

Semiotic spaces in antidiscriminatory political discourse: Naming practices as indexes

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A B S T R A C T

This article explores the semiotic spaces occupied by organizations working against discrimination in Sweden. Expressions of identity, norm critique, and political goals are studied in relation to word production and language policy and planning. The study departs from interviews with representatives from three organizations within the hbtqi, antiracist, and disability movements. Other resources connected to them have also been analyzed, such as glossaries. Theoretically, this study draws on Yuri Lotman's concept of semiospheres, allowing the analysis to weigh in the whole semiotic process, including meaning production, policy work, and concrete word production. This approach completes an analysis of indexical orders. The results show that (a) organizations are aware of the importance of linguistic choices, (b) when new concepts and words are spread to the public, tension can arise and sometimes objections, and (c) word meanings change when used in public discourse. (Language policy and planning, semiosphere, indexical order, hbtqi, antiracism, disability, discrimination)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

White people have an incredibly hard time knowing what to call black people—it's a neurotic crisis. People change terms four or five times in five minutes: colored, dark, black, dark-skinned... it's painful! (One of the interviewees of this study, October 2017)

What should people belonging to minority groups be called? This issue is sometimes subject to consideration, especially when existing terms are perceived as politically charged. Not least the above quotation illustrates this. An important task for sociolinguistic research on language and discrimination is therefore to investigate the relationship between language development and political goals. In this article, I discern some dimensions in three activist groups' work against discrimination. With a sociolinguistic and semiotic approach, I try to define the role that language use plays in political activism in three antidiscriminatory movements in Sweden.

Antisexist language practices are a recurrent theme in research on language and discrimination, which emphasizes the need for more inclusive language use and more respectful naming practices (Pauwels 1998, 2003; Cameron 2003). Similar

discussions also exist for other grounds of discrimination, such as racism, where Ahmed's work (e.g. 2006) is a guide to increased understanding of communicative practices. She points to the difficulty of basic perspectives (especially racism) that exist as part of the culture, which means that even well-meaning language use and other actions unintentionally risk reproducing discrimination. Something similar has been described for (dis)ability discourse (e.g. Campbell & Kumari 2008).

Language considerations have proven to be significant in contexts that summarize identity construction and the fight against racism and other forms of discrimination (e.g. Milani 2013; Landqvist 2015a, 2018). This insight is also found outside linguistic analysis, as shown in a significant amount of literature that provides linguistic recommendations based on an endeavor for increased respect and neutral forms of expression (e.g. Kailes 2010; Lorcan, Hattersley, Molins, Buckley, Povey, & Pellicano 2016). An example of a widespread recommendation is the principle *person first* (using *person with disability* rather than *disabled*) in the ability movement that has been the subject of discussion—and sometimes criticism, even within the movement itself (Sinclair 2013; Dunn & Andrews 2015).

In Sweden, to which this study applies, language development is analyzed in relation to social and ideological displacements in the general debate. It is understood that language planning, ideology, and media discourses are in intimate relation with each other (Vogel 2010, 2014; Milani 2013; Landqvist 2015b; Wojahn 2015). Vogel (2014) describes how ideological displacement creates the need for new concepts, as does Milles (2006, 2013), who points out that gaps in language use can occur when new approaches to societal issues arise. This can then lead to the creation of new words. The introduction of the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun *hen* instead of the gendered cognates *han* 'he' or *hon* 'she' is an example that shows that central actors, political contexts, media attention, and language planning agencies are factors that determine how this process is carried out. In Hornscheidt & Landqvist (2014), further points are presented for antidiscriminatory analyses and activist work, such as critical analysis. In addition, Hornscheidt's work (e.g. Sprachpraxis 2011) has contributed to extensive theory development in the field of language and gender, with many new terms for naming practices that are based on an ideological framework. Although research has contributed substantively and directly to what language policy activities are about in terms of society's discriminatory structures, many questions remain about how the constant advancement of the positions of antidiscriminatory movements generate new meanings and new linguistic practices and how they make existing ones obsolete.

Against the background of the theory of socially motivated language change (Cooper 1989; Fairclough 1992), which often has ideological ideals, euphemisms (Allan & Burrige 1991) have been a typical part of an ambition to create positive connotations about concepts that were previously perceived negatively, for example, practices of naming persons with cognitive impairment consisting of more or less oppressive expressions. In Swedish, the expression *handikappad* 'handicapped, disabled' was replaced by *funktionshindrad* 'functionally

impeded', which was then replaced by *person med funktionsnedsättning* 'person with impairment', which in turn was replaced by *funktionsvariation* 'functional variation', and so on. New terms, however, do not erase the previous ones, and they can exist in parallel in public discourses, clinical activities, and various media discourses, though in separate contexts and with different ideological grounds. Related to this is the resignification of existing expressions, so-called reclaiming (Myers & Rothblum 2005), that is, the retrieval and positive reloading of derogatory words or clinical terms (Sinclair 2013). Language choice, such as naming practices, also varies with the policy goals that antidiscriminatory movements work towards. Cameron (2006) put forward the idea that language users, perhaps with an activist agenda, can have opinions about their language and want to rename or reclaim words or acts in other linguistically significant ways. This nonelitist and bottom-up interest has provided inspiring perspectives for analysis. With the concept of *verbal hygiene*, Cameron (1995, 2006) analyzes popular views of what forms of language use and language changes are considered appropriate.

Butler's philosophical-rhetorical work can in many ways explain the political relevance of trying to replace words burdened with an overly categorizing, oppressive, and discriminatory meaning. First, the main points in so-called performativity theory are that linguistic categories are not just the reason for a practice, but also the result of power relations within this practice. Such a relationship between language and current views of reality, commonly summarized by the term *social constructivism* (Butler 2011a,b), causes categories to be created using language that reproduces the power relationships implicated by those categories. Second, people become 'visible' in public when they are referred to with linguistic categorization (the necessity of linguistic categories in this regard is sometimes referred to as *interpellation*, taken from Althusser 2006), inferring that categories can not only be oppressive, but can also be necessary for people to be able to create an identity. Third, the language always implicates action (Butler 1997), that is, a choice of expression implicates a kind of action, which makes the use of an oppressive expression a political act.

With this performative and social constructivist approach, a postmodern element in antidiscriminatory language policy is the rejection of the idea that language is a transparent representation of an external reality. A postmodern, norm-critical mindset instead creates new and more flexible views, concepts, and meanings that can make existing naming practices too delimiting, which is why new words expressing a more inclusive view are put into use. Thus, it is irrelevant whether new words eventually become subject to a pejorising development. A new way of analyzing language change might instead be that old vocabulary is always replaced not because words have been pejorised but because they no longer fit into the contemporary language and view of reality (Cameron 2006), for example, as presented in the context of norm-critical research (e.g. Cosenza 2010).

In summary, ideas and reflections on how language functions less discriminatorily through various actions have gained some ground, at least in scientific

discussion. Political goals, opinions, and other types of positions dictating what practices should be applied reflect the interlinkage between linguistic expressions and ideology. It would be a misunderstanding and a simplification to see language as pure and free from ideological presumptions and standpoints (Cameron 2006). Thus, language is not the neutral tool that we might have imagined.

DATA AND AIM

In this article, I investigate political objectives within three groups who are living with discrimination and who have a justice agenda. What kind of words and expressions arise from their undertakings? What are the semiotic processes behind linguistic change? What communicability exists in those resulting discourses against discrimination and in discourses of resistance to antidiscriminatory work?

The investigation is based primarily on interviews with representatives of movements in which members conduct activist and/or informative activities in Sweden.¹ They are Funktionsrätt Sverige (which organizes people with different (dis)abilities nationally), RFSL (the Swedish part of ILGA, International Lesbian and Gay Association), and the Afro-Swedish National Association. The interviews were three one-hour conversations with the respective organizations' representatives held in September–October 2017, along with email replies from other representatives, making a total of nine informants. The interviews focused on the language policies being conducted, for example, through education and enlightenment, codified dictionaries, internal discussions on linguistic choices, or public statements. A wordlist developed by RFSL and a terminology collection together with informal glossaries from Funktionsrätt Sverige are included in the rest of the material, as well as texts from *Mediearkivet* (an online media archive) and corpora that include social media (*Språkdata*). Thus, the study retrieves data from both those who actively counteract discrimination discursively and forums that include expressions of resistance to this work.

The analysis is aimed at defining the policy goals that are primarily identified in the data through, among other things, linguistic strategies, and to call into question what constitutes opposition to ideological positions and the naming practices associated with them. This is done by invoking the indexical orders that appear in the data. This refers primarily to lexical components that signify relevant actors, political goals, and ideologies.

Another starting point is that people's struggle for a more positive identification through new self-denominations does not always fall on fertile ground with a critical public, and especially when the way of expressing oneself is perceived as artificial and 'politically correct' (Fairclough 2003, 2015). Linguistic innovations, new concepts, and new terms categorizing minority groups are therefore rarely unambiguous, but can be perceived and handled differently in the general debate, which further creates difficulties for writers in search of a suitable term of expression.

I sketch three parts of the cultural space occupied by different approaches to discrimination and discriminated groups in society as well as the political work of the investigated groups as developed over time and on-site. By approaching the discursive characteristics of politics, mainly the political actions of different language suggestions, I want to contribute to a wider understanding of the function and necessity of linguistic significant and the consequences they bring about.

THEORY AND METHODS

The analysis departs from linguistic choices and registers developed within antidiscriminatory political activism. Keywords, slogans, naming practices, and so on change over time and represent the current struggle involving actors, activities, and the policy goals that are being applied. These practices work as linguistic signs constituting a so-called indexical order (Silverstein 2003), that is, the relationship between categories, values, and concepts at a social macro level and an indexable micro level of language and texts. Through these indexes, values are transformed at the macro-social level. This means that language has both a socially reflective function and a transformational one, which is a fundamental assumption in both discourse analytical and linguistic theory formation (e.g. Foucault 1982 and Mey 2001, respectively), and Ochs emphasizes that indexicality is the very basis for socialization (Ochs 1996). Silverstein analyzes this transformation by focusing on how linguistic indexes create, for example, an air of expert authority if the speaker simply uses an adequate vocabulary (2003). In this way, language carries the potential for individuals to understand their world. The starting point and application here is how linguistic changes, such as new naming practices, are attributed to people and groups and how they create new meaning and viewpoints because language use can act as an ideological filter (Irvine 2001; Mills 2003, 2007; Irvine & Gal 2009). The indexicalities analyzed thus originate in a political context and are used in public debate. They transform not only macro-social values, but also the production of words and their meaning.

No single person can on their own end the discrimination faced by various vulnerable groups. This instead requires a long process in which all of society must take part. The process looks different at different locations, at different times, and with different actors and actions. Such a postmodern view of social and cultural development is represented in this study by the now classic concept of *semiosphere* (Lotman 2002). A semiosphere consists of an identifiable core with fuzzy boundaries, constantly changing and represented differently in different individuals. It is a part of a larger world of ongoing semiotic processes, or as Lotman expresses it: 'The semiosphere identifies itself with the assimilated "cultural" space' (2005:211). The semiotic nuclei can be compared to how analytical sites in this cultural space are organized, that is, the conceptual world in which the individual is located, or as 'nodes within the network of social activities and relations' (Lotman 2005; Torop 2005). Such a site might have 'multiple identities due to its interrelationships to other places and the diversity of actors who have lived

there' (Kostogriz 2006:178). Semiospheres are furthermore strongly characterized by asymmetry (Lotman 1990:127) because they may exist in parallel, but there are displacements in time and space so that a semiosphere evolves differently in different environments and times and is constantly subject to change. This is not insignificant in this study because it includes several semiotic systems in the three different but interrelated social movements. The combination of a semiospheric, postmodern understanding of the political movements studied here and the indexical order indicating the ideological role of language will hopefully be able to show which dimensions of antidiscriminatory language policy, with separate distinctions, exist in parallel in modern Swedish society.

The theory of the semiosphere is strongly inspired by Bakhtin's dialectics, that is, the so-called translation that takes place in the meeting within and between texts. This dialogical view of communication is based on principles such as heteroglossia, that is, the multivocality of texts, which can be explicated as follows: 'There is no truly singular voice and no truly one-way communication: there is only interaction, suffused as it is with multiple voices and accents' (Tomlinson & Millie 2017:2). Multivocality has a concrete meaning in this study when many people engage in the debate on naming practices, (anti)discrimination, and language policy work. The voices can be said to belong to specific actors, but also to texts and discourses delimited in time and space. The voices can occur, cease, exist, and co-exist with others, and they can express partially new or changed goals or a counter-discourse (e.g. *us and them* discourses). The opposite of dialogue, that is, unifying or silencing of voices, has been referred to as *erasure* (Irvine & Gal 2009), a relevant concept for media discourses that are investigated here, as they seem to attempt to conserve existing values, or to simplify newly invented naming practices. Another way of conceptualizing unifying processes is by the so-called monologic (Wirtz 2017), that is, semiotic processes towards unity and coherence, which may create a sense of universal truths. 'Truths' can however be challenged by 'heteroglossic criticism', for instance in questioning, jokes, and parody. In this way, both cultural and meta-cultural expressions are relevant for the analysis of naming practices, because of the social balance between, for example, sharing a tradition, practice, or pattern and displays of questioning, or even aggression (Tomlinson & Millie 2017; Urban 2017). Both erasure and monologics may be at work in the debate on new naming practices.

A semiotic-linguistic way to describe the tension between the cultural centre and consequences of meta-cultural commenting is with Lotman's words: 'In the centre the meta-structure is "our" language, but on the periphery, it is treated as "someone else's" language unable to adequately reflect the semiotic reality beneath it' (Lotman 1990:134). The pursuit of self-description taking place in a semiotic core becomes rigid in self-regulation and risks creating a distance to the more peripheral parts, where greater freedom is considered to prevail. This means that new terms and words that occur within an ideological inside can be challenged by the outside, where those words cannot be understood or understood with the

same complexity or precision. Thus, in this analysis, the theory of intertextuality has been operationalized to apply to the concrete public debate that deals with language and discrimination in Sweden today.

Bakhtin (1986) developed the theory of intertextuality with the term *chronotope*, which has been acknowledged in sociolinguistic theory.

In Bakhtin's analyses, chronotopes invoke and enable a plot structure, characters or identities, and social and political worlds in which actions become dialogically meaningful, evaluated, and understandable in specific ways. Specific chronotopes produce specific kinds of person, actions, meaning, and value. Interactionally decoding and deploying them are also, in themselves, chronotopic phenomena, in which other historicities convene in the here-and-now historicity of production and understanding. (Blommaert 2015:110)

Here, a simplified view of context is challenged, which is otherwise close to studying new word production and politically motivated linguistic choices. Contexts are thus parallel, occur in different times and places, and are sometimes contradictory. At the core of the semiosphere are the meaningful expressions, truths, and central thoughts generated by specific goals and actors: 'It also creates an epistemic-evaluative effect of truth, importance, and relevance' (Blommaert 2015:112). Changed social positions lead to the emergence of new chronotopes, or ideological-semiotic cores, which makes existing expressions obsolete and presents a need for new ones. This is exemplified by Woolard (2013) for the case of the Catalan language and by Davidson (2007) for the fall of the GDR. Woolard claims that chronotopes allow us to see how meaning is 'given to personal experiences and the worlds' people live in, thus motivating stances, 'grounded in different representations of the nature of the world [people] move in' (Woolard 2013:213). Woolard found two quite different stances in her data to the use of a minority language, which are said to be formed by 'sociological and politicized versus psychological and apolitical readings of personal experience' (Woolard 2013:212).

Through the internet, we see strikingly increased opportunities for writing and spreading opinions. However, debaters do not always respond to each other, and the discussion is conducted on digital sites within communities, rather than between them (Del Vicario 2016). These constraints in time and space delimitation create complex relationships between intertextual power relations and important linguistic shifts in the light of ideological development. Then the question arises as to what possibilities there are to make an indexical order comprehensible to those outside the core, which seems to occur to different degrees: 'recognitions can occur simultaneously at different scale levels, when different audiences recognize different indexical orders in the same discourse' (Blommaert 2015:113).

In sum, this analysis seeks to capture the complex and changing situation prevailing in the work against social discrimination by applying concepts such as semiotic processes and indexicality. Methodologically, it involves an investigation where linguistic indexes are linked to different dimensions of political goals, activism, and actors. The study's informants touch on different aspects of political activism linked to different linguistic indexes, but also the use of current words and

expressions by the media. The meaning shift that occurs when words and expressions are discussed in social media, in news texts, or in management texts are therefore an important source. In addition to political positions and goals, that part of the material provides information about peripherals in relation to ideological nuclei, such as reports and narrations in news texts or argumentation in social media.

RESULTS

In the following, I sketch three complexes of political goals and the linguistic indexes representing them, primarily words and expressions, used in the naming practices of persons and groups. First, the semiotic process is indexed by words and expressions for identifying people from discriminated groups as part of a strategy to increase visibility and tolerance. Thereafter, the same goes for norm-critical discourses aiming at focusing on cultural expectancies. Finally, indexes are analyzed for semiotic processes in the work aimed at solid improvements and advancing political positions for groups with experience of discrimination. The debate held in the periphery is described especially when words and expressions become the subject of criticism and are given new connotations.

Semiosphere 1: A desire for identity and visibility

In Sweden, homosexuality became legal in 1944 and the ‘disease’ label was removed in 1979. This is, however, not the case in all countries, and in many places, there is still a struggle focused on tolerance and acceptance. The political goal of being accepted by the environment is probably the one with the longest history, and it is still going on in different movements around the world. This goal often implies (new) naming practices of persons and groups in as fair and respectful a manner as possible.

We use concepts that cannot be perceived as offensive or misleading by persons belonging to the groups. Historically, we have also used the strategy to modify how the naming word is perceived through usage. The word *bög* [‘gay’] was previously used primarily pejoratively. Within RFSL, as well as in the entire group of non-heterosexuals, *bög* was used to refer to a gay man, and we hence changed the tone of the word to be more neutral. (Mail reply from RFSL)²

This ambition to reclaim a previously pejorative word encompasses part of a group’s emancipatory discourses (Fairclough 2015) and henceforward their claim to self-identification. This very right to name oneself is emphasized mainly by the representative of RFSL when discussing the significant production of words in the *trans* field (e.g. *trans gender*, *trans person*).

We have also launched new words and concepts, which have later been established in the Swedish language: *trans person*, *hbt* and later on *hbtq*. The launch of those words and concepts work, when they start being used, in themselves making the image of who are part of a group visible and correct.

This is not unique for the LBTQ movement. Even in the interview with the ability movement, it appears that the biggest problem today is that their members do not feel comfortable appearing in the public space.

Intense opposition to people with impairment can manifest in different ways: spontaneous disgust, power structure, online trolls. It is fine that we left some words behind us. There is fear, a phobia, about disabilities. We are still considered strange. We have a disadvantage compared to other discriminated groups. We do not show enough pride. We are ashamed and become isolated. (Interview with DHR, September 2017)

The semiotic process is characterized by an endeavor to make oneself visible and accepted, often with a linguistic strategy to propose clear, morphologically simple, and positively charged words. These types of words probably have a great opportunity to function in educational contexts, thus increasing the knowledge and understanding of the majority population. Within the LGBTQ area, the process is indexed by today's accepted words *bög* 'gay' and *flata* 'lesbian/dyke', that is, earlier deprecating denominations are in this way reclaimed, although they are still pejorative in some contexts. Similarly, according to the interview with the ability movement, people with disabilities in Sweden sometimes name themselves with terms such as *CP*, *aspergare*, *autist*, or any relevant diagnosis (Alexandersson 2015). This reclaiming takes a formal or clinical discourse and reshapes it with a new value. A typical example is informal morphological markers, for example, in the positive meaning of *aspergare*, 'a person with Asperger's syndrome' derived from the diagnosis and a suffix marking 'person', *-are*, as well as the everyday sounding *funkis* 'person with disability', with a suffix marking informality or intimacy, *-is*. Such linguistic strategies are considered to contribute to increased proximity and a de-dramatization of people with disabilities. However, it can be discussed whether *CP* is always an unequivocally positive expression. Perhaps this term will instead be loaded with a political will for changing attitudes and better integration into the majority society through this informal and conscious self-denomination. If so, then this way of reclaiming would be an index of another semiotic process, the one described in the third part of the results section (i.e. demand for equality).

An effect of new or reclaimed naming practices coming into circulation is that the rest of society is affected. There is a need to supplement and update terminology, not least among authorities responsible for allocating resources to different groups with special needs. An example of term development in clinical terminology is that in the DSM (a collection of mental diagnoses) *Gender identity disorder* in DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association 1994) was replaced by *Gender dysphoria* in DSM V (American Psychiatric Association 2013). However, *gender incongruence* is sometimes used by clinicians, which is influenced by the LGBTQ terminology for transgenders and by a norm-critical perspective (see the next section). In sum, different discourses can interact and create fuzzy borders by using indexes across semiospheres.

The terms are given formal term status when used in government contexts. The Swedish National Board of Health recommends that a *person med funktionsnedsättning* 'person with disability' should be named just so. Or as a representative from DHR views this: "Generally, word starting with function are correct. This is considered the most neutral". Correspondingly, a black person is often referred to

as *mörkhyad* ‘dark-skinned’ in the media context. The reason is probably that it will act as a neutral term when *svart* ‘black’ has become politically charged and thus belongs in another ideological context. Thus, the search for identity by discriminated persons corresponds to the pursuit of appropriate linguistic expressions of identity, both by the individuals themselves and others.

Usability in public and formal contexts probably determines the communicability of the index, which in this case is determined by freedom from valued and politically charged connotations.

This semiotics is thus not limited only to the movements whose identity is concerned, but connects political and practical needs. It is not only within the groups that the need exists for fair, positive (and neutral), and context-overarching expression of identities. One expression that has emerged in other contexts is *visible minority*, which is used among other things for enabling statistical studies on society’s racist discrimination. It refers to nonwhite persons, that is, the term refers to phenotypic features, and it was mentioned in the interview with the representative of the Afro-Swedish National Association. The expression is illustrated in a press release from Gothenburg University, given below.

Our results show that there is a strong correlation between belonging to a VISIBLE MINORITY, NOT BELONGING TO THE MAJORITY IN A SOCIETY, and being established in a disadvantaged low-income region over generations, says Björn Gustafsson, professor of social work at the Department of social studies. (Meyer 2016; emphasis in original)

Resistance to ‘identity politics’

There are plenty of discourses that express opposition to identity policy ambitions. This resistance is expressed with arguments that individuals are too easily offended, that opinion makers are trying to be politically correct, that new types of identities are unnecessary, and so on. In the ability movement, some voices express the view that new terms are mainly needed by the public, not by the members themselves.

The need to be defined lies in others than disabled persons. I prefer expressions such as ‘person who uses a wheel chair’. (Interview with DHR, September 2017)

Also in the public, new words and concepts, and new identity claims, are often perceived as unfamiliar and pointless. The actors are usually anonymous debaters in social media, but such actors can also engage in political controversy on the newspapers’ editorials. Some quotations from the digital forum Flashback³ (all from 2016) show how such resistance is formulated.

“I am at all levels a dog”, “I am a pansexual horse”, “I am whatever”, and then people with these insane ideas have caught some power and influenced major lobbying groups, political parties, etc., and thus pushed all others to accept and give in...

It is obvious that the discourse used here is characterized by hard-touching words, polarized thinking, and exaggeration. Indices from an identity policy context serve as a symbol and reference to the ideology prevailing there. It is also obvious that the reader is assumed to be familiar with the semiosphere in question.

Another example from Flashback is given below.

The gay lobby now has a label for every damn variant that exists (pansexual, polyamorous, etc.) and has all been transformed into something completely natural, which of course cannot be ‘cured’.

Here too, we see a clear reference to the indexicality that occurs in the semiosphere, in this case words that appear in the glossary of RFSL. From the perspective of this writer, however, this world looks unfamiliar, as evidenced by the negatively valued term *gay lobby*, which turns disease (?) into something ‘natural’, that is, legitimate identity. Thus, the post not only signals a lack of understanding and sympathy for identities and the ambition to make relationships smooth, but clearly is also an expression of an alternative reality and ideology. However, there are also more playful comments, such as “So a pansexual man is nothing but a five-to-three [almost closing time in Swedish night clubs] horny bisexual?”, where new words are merely questioned as some kind of subtlety. The right to identity designation is, however, questioned in some way.

The degree of communicability seems to be about the need for antidiscriminatory ideology as well as the language that indexes it because actors create intertextual relationships where the expressions become fluid and tie together time, space, and political will. The last example indicates that there are problems not only with identity policy goals, but also an ignorance of the norm criticism that is sometimes behind new expressions, as the next section explores more closely.

In summary, the indexical order consists of reclaimed, positively charged self-denominations, as well as new expressions that hopefully can function neutrally and generally. The political goal is to appear in public with the identity that is perceived as one’s own and true identity. However, in the periphery, or even outside the semiosphere, words and expressions soon become negatively charged and their relevance might be questioned. The question of who is entitled to name oneself in what way becomes the subject of debate, a debate that sometimes invokes values other than the ideology that confirms a search for identity.

Semiosphere 2: Power and norm critique

The semiotic process that arises from a power and norm critique is probably the most geographically dispersed, although limited to certain knowledge cultures. It has taken influences from academia, for example, theories of intersectionality from gender studies (Lykke 2010), and from political activism. It is not least noticed in the expressions and concepts that index it, which are often complex both semantically and morphologically. In all of the interviews in this study, it appears that members of the younger generation are not only more politically impatient, but also more often engaged in the academic norm-critical discourse as students, researchers, and so on. Language development has always been influenced by thoughts and concepts from academia, but the historicity of the norm-critical school is relatively new. The intimate relationship between academic knowledge production and political activism is a characteristic feature, with indices such as

funktionsmaktordning ‘ability norm order’ and *heteronormativitet* ‘heteronormativity’, both of which refer to society’s prevailing norms. These types of indices are considered vital in the discussion on HBTQ rights.

By using a norm-critical perspective, one can tell why language is so important to those who might question the concepts that are related to the umbrella term *hbtq*. (Mail reply from RFSL, September 2017)

RFSL states that they are a feminist and anti-racist organization, in addition to their sexuality policies, which justifies intersectional perspectives often being present in the language discussion. Intersectional theories are now spread outside of the academic world, which can explain why similar words occur in several places at the same time. The norm-critical goal of highlighting societal norms and de-normalizing certain privileged groups and individuals is also visible in anti-racist terms such as *rasifiering/rasifierad* ‘racified’ and *icke-vit* ‘nonwhite’. However, the discussion on which ones to use is ongoing.

The researchers avoid skin color categories, because the concepts used in research are constructivist important. They do not want to fix categories and make them static. Therefore, white and black are not used, but instead processes of racialization. In essence, it is right—it is socially constructed, and racializing can be somewhat different in different situations. (Interview with Afro-Swedes, October 2017)

The significance of these expressions is based on a protest to a (post) colonial norm that privileges nonracified people, or those who are racially white, and who are thus not nonwhite, that is, they are white in a norm perspective (Daniels 2016). Everyone else is discriminated against in different situations, where they are perceived as belonging to another (social) race than white. Even in the other groups, the same high-level simultaneous new word production occurs, for example *funktionsvariation* ‘ability variation’ and *normbrytande funktionalitet* ‘norm-breaking ability’ from an interview with Funktionsrätt Sverige and *polyamorös* ‘polyamorous’ and *anarkistisk relation* ‘anarchistic relation’ from RFSL’s glossary. The first two expressions are based on a reaction to norms that govern the view of a person’s ability to function and the power order that this entails. The latter two are a reaction to a gender power scheme and against a heteronormal order.

Norm criticism is itself a historical result of political developments in the fight against discrimination. The current view is that norms are focused on and identified more than individuals and groups. A discursive action can therefore be to try to erase the boundary between ‘vulnerable’ and ‘others’. The terms chosen here as examples do not always refer to people but can refer to relationships, lifestyles, or the like. For example, *pansexual* refers to a person who engages in relationships where gender does not matter and is based on a nonbinary view of gender. The RFLS glossary defines *pansexual* as follows.

The ability to be attracted sexually by persons regardless of gender. The word *pan* suggests that there is a spectrum of sex and not just two as the word *bi* in *bisexual* can be considered to suggest. Some therefore prefer *pansexual* to signal that one sees their sexual orientation beyond the two-gender norm. (Swedish definition translated into English)

This step from the practice of always naming a person in specific categories is taken here (“the ability to be attracted”, “signal that one sees”). This is also a theme in the interview with the disability movement. It is said that the promptness to always categorize a person with disability is a problem and that the media and other actors tend to stress a person’s disability, even in situations where it is not called for. In this way, an implicit communicative norm is reacted to, that is, that everyone not included in the majority community should be labeled. Thus, the need to name people outside the majority community could be a part of a social norm structure (so-called *Entnennung*, a German term used for not explicitly categorizing the privileged; Sprachpraxis 2011).

The words tend to be morphologically complex, long, and loans from English. Newer, norm-critical indices also have a different significance, and usually there is a need for comparatively more inclusive concepts. This can be illustrated by the previously accepted word *bög* (‘gay’, see above) and the newer (at least in Swedish) *queer*, which has a norm-critical meaning.

REFERENCE:	<i>bög</i>	a homosexual man
	<i>queer</i>	people with a nonbinary identification (not necessarily gay)
MEANING:	<i>bög</i>	sexual orientation
	<i>queer</i>	anti hetero norm + anti gender norm

The word *queer* can thus be used for other referents than *bög*, which has a more limited scope of reference and another meaning. Those contexts could include discussions on gender order and heteronormativity. However, this does not prevent words in practice from referring partly to the same individuals, even in the core of the semiosphere, albeit from different perspectives. The same goes for words such as *pansexuellt*, which is both an identity marker and a significant of the norm-critical discourse. Fuzzy borders do indeed exist, but perhaps different semiotic processes can be discerned depending on the chronotopic focus, that is, ambivalence as to how a concept refers to a person or a political attitude.

The connection between linguistic indexicality and policy becomes stronger in this semiosphere that clearly originates in the questioning of social structures and norms. When norms are focused on rather than people, the naming practices tend to include more referents, which is shown in the example above. Thereby, earlier and stricter limitations are cancelled and become obsolete. A much-debated example is *funktionsvariation*. This word includes more than just people with a disability, and it offers another perspective on ability.

REFERENCE:	<i>funktionsnedsättning</i>	a limited group
	<i>funktionsvariation</i>	can include everyone
MEANING:	<i>funktionsnedsättning</i>	disability in some way
	<i>funktionsvariation</i>	dimension of different ways of functioning

The potential consequences of this division of meaning is discussed in the next section.

In the periphery and outside of norm critique

Norm criticism is indexed by expressions that focus on power structures and social structures, which are made visible and might thereby lose power. Norm-critical expressions will therefore land between a demarcated domain, where they are understood as being internal within an activist semiosphere, and a more general domain, where they are spread and replace previous expressions. They are sometimes perceived as theoretical and difficult to access, and are therefore criticized, perhaps in part because they radically change perspectives on what should be communicated.

Via everyday use, for example, news reporting, *funktionsvariation* has come to have the same meaning as *funktionsnedsättning* ‘disability’. Norm-critical words thus ‘lose’ their norm-critical meaning, as is the case with other scientific specific terms spread to general language. They will then be perceived as mere replacements for earlier terms, as in the following extract from a newspaper.

At camps, he [the riding horse Scott] does his very best, especially for children and youngsters with *funktionsvariation*. (Dalademokraten, 21 November 2017)

Norm-critical word production can bring about a relatively low degree of communicability and put high requirements on the language user not to be reduced in meaning. The word list by RFSL is commented on by one of their representatives.

The glossary becomes a symbol, and it might be valuable to others to develop a better understanding of what RFSL does. You cannot understand the HBTQ movement without understanding norm criticism. If you are interested, you want to learn more. (Interview with RFSL, October 2017)

The glossary therefore has several purposes—to inform about the LBTQ movement, but also to raise awareness about norm-critical reasoning, that is, to scale up the awareness and communicability of norm-critical indices. In addition, the questions are always current, as the same informant expresses below in (1).

- (1) a. What is your sexuality called if you remove gender? Those are exciting questions; how do I express things?
- b. If you don’t understand *anti binary* you cannot understand *pan*. These concepts depend on each other.

However, there is always the risk that people from an older generation will be excluded, or those from areas other than the big cities, those without academic education—even people who are active in the LBTQ movement.

Resistance to norm criticism

In the interview with the disability movement, criticism is made against the indices of norm criticism. Such expressions are considered to create vagueness around who might need special attention and assistance in their daily life. Thus, two ideologies stand against each other—the norm-critical one, which avoids pointing out and

naming people, and an identity policy that identifies people with special needs with a practical linguistic tool. Here in the periphery these two sometimes meet over fuzzy borders and conflict arises, and this is also expressed internally within the disability movement.

I am annoyed with all these concepts. I want to avoid them. But the equality discourse demands [these] concepts in order to understand who is referred to. The precipitation in developing new concepts leads to other consequences. The goal is normalization. The concepts makes people feel unwelcome. Hence the effect is the opposite. It would have been simpler to keep *handikappad*. The exchange [of terms] made it difficult, and since then it has become worse. (Interview with DHR, September 2017)

Discourses that express resistance to norm criticism are developed in many sites in the general debate, especially in social media among right-wing groups and conservatives. They are characterized by actors who are provoked by, and are opposed to, norm-critical ideology, and not just identity-political word production (see above).

Most of the norm-critical indices in this study are found in Flashback. This is the context that holds most expressions for resistance against norm-critical ideology of all the examined corpuses. The expression *funktionsvariation* (see above) was found in Flashback thirty-nine times out of ninety-nine in the whole corpus (2017–11–22), and the acronym HBTQ (LBTQ) was found to 51% in Flashback. Critical voices often remark on the low degree of communicability, but are also critical to the contexts that create relevance for such expressions ('everybody wants to be *queer* nowadays').

People who do not understand what a social structure is or a power norm might feel confused and excluded, and people who share the opinion that social power structures do not exist might experience and express resistance. Examples of such expressions are given in (2) below.

- (2) a. It is so damn typically Swedish to keep on moving around with hocus pocus 'queer' 'theories'.
b. transphobia is a yellow card in the debate. (both from Flashback 2016)

Queer and *transphobia* stand here as symbols of something distinctly Swedish and of an increasingly limited debate climate. A frequent positioning of these actors is made by claims that norm criticism is, and consists of, typical leftist concepts, as in the following quotation from Flashback: 'All the talk about racifying and norms of whiteness is only a way for the left to rationalize its hate towards white people'.

Norm-critical expressions are in this way recontextualized to symbolize the very norm-critical semiosphere rather than use them in a discussion about word meaning. Another point of view is that there certainly is a norm, but that it does not deserve to be criticized. The departure for such reasoning is, for example, the term *vithetsnorm* 'norm of whiteness' but together with a problematization of its critical meaning.

- (3) a. Of course, there is a norm of whiteness in Sweden, but this makes perfect sense.
 b. Naturally there is a whiteness norm here—or there should be one. (Flashback 2016)

The resistance is thus altogether a continuity of and with a clear intertextual contingency of norm-critical ideology, that is, indices are shared between the core and the periphery of the semiosphere. This can be noted not least in the following statement that seems to acknowledge the groups' fight for justice but ends up reacting to parallel norm-critical concepts.

A lot of new words are introduced, *islamophobia*, *whiteness norm* and *misogyny*, all of which are supposed to compete with the old words *anti-Semitism*, *racism* and *gender equality*. (Flashback 2016)

There is also room for description of the alleged (negative) consequences.

It makes sense to turn away from the school that we have today, because it is so very indoctrinating so that young guys today are fooled into believing in the oppression of women, and colonial guilt and other ideas such as whiteness norm and islamophobia and other ideas. (Flashback 2016)

In summary, an index can be moved between semiospheres and from the core to the periphery, adding a negative note to its meaning. This new, more negative meaning attributed to words seems to be an expression of a symbolic, negative valuation of norm criticism as such. Norm-critical naming practices can also be perceived as synonyms of earlier expressions, as in semiotic processes governed by euphemistic language change (as noted in the introduction). They lose their norm-critical significance. Indeed, the indices are relatively high on a scale of communicability in cases where criticism of norms is criticized and, naturally, very low when the meaning is lost.

Semiosphere 3: Political positioning and demands for equality

When people who are victims of discrimination organize themselves, they do so for similar reasons: to reduce society's discrimination and oppression. The goal is to erase hierarchies and hegemonies that cause suffering among the members of the group. It has previously been shown that short reclaimed terms are considered to create reduced distances to the environment and thus increased tolerance of a group, which might be a step towards integration into the majority society. However, using words that provoke with force or complexity could be a way of rebellion, creating an uncomfortable atmosphere among the majority population. This is the case for those concrete policy goals and strong political positionings that characterize this third semiotic core.

A political goal in all of the interviewed groups was a more profitable social position and new words that signify such an endeavor. Expressions like *afrosvensk* 'AfroSwede', *svart* 'black', *queer*, and *funktionsrätt* 'the right to function for

differently abled persons' are used by members themselves in this fight for increased justice, for example, as a first element in significant events and manifestations. Searches for, for example, *queer-festival* gives 229 hits in *Mediearkivet* (2017–12–06) and can be considered a well-distributed concept. These naming practices are also to be found in organization names such as *Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund*. The earlier name of the organization (containing the obsolete expression *handikappad*) changed to *Funktionsrätt Sverige* in 2009. These indices are characterized by not being univocal, that is, they not only symbolize the respective undertaking of the movements, but also sum up several meaning aspects, including the policy objectives of relevant actors. One of the interviewees said, for example, that the wording *I am black* can imply a whole complex of meanings.

"I am black" signifies racifying, social position in society, history, where I want to go [politically]. You lose that with *rasifiering* ['racifying']. People who refer to themselves as black make a political claim that is subversive—you don't want to lose that. This is obvious when so many people squirm when *black* or *white* is used. (Interview with Afro Swedes, October 2017)

The word *black* as an index of this semiotic core thus has a more complex meaning and lower degree of communicability than the word *black* in a more peripheral context would have, which might perhaps play only on the phenotypic features of a person. The following quotation from the interview with the Afro-Swedish National Association (October 2017) shows how linguistic choices have concrete consequences, both far-reaching and in specific situations.

The use of language tells a lot about social relations. If a group of people is structurally subordinate, then it is reflected in the language. If you use certain concepts, you have dehumanized black people and opened to violence against black bodies.

The quotation clearly summarizes the role of language in a concrete political struggle, and it illustrates the idea that word choice can be understood as action, even political action. This also implies a relevance for language planning towards a more nondiscriminatory discourse. This is explained by the informant as follows.

A despised group needs to reconstruct matters repeatedly. This must be done, but can frustrate the majority: 'Why was *colored* okay yesterday, but not today?' Language is part of a project for us. You do not always understand it; you just accept it. The goal is to create a new world where skin color is no longer a reason for subordination.

The goal is real, and the means are, among other things, linguistic projects, although they can be obscure or just symbolic in the eyes of the environment. The communicative scaling is commented on by acknowledging that it can be low, but at the same time it does not always need to be higher. Political discourse includes a social position that is relatively independent of acceptance, but there does not seem to be an educational task to enlighten the public.

Indices are also labeled in slogan-like expressions including different parts of a movement. An excerpt from *Funktionsrätt Sverige*'s website shows how an expression can symbolize the group's overall struggle.

Right to function ... is about the individual's rights in different social situations. The focus is shifted from obstacles, availability, and specific solutions to the principle of human rights and a universally designed society.

This is an example of an ultimate political goal, a 'universally designed society', which points to an existence where people with disabilities in an obvious way are guaranteed belonging and included in the majority community. Within this indexical order, personal names are not unequivocal or sufficient. In the example above, relevance is created for everyone's right, 'the individual's right', whether s/he has a disability or not. The index includes many people, without clear boundaries between groups and with more than one meaning.

Resistance against anti discriminatory positioning

The boundary between the norm-critical and the equality-demanding semiospheres seems to be quite vague. The indexes carry meanings from both, as mentioned above. Political positioning can therefore be regarded as a development of ideologies, actors, and linguistic indexes. Accordingly, the critical resistance is expressed in the same kind of posts in, for example, Flashback. I find no specific criticism of words and terms signifying antidiscrimination, though it can be noted that issues of discrimination create tensions. However, counter-discourses are usually found in relatively closed contexts in Sweden, for example, in social media targeting a specific audience. Thus, in a part of a semiosphere there can be fragmentation and conflict between intellectual discourses and right-wing anti-intellectualism. On the communicative scale, political positioning indices are relatively low because they are often perceived as symbols of a political attitude characterized as left, (radical) feminist, and so on.

DISCUSSION

The results compile examples of indexical orders for three semiotic cores in the fight against discrimination. Here, linguistic terms are part of, or the result of, the putting forward of political and ideological positions. Political aims and their indexes differ in terms of perspectives and goals, but also in how language becomes part of the venues where the fight is fought. These indexical orders occur both in the nuclei of antidiscrimination discourses and in the periphery with its counter discourses or in media discourses, where the same expressions are used. Conservative discourses sometimes put up a resistance that applies to word production, to the striving towards increased rights and identity claims. But, of course, it must be said that social positioning against equal rights offers resistance in other ways than just by responding to words and expressions.

Euphemisms and reclamations, which characterize the aspiration for tolerance, are probably quite easy to grasp by public debaters, as are other emancipatory discourses. By contrast, norm-critical word suggestions sometimes violate

communicative conventions, such as to name disabilities when not relevant, which is rarely advocated by norm-critical linguistic innovation. Therefore, from a language policy point of view, it is the academic, perspective-changing, and normative part of the cultural space that can be expected to create friction. Both words and their meanings take a different meaning perspective, which not everyone might recognize. Actors within the norm-critical discourse thus put higher demands on people changing their ways of thinking. The result is something of a conflict. When people do not understand, or feel excluded, or perhaps worse, they feel that their possibilities for expressing themselves are circumscribed, prohibited, or made impossible, this is when the reactions seem to arise. This problem is also recognized within all three movements, as shown below in interviews with RFSL and DHR.

It is a challenge to gather such a broad movement; politically, identically, to be political but not within political parties, all levels of awareness. Difficult! Linguistically and communicatively very difficult. What can be said and in what manner? We must have credibility and not create a sense of us-and-them. (Interview with RFSL, October 2017)

The elite in the movement leads a stirring discussion. However, it is performed in public and soon becomes a widespread truth, for example the word *funktionsvariation*. It is done too quickly. Internal think-tanks should prelaunch terms. *Funktionsvariation* has been launched and used without being an understandable word. The youth section's rebelliousness have led to the word *funkis*. Which is caught up and used without criticism. Here, nobody uses *funkis*. (Interview with DHR, September 2017)

By contrast, many of the interviewees recognize that there is always an ideological development that changes our approaches, sometimes at their very essence. This development is, of course, of positive value if it includes a democratic viewpoint and aims at combating discrimination.

Indeed, words and expressions are spread for different reasons, because they are needed in other discourses, or because one wishes to fight them, including both the indexes themselves and the ideology behind them. The most difficult displacement is probably the new perspective and direction, that is, *rasifierad* 'racified' and *svart* 'black' are related semantically but are hardly synonymous. They have essentially the same reference (if the expressions refer to, for example, Afroswednes) but differ in social meaning. Another displacement is against the widened reference, an inclusion that seems frequent in expressions such as *rasifierad*.

A problematic factor is the concept of political correctness (Fairclough 2003). Different social practices reflect ideologies and load norm-critical expressions with politically activist power or pejorative meaning regarding political correctness. An example is anti norm-critical statements, given below.

Funkofobi 'phobia of differently abled people' is a new yellow card [a warning in a soccer game] in the debate. (Flashback 2016)

The expression *funkofobi* is loaded with both political force and derogatory associations. Discursive practices lead towards their respective ideological-controlled political wills, activities, or the like, and the conflict between these social practices is revealed by the advocating for, undermining, or taking over of these practices. Even

critical studies outside linguistics highlight the question of the duplication of the term ‘politically correct’ and often take their starting point in the ideological new word production in the (dis)ability movement (e.g. Jette 2006, Devlieger 1999) that has been the subject of much public debate.

There are some obvious differences between the three groups examined, although the similarities are considerable. The LBTQ movement has gone through an intense process of identity-defining concepts and terms, and it today works towards a norm-critical view of discrimination in many different ways. The disability movement also has an ongoing and growing norm-critical part. However, it should be said that it is not shared by all representatives, some of whom might feel uncomfortable with the indices of norm criticism. The antiracism movement sees language as a central political tool and as a shift towards an impatient attitude to the majority society. The movement of action has become even more political in this sense, which is why antiracism appears to be the most politically provocative of the three movements under investigation.

The interaction between movements and different media actors shows strengths and weaknesses in influencing semiotic processes and strategies of language use. The media might quite simply take over words and expressions from the indexical order that emerges as an effect of tolerance and identity policy. Both the media and the authorities are quick at trying to understand and implement the terms necessary for a neutral terminology and neutral media reports. But some actors in the public sphere are sometimes in opposition to what they call identity politics, so here the emancipatory discourse gets its counter-discourse. For norm-critical indices, the spread is less. The media misunderstand or reduce them, and in social media they encounter stiff opposition. Resistance in social media might also represent the discourses and indexes in political positioning against equalization. In public discourse, there might be no interest in reflecting that kind of battle (as was noted in a Swedish debate in 2012 on editing the ‘n-word’ in children’s literature). In the interview with AfroSwedes, this is discussed.

The discussion is always about whether black people are sad, offended, etc., but then you deviate from the discussion of whether something is right or wrong and end up discussing whether someone is upset, ‘but we [i.e. white people] cannot be guided by someone’s emotional reactions, what is important is what we intend—and we always have good intentions, so our word choice is okay’.

If a political struggle is always reflected from the opposite side, even if it is done with the best of intentions, it still reproduces the hegemony in question (see Ahmed 2006), and then resistance comes to be expressed in other ways than through linguistic-based responses. Thus, the role played by indexical orders is a different one in a semiosphere where ideology is univocal than in the periphery where different ideologies might meet in conflict.

NOTES

¹The interviews were subjected to analysis, from another perspective, in Landqvist (2018).

²All quotes from interviews and other data are translated into English by the author.

³The social forum Flashback presents itself in the following way: Flashback defends the free word, and monitors deviant views in our society. Politically and religiously unobtrusive.

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