in representing that environment in his poetry, he was to a certain extent translating The Latin Kings' representation of this environment into a new medium. Many of the themes are similar, although they are conveyed with a vastly different tone and emphasis.



Intralingual:

Whereas the impact of the intersemiotic translation process discussed above lies in the change in the signs with which something is communicated, intralingual translation concerns the use of different words within the same language to communicate the same concept. The transfer of contemporary urban vernaculars from street, to microphone, and from there onto the page is a good example of this. Again, my discussions in this thesis of the conventions of informal speech, rap performance and literary style are useful in explaining why. The fact that many of the features of spontaneous speech (e.g. overlapping, repetition, unmarked change of subject) become difficult to comprehend in a written transcription indicates the extent to which norms and conventions govern our use of language in these different contexts. It also suggests that different norms and conventions must be adhered to in a written representation of that same speech. Likewise, a rap, as discussed in Section 3.1.2 takes spoken language and turns it into a performance – using stylisations and rephrasing to create the right image and the right flow.

In turn, this adherence to different conventions means that certain elements must be foregrounded in order to create the same effect. Thus, the pool of CUV features used becomes smaller, as rappers and writers ‘translate’ into a target text made up of stereotypical forms that are more easily recognisable to a wider audience. Thus what constitutes a whole register of speech is translated into a distillation of a few key terms or phrases.

Additionally, certain words have to be explained or recontextualised for this wider audience. A good example of this is Ayo’s track *Översättning* (Translation), discussed in Section 3.4.1, in which he presents the contrasts between the language of his local CUV community and wider Swedish society, explaining terms and their usage for the audience.

Interlingual:

Many of the considerations for the interlingual translation of written representations of contemporary urban vernaculars pertain to the same need to explain or capture concepts in a new setting. This may involve certain elements being foregrounded in the TT order to create the same effect as in the ST. A key reason for this is, once again, the conventions governing the different contexts, this time linguistic and national, rather

than social or semiotic. So, as discussed in the survey analysis in Section 7.2.3, one respondent to the survey commented on the fact that literary conventions in China differ considerably from those in the UK or other Anglophone countries. The absence of a precedent for non-standard language in Chinese literature meant that the author had used intralingual translation to convey the meaning of regional dialect within his own text, something that had to be re-configured in the translation process as such conventions are not present in English literature.

Equally, the need to explain concepts relates both to those terms or ideas that are deemed to be untranslatable (see the discussion of Swedish racial slur ‘*blatte*’ in Section 8.1.6), and also to scenarios that exist only in the source culture setting. An example of this is the significance of The Latin Kings in Sweden – something that would not be self-evident to a UK reader who might well have no idea that Swedish hip hop even exists. Thus, a translation of Leiva Wenger’s *Borta i tankar* might require some kind of contextualisation to render the references to the rappers (see Section 5.3) legible. Other approaches may change the reference in the text to something similarly evocative, but less restricted to the local ST setting. This carries its own dangers, however, as specific connotative meaning is replaced with generalised connotations that elide the specific meaning for the Swedish suburban teenager that The Latin Kings signify in Leiva Wenger’s story.

But what does all this mean for the representation of CUVs in different formats and contexts? If anything, this discussion may have highlighted the difficulty of translating contemporary urban vernaculars, or even using them in creative writing at all. But hopefully, the overall evidence in my study points to the extremely interesting and expressive ways in which contemporary urban vernaculars have been harnessed for a wide variety of functions. These functions have ranged from the desire to represent personal experience, to the desire to question prevailing representations of the Other, to the desire simply to tell an interesting story about the community in a particular urban location. The urge to then translate such functions into another linguistic and cultural setting offers a way to open them up to a whole new audience, and with that, a whole new discussion about the emergence of contemporary urban vernaculars as a phenomenon that is not restricted to a single national context. If this is the case, the contribution of translators working with CUVs could play an important part in this discussion – the degree of sensitivity with which they go about the translation could

have a huge impact on whether this discussion happens at all. The reproduction of the meaning-through-language signalled by CUVs, through attention to detail and awareness of debates around CUV use, helps facilitate such a discussion.

## Ideas for further study

During the course of my research, I have encountered many interesting themes in the broader topic of CUV use that I have been unable to dedicate as much attention to as I would have liked. As a result I have included here a number of areas that would reward further investigation.

The first would be looking into the use of contemporary urban vernaculars in other media. As discussed in Sections 4.3.7 and 8.4, there are a number of other creative media in which CUVs have been used, not least television and film. A valuable comparison might be one that analyses the way scriptwriters for plays, films and television programmes use CUVs differently, and whether the differing formats (and audiences?) have a role to play in any differences that emerged.

A second would be the role of the fan and the user of online forums in the dissemination of CUVs. While I have found that rappers play a key role in the representation of CUVs to a wider audience, codifying and thereby recording the sounds and words that make up these varieties, I have not been able to look in depth into the role played by their fans outside the immediate speech communities. Often, such roles are played out on the forums and social media sites of the rap world, spaces that have been the subject of studies by Jannis Androutsopoulos in Germany, among others (cf. Androutsopoulos 2006). It would be interesting to look further into the way fans use CUVs online as a way of associating themselves with their musical heroes, and whether such use has a lasting impact on their speech outside of those forums.

The major focus of my research has been the role played by The Latin Kings and their use of contemporary urban vernaculars. But although their influence continues to be seen, for instance in a major tribute concert to their second album *I skuggan av betongen* (In the Shadow of the Concrete) (Kingsize 2014), significant changes have taken place in Swedish rap in the twenty years since *Välkommen till förorten* (Welcome to the Suburbs) was released. It would be interesting to carry out a wider investigation of the

current status of CUV use in rap, something that could provide insights into the continuing status of contemporary urban vernaculars as a tool for creative expression.

A renewed focus on the translation of contemporary urban vernaculars might involve series of workshops with translators using experimental translation techniques. In my initial research proposal, I discussed the possibility of translators working together with speakers of English-language CUVs in order to find innovative solutions to the challenges involved in translating representations of contemporary urban vernaculars. For various reasons, the proposed workshops never came to pass, but my opinion is that such a process would be valuable for future translations, and a research project along those lines would be worth pursuing.

Finally, one major area I would have like to have covered is the reception of, and attitude to, translated texts featuring contemporary urban vernaculars in the target culture, coupled with an analysis of publishers' approaches to these texts. I am aware that Khemiri's plays featuring CUV use (*Invasion!* and *Jag ringer mina bröder* (I Call My Brothers)) have been very popular in translation (cf. Grode 2011), and have been performed many times in the last few years. The English translation of his 2006 novel *Montecore* received good, and prominent reviews, when it was published in the US (cf. Monson 2011), but *Ett öga rätt* has never been translated into English (although it was translated into a number of other languages) (Khemiri.se). The translation of *Montecore* and of Jens Lapidus' thriller novels are the exceptions to an otherwise striking lack of interest among English-language publishers for Swedish literature featuring contemporary urban vernaculars. Given the success of Swedish literature over the last decade or so, it could be expected that more of the texts that have caused such a fuss and been so popular on the Swedish market will be published in English. There is obviously some resistance to this, but it is unclear where this resistance lies. Further investigations into the reception of texts such as *Montecore* and *Snabba Cash* (Easy Money), as well as the buying practices of UK and/or US publishers would shed light on the source of this resistance, and provide data that could support efforts to promote the publication of a broader range of Swedish literature in English.

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## Appendix 1 Final questionnaire texts

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What is meant by 'non-standard language'?

This questionnaire aims to collect information about how translators working into English approach literary texts that contain examples of 'non-standard' language. The researcher recognises that 'non-standard language' is an ambiguous term. For the purposes of this questionnaire, 'non-standard language' is taken to include slang, dialect, urban vernacular and youth language, although this is not an exhaustive list. If you've encountered something you deem to be 'non-standard', please indicate what you understand the term to mean in the context of the texts you were translating.

### Non-standard language in the text

This section focuses on examples of 'non-standard' language in texts you have translated. If you have translated more than one text featuring 'non-standard' language, please give answers for either:

- a) the text you thought contained the highest proportion of 'non-standard' language, or
- b) the text for which you were most pleased with the finished result.

1. What format was the text in question?

- Novel
- Play
- Poetry (prose)
- Poetry (verse)
- Short story
- Other

2. What language were you translating the text from?

3. What type of 'non-standard' language did the text include?

(The options below may overlap. Please choose the one you think is most appropriate to the text in question, and give more detail in the 'other' section if you wish. If you are unsure which option is the most suitable, please select 'other' and give details).

- Regional dialect
- Slang
- Sociolect
- Urban vernacular
- Youth language
- Other – please define/clarify below

4. What proportion of the text was written in this ‘non-standard’ language?

- All of the text
- Most of the text
- Some sections of the text
- Occasional words or phrases of the text
- None of these (please give details)

5. In your opinion, what was/were the function(s) of ‘non-standard’ language in the text?

6. Did you think it was important to ‘recreate’ this function/these functions in your translation?

- No
- Yes (Please explain why)

## The Translation Process

This section focuses on how you translated the ‘non-standard’ language in the text.

7. What approaches did you adopt when translating the text, both in terms of understanding the original and rendering it in English? Please tick as many as apply and give further details in the space provided below if you wish.

- Consulting other individuals (author)

- Consulting other individuals (relatives)
- Consulting other individuals (friends/colleagues)
- 'Invention'/innovation of terms/phrases yourself (neologisms)
- Private research (using other texts/films/music/internet)
- Private research (online)
- 'Collaboration' - where others contributed directly to the text
- Other

8. Why did you employ this approach/these approaches?

9. Did this approach differ from the way you usually work when translating a text of the same 'format' (i.e. novel/poem, etc)?

- No
- Yes (please give details of how it differed if possible.)

## Professional Matters

This section focuses on the outcomes of your translation.

10. Was the translation published?

- No
- Publication forthcoming
- Yes

11. If so, what input did your editor/publisher have into the translation process?

12. What was the public/critical response to the text in the English-speaking market?

13. Was the fact that 'non-standard' language was used in the text mentioned in this response?

- No
- Yes (What was said about it?)

## About you

These questions will make it easier to analyse the responses you have given above.

14. Age

- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-39
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80+

15. Which language(s) do you translate from?

16. How long have you been translating literature?

17. Do you have any academic or professional translation qualifications? (If yes, please indicate the highest-level qualification - they are in alphabetical order)

- No
- BA (Or equivalent)
- IoL DipTrans (or equivalent)
- MA (Or equivalent)
- PhD (or equivalent)
- Other (Please give details)

The researcher may wish to contact you to ask a few more questions (either in a short phone interview or in person). If you are happy to be contacted by the researcher for this purpose, please give your name and email address here.

## Appendix 2 Text summaries

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### Borta i tankar

Alejandro Leiva Wenger's short story '*Borta i tankar*' (Lost in Thought), was published to critical acclaim in Leiva Wenger's short story collection *Till vår ära* (In Our Honour) (2001b). It was hailed as "*en i långa stycken lybörd och språkligt uppslagsrik framställning, där Rinkebysvenskan förs in i den svenska skönlitteraturen*"<sup>112</sup> (Lundgren 2001). The story focuses on Felipe, a young man whose transition to a city centre high school puts a strain on his relationship with his friends and brother who have continued at a local technical college back in the suburbs where they all live. It depicts a young man's frustration with his surroundings and his uncertainty about where his allegiances lie through a complexly woven narrative with diverse perspectives and interlocutors. The story uses these complex narrative strategies to unsettle a straightforward reading of its portrait of suburban masculinity. As Wolfgang Behschnitt puts it: "[d]ie Erzählung erfordert Aufmerksamkeit, Geduld und Reflexionsbereitschaft. Sie schafft eine deutliche Distanz zwischen dem Erzählten und dem Erzählen und erschwert damit den einfachen Bezug auf eine soziale Wirklichkeit"<sup>113</sup> (Behschnitt 2008, 41, orig. emphasis).

*Borta i tankar* references The Latin Kings, quoting lines from the group's songs. In doing this, Leiva Wenger alludes to the multisensory environment of the late 1990s suburban estate, creating a mood of young male sociability that is closely tied to that time and place (see Section 5.3 for further discussion of this). This is coupled with the narrative of the story, which depicts a young man, Felipe, struggling against the prejudice he encounters as a result of where he is from. The idea that his place is in the suburbs, and the suburbs only, is expressed both by outsiders (the middle-class students of the prestigious city centre school he is transferred to), and by the friends he has grown up around.

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<sup>112</sup> "An on the whole perceptive and linguistically ingenious portrayal, in which *rinkebysvenska* is brought into Swedish literature."

<sup>113</sup> "The story demands attentiveness, patience and a readiness to reflect. It creates a clear distance between what is told and the process of telling, thereby hindering any straightforward association with a social reality."

There is an intriguing formal interplay in Leiva Wenger's story as the narrator's assumed personas intervene – the narrative is broken up and rendered unclear by the narrator telling two versions of the story to two different interlocutors. While these versions are similar in content, the narrator uses them to represent himself in different ways according to his relationship with the person he is addressing. The formal expression of these narrative threads results in a complex, and at times confusing, reading experience.

## Ett öga rött

In *Ett öga rött* (2003), Jonas Hassen Khemiri's debut novel, 15-year-old Halim narrates his naïve view of the people and the world around him through his diary. Though its language, narrative content and structure, the novel plays with identity and authenticity as Halim nominates himself 'Tanquesultan'<sup>114</sup> and romanticises his former life in the suburbs. Halim goes further and further into his fantasy of outsider-hood, attempting to foil the Swedish 'integration plan' and becoming increasingly frustrated with his father's attempts to fit in and be taken seriously by those around him. He rages away in his diary, from his bedroom in the area of central Stockholm his father has moved them to in order to give Halim greater opportunities.

Khemiri has been outspoken about the reception he and *Ett öga rött* received when the novel was published, much of which discussed his work through the category 'immigrant author', and even ascribed the views of the novel's protagonist to the author himself (cf. Källström 2011 for an analysis of the reception of this novel). I would argue that his response to this reception has resulted in a noticeable change in the way ethnicity and identity are talked about in the Swedish media.

## Det är bara gudarna som är nya

Johannes Anyuru's collection of poems *Det är bara gudarna som är nya* (2003) weaves together many references and allusions. Homer's *Iliad* and Frantz Fanon are intertwined with imagery drawn from the underpasses and tower blocks of Sweden's suburban landscapes, with a soundtrack provided by Jimi Hendrix, The Latin Kings and New

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<sup>114</sup> Sultan of Thought



York rappers Mobb Deep. The poetic voice remembers friendships and moments from his formative years – setting them in a context which echoes the multicultural world of Homer’s epics: Achilles becomes an Argentinian hardman, staring out from under a street light, his face in shadow. Young men from all over the world are united by their otherness in Swedish society.

Anyuru has published two further collections of poetry and a number of novels and non-fiction books. He has also toured Sweden with his live, DJ-accompanied rap poetry performance, *Abstrakt rap*.

## Montecore

Kadir, the childhood friend of Abbas, who is the father of famed author Jonas Hassen Khemiri, decides to get in touch to urge the son to re-establish contact with his estranged father through a writing project documenting the father’s life. Jonas accepts, but his retelling comes to be something quite different to what Kadir had envisaged. *Montecore* (2006) continues Khemiri’s playful relationship with language, as Kadir’s idiosyncratic version of Swedish combines with the ‘Khemiriska’ of Jonas’s childhood home and his teenage experiments with *multietniskt ungdomspråk*.

## Snabba Cash

In *Snabba Cash* (2009 (2006)) by Jens Lapidus, the lives of three men from very different parts of Stockholm’s criminal underworld intertwine. Jorge escapes from jail and finds that life on the outside is hard when your friends are too scared to be associated with you. JW is a wannabe player in Stockholm’s upper-class Östermalm district who finds a quick way to make money when he starts dealing cocaine at his friends’ extravagant parties. Mrado falls out with the boss of one of Stockholm’s biggest Serbian gangs, with disastrous consequences for his finances and family life.

This bestselling novel is a thriller which gives prominence to the myriad voices of Stockholm’s inner city and suburban cliques. Jens Lapidus is a criminal defence lawyer who claims to have taken inspiration for his thrillers from his legal work and the people he met as part of it (af Kleen 2008).

## Invasion!

Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Invasion!* (2008b) is a play about language, identity and the right to a voice. It centres on the word 'Abulkasem', following it through the distortions and reinventions it undergoes. On the way it takes in some disruptive teenagers, pretentious beer-fuelled discussions of post-colonial theory, some very strange 'interpreting', and a harried asylum-seeking apple-picker in a cottage in Southern Sweden. The play has been performed to great acclaim in Stockholm and around Sweden, as well as in France, Germany, the UK and the US.

## Foxy-T

*Foxy-T* (2004) is set in Tower Hamlets, a borough of London with a very high proportion of Bengali speakers, immigrants, and their children and grandchildren, who have settled in the area since the 1970s. The novel, written by Tony White, follows the exploits of two characters, Ruji-Babes and Foxy-T, young British Bangladeshi women who run the internet and call shop E-Z Call. Their lives are turned upside-down by the arrival of Zafar, a young man recently released from Feltham, the renowned young offenders institute in West London. Unbeknownst to Zafar, his grandfather, who had previously lived in the flat above the shop that the women now live in, has died, and the two take pity on Zafar and allow him to move in with them. The novel progresses, as each character settles into his or her role in the daily workings of the shop and the neighbourhood around them.

The novel takes place almost in its entirety on a few streets in the heart of the Bangladeshi neighbourhood around Cannon Street Road, with explicit reference made to the streets, restaurants, schools and housing estates that constitute real local landmarks. It is thus clear that White intended a high level of geographical specificity and it may be inferred that his desire was to depict something about the Bangladeshi community that lives there. In this chapter, I look at the role his choice of literary language plays in this.

## Londonstani

Gautam Malkani's novel *Londonstani* (2007) follows the exploits of a group of young men in an Asian community in Hounslow, west London. The narrator, Jas, gets pulled further and further into the a world of macho posturing after he and his friends go into 'business' supplying stolen mobile phones to local hard-man Sanjay. However, the reader finds out that all is not as it seems, and it becomes clear that the novel has been playing with stereotypes and assumptions about race and authenticity as Jas's true identity is revealed. The novel is narrated in an idiolectal blend of Standard English and 'West London Asian Rudeboy', with dialogue between its young characters in a staccato, orthographically clipped contemporary urban vernacular.

## Hello Mum

*Hello Mum*, by Bernadine Evaristo (2010) tells the story of a few baking-hot summer days in the life of Jerome, a London schoolboy who becomes the victim of gang violence for crossing the boundaries of his north London postcode. In a series of posthumous letters to his long-suffering mum, he explains the events leading up to his death, and the struggles he and other young men like him have to contend with on a daily basis on council estates across London. Evaristo's novella is interesting for the way it weaves together the world of the mother with the world of the son through fleeting explanations of slang terms and conventions.

## Pigeon English

*Pigeon English* (2011) is Stephen Kelman's first novel. It follows a few months in the life of Harrison, an 11-year-old boy who has two months previously migrated to the UK from Ghana with his mother and his sister Lydia. At the start of the novel, we find out that a local boy, a year or two older than Harrison, has been stabbed and killed. Harrison and his friend Dean set out to investigate the killing, but in the process of their investigations they unearth information that implicates several people close to Harrison, which turns out to have fatal consequences. Kelman's story is based in theme, if not strictly in content, on the tragic killing of schoolboy Damilola Taylor in south

London in 2000. Kelman has stated that he was deeply affected by the killing of this young boy, who, like Harrison, had recently moved to London (Daly “Interview with Stephen Kelman”). Kelman portrays Harrison as a good-natured, enthusiastic and curious child, and signals his comparative innocence in his dealings with the Dell Farm Crew, a would-be gang of older children who attend Harrison’s school and live on the Dell Farm Estate, where Harrison also lives. Aside from the interactions between Harrison and these school bullies, Kelman also depicts Harrison’s experience of his world around him, the myriad characters that populate that world, and the ways in which he seeks to make that world legible and liveable. For the most part, the events of the novel are seen through Harrison’s eyes as he narrates them to the reader from his child’s perspective, sometimes deeply perceptive, sometimes naive. In addition to this, the pigeon of the novel’s title plays the role of guardian to Harrison, watching over him in a sequence of short monologues.

By making Harrison the narrator of the novel, Kelman gives the reader the opportunity to view the life of a London housing estate through the eyes of a ‘privileged’ outsider – at once familiar with, and perplexed by, its goings on. We witness the daily struggle of a working woman (Harrison’s mother) trying to support two children, the complexities of friendship and allegiance, the power relations of the school playground, and the subjectivity of good and evil. Much of this is communicated through Kelman’s choice of language.