

# Language Variation – European Perspectives VIII

*Edited by*

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Language Variation – European Perspectives VIII

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## **Volume 25**

Language Variation – European Perspectives VIII

Selected papers from the Tenth International Conference on Language Variation in Europe (ICLaVE 10), Leeuwarden, June 2019

Edited by Hans Van de Velde, Nanna Haug Hilton and Remco Knooihuizen

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## *Benim*

### A new pronoun in Swedish

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A new first-person pronoun has emerged in the vernacular of Stockholm Swedish. A loan from Turkish, *benim* is indexically self-aggrandizing and a feature of the male genderlect of Stockholm's racialized proletariat. It is also typologically unusual by virtue of being a loanword in an abstract functional role, namely, a pronoun. I detail several factors that, in concert, allowed *benim* to enter into Swedish first as a naked prototype, then as a reanalysis of dissociative third-person constructions, and finally, as a productive first-person personal pronoun. I conclude further that the actuation of these factors was the unique social ecology of class and racial exclusion, which are generally known to drive symbolic status-moves among the subordinated.

**Keywords:** contact linguistics, constructionalization, grammaticalization, multiethnolects, pronouns, Rinkeby Swedish, Stockholm Swedish

#### 1. Introduction

*Benim*, a loan from Turkish, has recently emerged as a first-person ego-honorific pronoun in Stockholm's multiethnolect, exemplified in (1)

- (1) *benim gjorde brott innan benim fick mustasch*  
I did crimes before I got moustache  
'I've been breaking the law before I even had a moustache'  
(Z.e & Jiggz 2018, time 2:36)

This chapter will offer an account of *benim* that includes its syntactic and socio-indexical use. I will also offer a proposal about its evolutionary emergence into Stockholm Swedish, which is of particular theoretical importance to contact sociolinguistics and construction grammar. As it pertains to contact linguistics, functional words are rarely borrowed in contact scenarios (Hock 2009: 381–385),

and I argue that a unique concert of external and internal factors brought about the emergence of this unusual linguistic phenomenon. As it pertains to construction grammar, I draw on Traugott (2015) to argue that the emergence of *benim* as a productive pronoun depended on a chain of matched constructions, each of which was an incrementally divergent iteration of its cognitively-anchored predecessor.

### 1.1 Stockholm: Europe's first-documented multiethnolect

*Rinkeby Swedish* is generally recognized as Europe's earliest-known and Scandinavia's first multiethnolect (Kotsinas 1988a). The linguistic situation in Stockholm is matched by a parallel linguistic development that is ongoing across Europe, referred to by Clyne (2000) as *multiethnolects* and by Rampton (2011) as *contemporary urban vernaculars*. Rampton (2011) describes these linguistic developments as Europe-specific late-modern phenomena with the following three properties: (1) they emerged in urban neighborhoods shaped by immigration and class stratification; (2) they are connected-but-distinct from migrant languages, the traditional working-class variety, and the standard variety; (3) they are widely known and represented in media and popular culture. Stockholm's multiethnolect matches his description quite closely – it first emerged in the working-class migrant housing projects of Rinkeby and Flemingsberg; it has features from both migrant languages and the indigenous working-class variety *Ekensnack*; it is widely represented in the media, the most prominent genre of which is hip hop. The data from this study come from a corpus of Swedish hip hop, which I will detail more closely in Section 3.

It is useful to conceptualize this linguistic development as a uniquely *late-modern* phenomenon. This is because, along with neoliberalization and the rise of social inequality, one of the signature features of late-modernity in Europe is the racialization of the social-class hierarchy (Hesse 2007; Lee 2010; Lentin 2008; Lentin & Titley 2011). As the speech of the children of non-Western migrants continues to focus into coherent varieties, it is becoming more apparent that we are witnessing the emergence of racialized working-class sociolects. For example, Cornips and de Rooij (2013) have proposed that *straattaal* in Rotterdam has come to index anti- or “non-mainstream social categories and practices” in a binary hierarchy (Cornips & de Rooij 2013: 138–139) that, in my view, closely resembles a racialization process. The binary hierarchy erases heritage ethnicities like Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean and encapsulates them all within a single category called *allochthon* (Greek: other land) that is subordinate to the Dutch *autochthon* population (Greek: same land).



Likewise in Stockholm, the notion of “second-generation immigrants” ignores the relatively large Nordic and Western European diaspora in the city, the children of whom are also technically second-generation immigrants. This is one reason why Hübinette, Hörnfeldt, Farahani and Rosales (2012) have proposed taking a Critical Race Theoretical perspective to any contemporary discussion of immigrants or their descendants. They argue that *immigrant* (Swedish: *invandrare*) is actually just a racialized euphemism for what Mulinari and Neergaard (2004) have referred to as Sweden’s racialized working class. This demographic subgroup has developed its own linguistic variety after more than 40 years of social exclusion and relegated suburban enclosure.

In this sense, the term *multiethnolect* inadequately addresses the racializing aspect of this process. Rather than being the variable “lect” of multiple ethnicities, it is the focused “lect” of a proletariat for whom ethnic differences have been erased. In other words, the blanket exclusion that non-white (phenotypically marked) ethnicities face from the majority white population has enacted an enclosure upon all types of otherwise heterogeneous ethnicities, which in turn has resulted in extensive cross-cultural contact and extensive linguistic focusing within that enclosure. Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox and Torgersen (2011: 157) take a similar position when they call Multicultural London English “ethnically neutral”, proposing that the ethnic makeup of individual speakers has no bearing on which features they use; the defining factor is that they are not part of the white majority.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the first time that transformative demographic change – and the new stratifications born out of this change – has incubated new varieties. During their respective industrial revolutions, European cities witnessed the emergence of coherent working-class varieties such as London’s *Cockney* and Birmingham’s *Brummie*. Due to this explosive population growth, some linguists have proposed that the traditional working-class varieties of these cities emerged from a *koinéization* process whereby exogenous forms *swamped* the local variety (Honeybone 2007; Johnston 2015; Kerswill 2018). Kotsinas (1988b) has similarly proposed that Stockholm’s industrial-era working-class variety *Ekensnack* (a.k.a. *Lågstockholmska* ‘Low Stockholmsian’) developed in a similar fashion. She takes the position, in fact, that the evolution of *Ekensnack* and Stockholm’s *multiethnolect* are part and parcel of the same process.

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1. Note, however, that Wiese (2009: 784) might disagree with this claim. She has argued that speakers from the majority-German population are active participants in the development and spread of *Kiezdeutsch*. Most of the literature, however, depicts majority-group speakers as the exception (Auer 2003; Cheshire et al. 2011; Nortier & Dorleijn 2008).

In both cases is slang an important part of the variety, and in both cases words are borrowed from various substrate languages; in the case of Ekensnack from Romani, Månsing,<sup>2</sup> and various dialects; in the case of Rinkeby Swedish from Romani, Turkish, Greek, etc., in other words the minority languages in Rinkeby.

(Kotsinas 1988b: 145, my translation)

Naturally, the same processes of racialization were not as strong during the Industrial Revolution, since the Romani population was only a subset of the Industrial proletariat, but the parallels are clear. This is especially the case if one considers racialization as an additive vehicle to social class for the exclusion and enclosure of a sub-population. In Section 8 of this paper, I show that *benim* and its contemporary use has a striking similarity to the first-person honorific pronoun *mandrom* – a loan from Swedish Romani – that was widely used in Low Stockholmian at the turn of the Twentieth Century. I argue that the enclosures rendered by class and racial subordination likely actuated the emergence of indexically-rich lexemes like *benim*.

## 1.2 Slang and symbolic distinction

As Kotsinas (1988b) illustrates above, the conceptualization of Rinkeby Swedish within the paradigm of Low Stockholmian is an epistemological strategy that allows us to focus less on group second-language acquisition and more on the mechanics of hegemony and marginalization. Through this lens, I see the appropriation of foreign lexical matter as a symbolic means of distinction and even opposition – not unlike the mundane monolingual innovations that have engaged the variationist enterprise for so long in cities like Detroit (Eckert 2000), Martha's Vineyard (Labov 1963), New York (Labov 1966), Philadelphia (Labov 2001), and so on.

Certainly, the dynamics of immigration are a key factor to the emergence of these features, but I would argue that their appropriation is accelerated – and perhaps even actualized – by the external forces of racialized subordination and class exclusion. Just as young Chilmark fisherman appropriated an existing feature in the speech community in reaction to the threat of mainland tourists (Labov 1963), young racialized working-class Stockholmers have appropriated pre-existing linguistic matter in reaction to the threat of race and class exclusion.

Cheshire (2013) offers a similar perspective in her explanation for the use and development of *man* – the recent first-person pronoun that has developed in London's multiethnolect. In addition to the flexibility afforded the pronoun by means of group second-language acquisition (*man* originates from Jamaican

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2. Månsing was the language spoken by the *knallers* – nomadic merchants from Westrogothia who roamed Central and Southern Sweden between the 16th and 19th Centuries (Bergman 1931).

creole), the unique ecology of London street life renders the need for a pronoun that indexes in-group membership (2013: 621) and high-involvement narratives about conflict (2013: 622).

Whether the feature is “originally foreign” or not is less important than the fact that external threats actuate a socio-symbolic gap that must be satiated by oppositional practice, and the material for such practice must be readily available in the feature pool. The loanword *benim* is emblematic of this because, while Turkish, it has never been mentioned in the otherwise rich literature on slang during the height of Turkish migration in Sweden in the 1980s (Kotsinas 1988a, 1994, 2001). Therefore, its emergence cannot be understood as part of some sort of mechanical contact-driven process. Its first mention is in a slang dictionary from 2004 (Kotsinas & Doggelito 2004) – well within the late-modern era and long after Turks had been outnumbered by other migrant groups – and its first discussion in the academic literature was in 2018 (Young 2018).

## 2. Research aims

I wish to address five research aims: (1) In Section 4, I will account for the syntactic use of *benim*; (2) In Section 5, I will describe its socio-pragmatic meaning; (3) In Section 6, I will construct a social profile of its users; and (4) in Section 7, I will offer a hypothesis rooted in *grammatical constructionalization* (Goldberg 2006; Traugott 2015) on how the pronoun emerged into vernacular Swedish. A fifth and final aim of this article, presented in Section 8, is to shed light on the *actuation problem* (Labov 2001: 466) of *benim* by contextualizing it within the history of Lågstockholmska and *mandrom*, the first-person honorific pronoun used in that variety 100 years earlier.

## 3. Data: A corpus of Stockholmian hip hop

Data come from a corpus of 923 Swedish hip hop songs that were released between 2012 and 2019. The songs are authored by 93 artists who hail from Greater Stockholm.<sup>3</sup>

Although the entirety of the data for this analysis comes from Stockholmian hip hop, this paper is not about the genre of hip hop, per se. Rather, hip hop is the domain within which I access the more flamboyant styles of Stockholm’s

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3. NB that I include Västerås and Uppsala as part of the extended metropolitan area of Stockholm.

contemporary vernacular. Therefore, the premise of this article is that the material is representative of the city’s current vernacular speech. Much like the case in neighboring Denmark (Stæhr & Madsen 2017), Germany (Androutsopoulos 2000, 2009), and Norway (Cutler & Røyneland 2015; Opsahl & Røyneland 2016), the link between Swedish hip hop and Stockholm’s multiethnolect (locally known as Suburban Swedish) is well-established. The first dictionary of “suburban slang”, for example, was co-authored by Dogge Doggelito, a member of the hip hop group Latin Kings (Kotsinas & Doggelito 2004). Two members of Latin Kings later established Red Line Records, to which a number of the rappers analyzed here are (or have been) signed. These include Dani M, Gee Dixon, Jacco, Labyrint, Linda Pira, and STOR.

Behschnitt (2013: 194) has described Stockholmian hip hop “as a collective symbol of suburban youth culture and as mediator of multi-ethnic youth language to a broader public”. Smalley (2015: 267), in her dissertation on contemporary urban vernacular (CUV) in Stockholmian hip hop, 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”. Further, Jonsson, Franzén and Milani (2020: 6–9) investigated how Stockholmian rapper Fille (also analyzed in the present corpus) is presented as an “exemplary” speaker of Rinkeby Swedish when he establishes a “slang school” in the Swedish reality television program *So much better*. The placement of his linguistic authority within a humorous event constitutes one of several “facets of the characterological persona that this contemporary urban vernacular brings into being” (Jonsson, Franzén & Milani 2020: 2).

The corpus contains 402,800 words. Of its 93 artists, 25 (27%) are women and 68 (73%) are men. While I do not have access to the ages of all the artists, the artist I estimate as the oldest, Abidaz, was 39 during his last record release. The artist I estimate to be the youngest, Jireel, was 15 during his earliest record release. *Benim* occurs 512 times in the corpus. An overview of the data analyzed is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the data material

	All	
Artists	93	
Words	402,800	
Total number of first-person pronouns	18,006	
<i>benim</i>	512	(2.8%)

#### 4. Syntactic use of *benim*

Table 2 shows the distribution of the grammatical role of *benim* in the corpus. *Benim* appears more often as a grammatical subject, which, importantly, is NOT a reflection of the higher frequency of subject forms in speech. The actual portion of subject forms of *benim* ( $n = 440$ ) as a percentage of all 13,999 subject forms is 3.1%, which is higher than the portion of oblique forms of *benim* ( $n = 62$ ) as a percentage of all 3,980 oblique forms (1.6%). This, in turn, is higher than the portion of possessive *benims* ( $n = 10$ ) as a percentage of all 4,609 possessive forms (0.2%). A full breakdown of the distribution of syntactic usage is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Grammatical role of *benim*

	Standard + <i>benim</i>	<i>benim</i>	Percentage
subject ( <i>benim</i> )	13,999	440	3.1%
object ( <i>benim</i> )	3,980	62	1.6%
possessive ( <i>benims</i> )	4,609	10	0.2%

An example of the typical subject pronoun was provided above in (1). Examples of object/oblique and possessive forms are provided in (2) and (3), respectively.

- (2) *du har benim i din mun*  
 You have me in your mouth  
 ‘You gossip about me all the time’ (Yasin Byn 2015, time 1:13)

- (3) *benims nia, den e ej latch*  
 My niner it is not nice  
 ‘My niner is not nice’  
 (Joel Fungz, Ibbe, Chris o Fada, Michel Dida & Ille FreeWay 2018, time 1:03)

Curiously, the subject form of *benim* occurs in two types of constructions. The first construction ( $n = 378$ ) consists of *benim* as the simple standalone first-person pronoun exemplified in (1). The second construction ( $n = 62$ ) consists of *benim* as a left-dislocated topic followed by the third-person pronoun *han* ‘he’,<sup>4</sup> exemplified in (4a, b).

- (4) a. *benim han e honcho*  
 I he is honcho  
 ‘I’m the head honcho’  
 (Pyramids, Jireel, Pato Pooh & Lamix 2017, time 1:36)

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4. There is only one example of *benim hon* ‘benim she’ in the corpus (Showit 2018).

- b. *benim han e boss; jag ska dö som en man*  
 I he is boss I will die like a man  
 ‘I’m the boss; I will die like a man’ (Jireel 2016, time 1:27)

As can be seen in (4a, b), the third-person personal pronoun refers to the speaker. I refer to this as the “*benim han* construction”. Such use of what Horn (2008) refers to as “the dissociative third person” is a rhetorical strategy that literary scholars have entitled *illeisms* (Horn 2008: 175). Illeisms are more often than not associated with male athletes and politicians who wish to signal bravado (Zwicky 2007). A famous example comes from the American basketballer LeBron James who, when asked in 2010 about his decision to join the Miami Heat, replied “I wanted to do, um, what was best, um you know, for LeBron James and what LeBron James is gonna do to make him happy.” When US President Trump was asked about Russian interference in the presidential election, he responded “Nobody’s been tougher on Russia than Donald Trump”.

Such illeistic uses of proper names and third-person pronouns occur in the present corpus as well, illustrated in (5) where the rapper Z.e left-dislocates his own name and inserts the third-person pronoun *han* ‘he’ as the grammatical subject. This construction offers an important clue for how *benim* found its way from Turkish into the Swedish grammar. It constitutes a core component of my hypothesis on the evolution of *benim* in Section 7.

- (5) *Ainajag, och Z.e han rattar den*  
 Police chase, and Z.e he(I) steer it  
 ‘Police chase, and Z.e(I) is(am) driving’ (Z.e 2016, time 2:10)

## 5. Socio-indexical pragmatics of *benim*

*Benim* has a self-aggrandizing indexicality. In other words, it elevates the speaker, which can result in the deprecation of the interlocutor. Hip hop is by its very nature self-aggrandizing and other-deprecatory. Therefore, it is easy to fall into the false-positive trap of qualitatively assessing *benim* as self-aggrandizing based on its pragmatic occurrence alone. To avoid this trap, I tested whether *benim* actually occurred more often in self-aggrandizing phrases than the standard form *jag* ‘I’. I coded the 440 subject exemplars of *benim* for self-aggrandizement, and I coded a randomized sample of 1,000 standard subject exemplars of *jag*.

Sentences that I evaluate as self-aggrandizing include those with simple predicates like “*benim är kung*” ‘I am king’ or more complex boasts like “*varför rulla fattig, jag gör para om jag kan*” ‘why roll poor, I make money when I can’. In the

latter construction, for example, “I make money when I can” is made into a boast by its antecedent “why roll poor”.

Table 3 shows the raw count and percentage of the 440 *benim*-subject exemplars that were coded as self-aggrandizing in comparison to the random sample of 1,000 *jag*-subject exemplars that were coded as self-aggrandizing. Of the 440 *benim*-subject exemplars, 288 (66%) occur in self-aggrandizing semantic conditions. The remainder occur in other types of semantic conditions. Of the 1,000 *jag* exemplars, 242 (24%) occur in self-aggrandizing semantic conditions. This leads me to conclude that *benim* carries socio-indexical connotations of self-aggrandizement.

**Table 3.** The distribution of subject-form ‘*benim*’ and standard ‘*jag*’ in self-aggrandizing phrases

	<i>benim</i> (n = 440)		<i>jag</i> (n = 1,000)	
self-aggrandizing lines	288	66%	242	24%
other lines (e.g., sentimental)	151	34%	758	76%

Where *jag* seems to occur more often is in *complications* to the narrative and in moments of *sentiment*. Examples of complications are “*minns tiden jag var solo*” ‘I remember the time I was solo’ and “*det krävdes att jag tog en överdos*” ‘it took me having to overdose’. Examples of sentiment are “*jag tänker på min mamma, pappa, syster och min bror*” ‘I think about my mother, father, sister and brother’ and “*I die for you*” ‘jag dör för dig’.

To summarize, I interpret the distribution in Table 3 to mean that *benim* further aggrandizes the speaker beyond the already-aggrandizing trappings of hip-hop subjectivity. This is why I refer to *benim* as “ego-honorific”.

## 6. Social profile of *benim* users

### 6.1 Ethnic and national heritage

While I do not have information on all of the rappers’ ethnic background (or national origin), I do have it for 35 of them. The information becomes sporadically available in interviews or, occasionally, in the lyrics of their songs. Where the ethnic information was available, I coded for ethnicity (e.g., Wolof). Where only national origin was available, I coded for this instead (e.g., Gambian). Of the 35 rappers for which I have heritage information, 20 of them use *benim* in their lyrics, totaling 268 of the 512 total *benim* exemplars. Their names, ethnicities, and number of *benim* usages are provided in Table 4.

Although the data in Table 4 constitute a mere sub-sample of the larger analysis, it becomes clear, nonetheless, that “rights” to *benim* have ethnically leveled. We do not see the sort of Black/Asian divide like we witnessed in the UK in the 1990s (Rampton 1995). None of the rappers here are Turkish; rather, a wide range of ethnic and national heritages are represented. This provides evidence and support for using the term *multiethnolect* in the Swedish context, given that a Turkish loan is so readily used by speakers who lack any shared ethnic affiliation. While this may intuitively not be very surprising, rarely has the literature on European multiethnolects actually tracked the use of specific heritage-language lexical matter according to the heritage nationalities or linguistic background of the speakers.

**Table 4.** Ethnic/national heritage of the rappers that use *benim*

Rapper	Ethnic/national heritage	Usages of <i>benim</i>
1.Cuz	Somali	1
Abidaz	Eritrean	7
Aki	African American/Finnish	2
Antwan	Assyrian	9
Dani M	Venezuelan/Finnish	10
Denz	Eritrean	28
Dree Low	Somali	26
Erik Lundin	Swedish/Gambian	6
Gee Dixon	Gambian	14
Ibbe	Sierra Leonean	4
Ille Freeway	Somali	7
Ivory	Ivorian	5
Jireel	Angolan	17
Lamix	Gambian	28
Linda Pira	Swedish/Colombian	1
Pato Pooh	Chilean	19
Patryk	Romani	9
Showit	Eritrean	2
Yasin Byn	Somali	17
Z.e	Polish	56
	<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>



## 6.2 Social class

Anecdotally, Swedish hip hop is known to originate from working-class multiethnic neighborhoods. Since I have not conducted interviews with any rapper,<sup>5</sup> I do not have specific social-class metrics for them. I do, however, have information on the home neighborhoods for 34 of the rappers, 20 of whom produce *benim* in their lyrics, totaling 248 of the 512 total *benim* exemplars. I harvested the regional data on median monthly income and the percentage of unemployed residents for their respective neighborhoods from the most recent statistical data available from municipal reports, dating between 2016 and 2018. The rappers' names, neighborhood, neighborhood median monthly income, neighborhood unemployment, and number of *benim* usages are catalogued in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Neighborhood and socioeconomic profile of the rappers that use *benim*. Neighborhoods where the monthly median income is less than and unemployment is higher than the city average are marked with an asterisk

	Rapper	Neighborhood	Neighborhood monthly income €	Neighborhood unemployed residents %	Usages of <i>benim</i>
*	1.cuz	Hässelby	1,895	6.1	1
*	Abidaz	Hagalund	2,156	n/a	7
*	Adel	Akalla	1,961	5.2	1
*	Aki	Gottsunda	1,745	6.5	2
	Alex Ceesay	Stocksund	4,203	n/a	31
*	Ambessa	Fittja	1,588	7.0	1
*	Antwan	Råby	1,610	7.0	9
*	BLB	Husby	1,683	7.1	2
*	Dani M	Stenhagen	2,117	3.8	10
*	Denz	Rissne	2,052	n/a	28
*	Dree Low	Husby	1,683	7.1	26
	Erik Lundin	Bromsten	2,586	3.9	6
*	Ibbe	Rågsved	1,859	6.0	4
*	Ivory	Vällingby	2,279	4.2	5
*	Jireel	Rågsved	1,859	6.0	17
	Macky	Dalen	2,812	2.0	11
*	Pato Pooh	Rinkeby	1,458	8.8	19
*	Rami	Storvreten	1,815	7.2	1
*	Sinan	Tureberg	1,470	n/a	11
*	Z.e	Tensta	1,581	8.2	56
Stockholm average			2,520	2.9	
Total usages:					248

5. Rapper Pato Pooh was kind enough to review this article for content and accuracy via email, but he has not participated in any interview with me.

Seventeen of the 20 rappers hail from neighborhoods that have a median monthly income below the city average of € 2520, and 18 of the rappers hail from neighborhoods that have an unemployment rate above the city average of 2.9%. Eleven of the rappers hail from neighborhoods that are widely known as particularly marginal: Akalla, Fittja, Gottsunda, Husby, Råby, Rågsved, Rinkeby, and Tensta. This is also reflected in the income data; these are all neighborhoods with median incomes below € 2000 per month.<sup>6</sup>

What this analysis shows is the connection between the hip-hop corpus, the actual neighborhoods where Swedish multiethnolect is known to be the prevailing variety, and the status of these neighborhoods as socioeconomically peripheral.

It is also worth pointing out that the two highest users of *benim* stand out from the remaining group in an important way. Alex Ceesay from Stocksund has 31 uses, and Z.e from Tensta has 56 uses. Alex Ceesay stands out because he is from a traditionally affluent neighborhood, and Z.e stands out because he is the “whitest” of all the rappers in the corpus. While certainly a tricky term, “white” is defined here as the Swedish ideal described by Hübinette et al. (2012: 60). We cannot ignore the possibility that Ceesay’s home neighborhood and Z.e’s complexion might have roused challenges to their legitimacy at different points throughout their lives. One can imagine that experiencing such challenges might drive either rapper to use more slang overall or, specifically, to co-opt *benim*’s other-deprecatory power to dissuade any such unwelcome challenges. Crucially, I am not *myself* proposing that they lack legitimacy; rather, I am proposing that reductive understandings of race and class in Stockholm can result in the erasure of Ceesay’s and Z.e’s very real lived experiences. One potential tool to fight that erasure can be the use of symbolic resources like *benim*.

### 6.3 Gender

The corpus contains 402,800 words and 93 artists, of whom 25 (27%) are women and 68 (73%) are men. The word count, however, is not similarly distributed. Female rappers contribute 67,582 (17%) words, and male rappers contribute 335,218 (83%) words. The gender distribution of *benim*, however, is quite different. Women are heavily underrepresented, contributing only 10 exemplars (2%) of the 512 total exemplars of *benim*. This is broken down in Table 6.

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6. Some readers may find these numbers insufficiently “marginal”. It is important to note that Sweden ranks 8 on the OECD human development index and has no ghettos according to Wacquant’s (2004) contemporary definition of the term.

**Table 6.** Distribution of *benim* by gender; the distribution of words and total first-person pronouns (*benim*, *benims*, *jag*, *mig*, *min*, *mitt*, *mina*) by gender

	Men		Women		All
Artists	68	73%	25	27%	93
Words	335,218	83%	67,582	17%	402,800
Total first-person	14,352	80%	3,654	20%	18,006
<i>benim</i>	502	98%	10	2%	512

What is key here is that female rappers do NOT produce significantly fewer self-aggrandizing lines than men. Table 7 shows that in the subsample of 1,000 lyrics with *jag* as the subject (instead of *benim*), 20% of the lines produced by women are self-aggrandizing and 25% of the lines produced by men are self-aggrandizing. It can therefore not be said that the absence of *benim* among women is due to the fact that their lyrics are less boastful. Rather, a more probable conclusion is that *benim* is part of Stockholm's male genderlect.

**Table 7.** Gender distribution of self-aggrandizing lines (i.e., phrases) in 1000 randomly-selected lines that have standard *jag* 'I' as the subject

	Men		Women	
	<i>jag</i> ( <i>n</i> = 823)		<i>jag</i> ( <i>n</i> = 177)	
self-aggrandizing lines	204	25%	35	20%
other lines (e.g., sentimental)	619	75%	142	80%

This is not to say that the findings on self-aggrandizement in Section 5 are unimportant to the findings here. Quite the contrary, I would argue that the self-aggrandizing indexicality of *benim* has enabled it to take on a masculine indexicality because boasting is accepted and even encouraged for men while being frowned upon for women. Eckert's (2008) exposé on the *indexical field* offers helpful insight as to how the indexicality of *benim* might evolve. Indexical meanings are highly under-specified and are linked by means of "ideological connections" (2008: 454). This is how the aspiration of /t/ can take on a wide range of socio-indexical meanings – from "nerd girl" to "gay diva" to "schoolteacher". Those three personas are linked to stances such as "articulate", "prissy", and "effortful", which themselves are also ideologically linked to one another (Eckert 2008: 469). In other words, someone seen as prissy is more likely to be perceived as articulate than as inarticulate and is more likely to be perceived as effortful than as sloppy. By means of these indexical chains do new indexical constructions emerge.

Returning to the data on *benim*, male and female rappers may be equally self-aggrandizing in their lyrical content, but the ideological connection between

the construction of masculinity and boastful stances will be stronger due to pre-existing gender ideologies, ideologies of which may keep female speakers from using *benim* too extensively.

Miyazaki (2004) found similar gendered results in girls' and boys' use of *ore*, a Japanese other-deprecatory first-person pronoun that bears considerable resemblance to *benim*.

Girls' masculine pronoun use, for instance, was at times well received but at other times dismissed as crazy. A boy's feminine first-person pronoun use was ridiculed and sometimes severely punished. Girls and boys continually have to negotiate their speech and identity in a complex field of gender and power.

(Miyazaki 2004: 265)

While the distribution of *ore* production was gendered just like *benim*, stances of dominance and submission appeared also to be important because those stances are connected to the prevailing conceptualization of gender roles. Since the female use of *benim* is exceptionally rare and may at times be negatively sanctioned, the ten occurrences by female rappers may be received by listeners as especially boastful. Without a perceptual experiment, this is impossible to ascertain, but Miyazaki's and Eckert's work would imply so.

## 7. The evolution of *benim*: A hypothesis

It is so rare that a new pronoun emerges in a variety that we know very little about the process (cf. Cheshire 2013). In fact, functional words are not often borrowed into a recipient language; rather, content words dominate at a much higher rate (Field 2002; Haspelmath 2008; Haugen 1950; Hock 2009; Muysken 1981; van Hout & Muysken 1994; Whitney 1881). According to Hock (2009: 381–385), in the rare event that the donor lexeme is functional, it is first typically stripped of its functional role and nominalized. An example of this is the borrowing of the AAVE verb *to mack* – which means to court or seduce – into Swedish. The Swedish loan is *göra mack*, which translates literally as 'do/make mack'. *Mack* here is stripped of its functional role, nominalized, and affixed to the "all-purpose verb" *göra* 'do/make'.

I hypothesize here that the Turkish pronoun *benim* was similarly stripped of its grammatical function, nominalized, and then affixed into the illeist construction *benim han* that I exemplified in (4a, b). This construction was enabled by the Nordic tendency to routinely left-dislocate semantic subjects and produce a personal pronoun as the grammatical subject. The *benim han* construction then entered into the community grammar as an exemplar that later enabled *benim* to undergo reanalysis and become the free-standing productive first-person pronoun that it is today. In the following sections, I detail each step.

## 7.1 The Turkish use of *benim* and its dominance in the feature pool

Turks were one of the largest migrant groups in Rinkeby and Flemingsberg, the two original birthplaces of *Rinkeby Swedish* (Kotsinas 1988a: 266). Turkish is also the donor language of many of the most-commonly used slang words in Stockholm's multiethnolect (Young 2018).

A dictionary will simply define *benim* as the Turkish genitive form 'my' of the first-person pronoun *ben*, which means 'I'. Below is a sample declension of the pronoun in Turkish.

Turkish NOMINATIVE	<i>ben</i>	I
Turkish GENITIVE	<i>benim</i>	of me/ my / mine
Turkish DATIVE	<i>bana</i>	to me
Turkish ACCUSATIVE	<i>beni me</i>	me

The actual usage, however, is more complicated than what a typical dictionary implies. First, Turkish is an agglutinative language, and the unmarked way to indicate first-person possession is with the morpheme *-m*. This means that the routine way to indicate that a car, *araba* in Turkish, belongs to me is to say *arabam*. It is only in instances of emphasis that *benim* would be added, rendering *arabam benim*. Second, *benim* is the form used in exclamatives. For example, if one's mother were to knock on the door and one was to ask "who is it?", her response would be "*benim!*", which translates pragmatically into English as "it's me!". If one were to play peekaboo with a Turkish baby, it is commonplace to exclaim "*benim!*" at the moment one's hands open to reveal one's face.

What all of these usages have in common is *salience*. It may not necessarily be the case that *benim* is frequent in Turkish, but when it does occur, it is in salient instances. Cheshire, Kerswill, Fox and Torgersen (2011) point out that while frequency is important for selection from the feature pool (Mufwene 2001), salience may also play a key role behind why certain features dominate over other potential donor features. This would explain why *benim* – not *ben* – prevailed.

## 7.2 Left dislocation in the Nordic languages

According to Johannessen (2014), left-dislocation of subjects is commonplace in the Nordic languages, exemplified in (6).

- (6) *Johan han e bra komisk ibland.*

Johan he is good comic sometimes

'Johan is very comic sometimes.'

(Johannessen 2014: 404)

Whereas (6) would take a marked topicalized meaning in English or German, it is unmarked in Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish. In the corpus examined for this article, examples of left-dislocated subjects abound, such as in (7a, b) and (8). Example (3) also happens to contain one as well (...nia, den...).

- (7) a. *När vi är på klubben par dom blir ex*  
 When we are on the club couples they become exes  
 ‘When we are at the club couples become exes.’ (Adel 2018, time 1:10)
- b. *Dom hinner inte ikapp, nej; araban den ax*  
 They catch not up no the car it speeds  
 ‘They can’t catch up, no; the car is speeding.’  
 (Macky & Thrife 2017, time 1:01)
- (8) *Ainajag, och Z.e han rattar den*  
 Police chase, and Z.e he(I) steer it  
 ‘Police chase, and Z.e(I) is(am) driving’ (Z.e 2016, time 2:11)

### 7.3 *Benim* as a left-dislocated noun in an illeist construction

While (6) and (7a, b) are semantically similar, (8) is semantically mismatched because it is speaker-referential, enabled by means of the dissociative third-person illeist *Z.e han* ‘Z.e he’. It is, however, matched in terms of construction, and if we examine the double subject construction within the theoretical lens of *construction acquisition*, then a clear evolutionary pathway is revealed. I propose here that the *Johan han* construction in (6) opened the pathway for the illeist *Z.e han* construction in (8), which, in turn, opened a pathway for the *benim han* construction in (9a, b).

- (9) a. *benim han e honcho*  
 I he is honcho  
 ‘I’m the head honcho’  
 (Pyramids, Jireel, Pato Pooh, & Lamix 2017, time 1:36)
- b. *benim han e boss; jag ska dö som en man*  
 I he is boss I will die like a man  
 ‘I’m the boss; I will die like a man’ (Jireel 2016, time 1:27)

According to Goldberg (2006: 89), certain constructions dominate in the acquisition of grammar because they “involve a type of *cognitive anchoring* where a high-frequency type of example acts as an anchor, i.e. a salient standard of comparison”. When new lexical material is introduced, a series of analyses will be conducted based on its form-meaning constellation. *Benim* is both disyllabic and speaker-referential, and the only other examples of disyllabic speaker-referential lexemes in Swedish are proper names (all pronouns are monosyllabic), and this is

especially the case when a lexeme is phonotactically foreign like *-nim*. Since proper names often occur in double-subject constructions like *Johan han* or *Z.e han*, it is plausible that the entry of *benim* into the grammar would be facilitated by the anchoring role of such constructions. If we refer back to Hock's (2009) argument that functional loans are grammatically stripped and nominalized, then it is all the more plausible that *benim* would have entered as a naked prototype and more vulnerable to analogization. Furthermore, the lingering self-referential semantics of *benim* would serve to further cement the rhetorical function of the dissociative third-person construction.

#### 7.4 Grammatical constructionalization of 'benim han e' to 'benim'

The *benim han* construction almost always occurs with a copula; specifically, in 58 out of its 62 occurrences. What this implies is that the *benim han* construction may have spread by means of the fixed-form exemplar *benim han e* 'benim he is'. Later, its wide circulation would have permitted successive speakers to reanalyze it and repurpose *benim* for the wider grammatical usage seen in (10), (11), and (12).

- (10) *benim gjorde brott innan benim fick mustasch*  
 I did crimes before I got moustache  
 'I've been breaking the law before I even had a moustache'  
 (Z.e & Jiggz 2018, time 2:36)
- (11) *du har benim i din mun*  
 You have me in your mouth  
 'You gossip about me all the time' (Yasin Byn 2015, time 1:13)
- (12) *benims nia, den e ej lath*  
 My niner it is not nice  
 'My niner is not nice'  
 (Joel Funz, Ibbe, Chris o Fada, Michel Dida & Ille FreeWay 2018, time 1:03)

According to Traugott (2015), this process is referred to as *grammatical constructionalization* by which a form<sub>new</sub>-meaning<sub>new</sub> pairing is forged "through a sequence of small-step reanalyses of both form and meaning" (2015: 54). This implies that *benim* is not merely an innovation; rather, it is a type-change in "degree of schematicity, productivity, and compositionality" (2015: 55) that involves the following process:

Language-users loosely associate an implicature or "invited inference" from a construct with the semantics of an existing construction in the constructional network, preferring to use parts of the construct in a particular distributional niche, or repeating part of a construct as a chunk. (Traugott 2015: 55)

Therefore, it can be concluded that a complex interaction of socio-pragmatics (the dissociative third-person), de-grammaticalization (nominalized *benim*), and construction grammaticalization have facilitated an iterative chain of constructions that birthed a new personal pronoun.<sup>7</sup>

## 7.5 Summarizing the proposed evolutionary trajectory of ‘benim’

The constructional network I propose is that stage 1, the left-dislocation construction of proper names like *Johan han*, facilitated stage 2, the illeist *Z.e han*, which facilitated stage 3, the left-dislocation of the de-grammaticalized *benim* to *benim han*. Two elements that are of utmost importance to the latter stage are the fact that the surface form of *benim* increases the chance of proper-name matching in Swedish constructions (and the fact that speaker-referential meaning can be maintained through dissociative third-person illeisms). Stage 3 served then as an anchor point for a final reanalysis in stage 4 whereby *benim* became a free-standing productive pronoun, and this may have been facilitated by the fixed-form exemplar *benim han e*.

Figure 1 contains a flowchart of how, in more detail, *benim* might have entered from Turkish into Swedish and become a productive first-person ego-honorific pronoun in the contemporary vernacular. In the late 1970s and 1980s, as Turkish migrants began concentrating in Rinkeby and Flemingsberg, the word would occur in infrequent, albeit salient, moments. With time, second-language learners and young acquirers of Swedish would continue to use *benim* in an exclamatory way. This, combined with the imperfect acquisition of Turkish, would have facilitated the grammatical stripping of *benim*.

As I outlined earlier, illeisms are a common rhetorical strategy for speakers wishing to signal bravado. At the same time, an unmarked feature in spoken Swedish is the left-dislocation of the semantic subject and the insertion of a third-person personal pronoun to take on the role of grammatical subject. This would have provided the opportunity for younger speakers – speakers who are closer to or within the Critical Period of Language Acquisition – to reanalogize *benim* by inserting it into dissociative third-person left-dislocated subject phrases. The innovative construction could have begun with the simple copula construction *benim han e* ‘benim he is’. This fixed form exemplar would have been readily available for duplication because, as an exemplar, it makes fewer cognitive demands.

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7. It is important to point out that constructions as in (9a, b) do not occur with the first-person pronoun *jag* (\**benim jag*). Constructions like (8) do not occur with *jag* either (\**Z.e jag*), and neither do constructions like “\**benim jag*”.



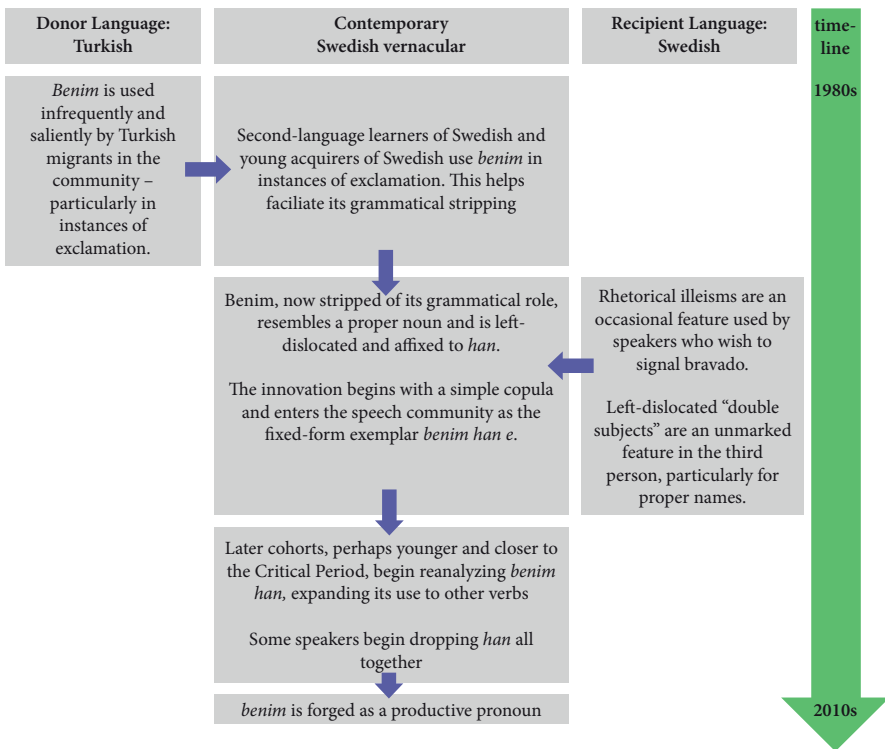


Figure 1. Proposed evolutionary history of *benim* in the Swedish vernacular

Later cohorts, at some point in the 2000s or 2010s – perhaps also younger and closer to or within the Critical Period of Language Acquisition – would have grammatically reconstructionalized this exemplar. This would have facilitated using *benim han* with more verbs than just the copula, and it would have facilitated the dropping of the dissociative *han* all together, rendering the productive pronoun *benim*.

## 8. *Benim* in historical context

Although I have offered a hypothesis on how *benim* came to be *despite* the labyrinthine constraints of Swedish grammar, the impetus for the change remains to be accounted for. Labov (2001) reminds us that investigations of linguistic variation throughout the world share a common theoretical puzzle: the Actuation Problem.

There remains, as always, the Actuation Problem. Why here and now? The beginnings of change are as mysterious as ever. Why *not* here and *not* now?

(Labov 2001: 466)

As it pertains to Stockholm, one can imagine the popular narrative surrounding *benim* as a male genderlectal word. I recently heard “well it comes from the male chauvinistic tendencies of men from the Middle East!”. Aside from the obvious fact that Turkey is not in the Middle East, the picture is of course more nuanced than that. Certainly, the language-contact ecologies within Stockholm’s multiethnic suburbs have coalesced with a particularly flamboyant expression of masculinity to render particular lexical outputs. The ego-honorific *benim* accompanies a large lexical inventory for sex and women, stemming from Turkish, Arabic and Romani.

However, if we are to take a more critical eye to the actuation problem, we ought to look further back in history, for this is not the first time a first-person honorific has circulated in Swedish. During the Industrial Revolution when *Lågstockholmska* ‘Low Stockholman’ was the infamous variety of Stockholm’s criminal underworld and lower working class, the ego-honorific *mandrom* played a similar syntactic and socio-indexical role as *benim* does today. Examples of its use are provided in (13a, b).

- (13)

a.

*Mandrom*

*ha*

*studera*

*live*

*jävlitt*

*skarpt*

I

have

studied

life

damned

sharply

‘I have studied life pretty damn closely’

(Bergman 1964: 31)

b.

*De*

*e*

*mandroms*

*tjejja!*

That

is

my

girl

‘That’s my girl!’

(Koch 1916: 98)

*Mandrom* comes from the Swedish Romani first-person pronoun *mande* and its variants *mander* and *mandro* (Bergman 1931: 28; Lindell, Thorbjörnsson-Djerf & Carling 2008: 36), the latter of which is a fossilization of the Common Romani first-person possessive *mundro* (Carling 2005: 91). The evolutionary journey of the pronoun from Common Romani (as described by Matras 2002: 100) to Swedish Romani to Low Stockholman is illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8. The evolutionary journey of *mandrom*

	Common Romani	Swedish Romani	Low Stockholman
SUBJECT	me	mande/mander/mandro	mandrom
POSSESSIVE	mindro/mundro	mandros	mandroms
OBLIQUE	man-SUFFIX	mande/miro	mandrom

I draw *mandrom* into the discussion to explicitly draw parallels between the Industrial Revolution and our current era, late modernity. Both are epochs defined by rapid social change and intense social stratification. Aside from the relatively

short “Golden Era” of Swedish social democracy (1930s–1980s; Therborn 1998), Sweden and its capital, Stockholm, have always been socially stratified. Liquor purchases were rationed according to social class until 1954 (Centre for Business History 2019), women gained the right to vote long before social-welfare recipients (1919 versus 1945), and the middle classes avoided public schools until after World War II (Sandin 2003: 60–61).

As industrialization began to partition the citizenry according to their relationship to production, Stockholm, itself situated within a dense archipelago, saw its social classes assemble on different islands. Figure 2 contains a map of the city in year 1841. The brown shading indicates the developed parts of the city, blue shading indicates water, and green indicates farmland and forests. The central island is the historic medieval city Gamla Stan (previously known as Stadsholmen), and Södermalm to the south is where the new industrial working class was confined. The growing middle class spread to Norrmalm in the North. Since then, the city’s population has grown to fill the full map, but the social classes today continue to be separated by water and forests. These symbolic and physical enclosures contributed to the emergence and maintenance of Lågstockholmska, its many inputs from Swedish Romani and Månsing (Lagerström 2004), the eventual development *Ekensnack* during the Industrial Revolution (Kotsinas 1988c; Thesleff 1912), and the development of Swedish multiethnolect during late modernity.



Figure 2. Stockholm in 1841 (Topografiska corpsen 1861)

The tie between Stockholm's Industrial Revolution then and late modernity now is that both periods were marked by stratification and the rapid inflow of labor migrants. In the former era, migrants arrived from the surrounding provinces; in the latter, migrants arrived from non-Western countries. According to Labov (2001), the valorization of oppositional practices in marginalized communities – whether minority or working-class or both – incubates linguistic innovation. This process is known as the *Nonconformity Principle* (Labov 2001: 516), and the coinage of *mandrom* and *benim* can be seen as examples of this.

But it is not just the opposition to norms that may have actuated these new slang terms; it may also be the need for symbolic currency when material currency is lacking. As structural factors like segregation, racism, and income inequality render the hegemonic order more salient to those who are not part of it, so too will there be pressure for the subordinated group to duplicate the hierarchy within itself. Irvine and Gal (2000) refer to this as *fractal recursivity*.

Fractal recursivity involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level. [...] Thus the dichotomizing and partitioning process that was involved in some understood opposition (between groups or linguistic varieties, for example) recurs at other levels, creating either subcategories on each side of a contrast.... (Irvine & Gal 2000: 403)

I believe that as Stockholm became more heavily hierarchical, twice in modern history, its subordinated groups were increasingly motivated to create their own internal hierarchies as a way of both duplicating the superstructure – as Irvine and Gal propose – and as a way to divide up the ever-shrinking availability of material resources. Such circumstances render an ecology ripe for indexicals like *benim* and *mandrom* that can be used in rhetorical strategy to assert the speaker and deprecate the interlocutor.

## 9. Conclusion

I have offered a descriptive account of *benim* and have sought clues in the data to explain how it emerged into the Swedish vernacular grammar. The word is a first-person ego-honorific pronoun that projects aggrandizement onto the speaker and is part of the male genderlect of Stockholm's racialized proletariat. Aside from its clear local relevance to the Swedish research community, *benim* is theoretically relevant to the field of contact sociolinguistics by virtue of being a loanword in a highly abstract functional role. It is also of relevance to students of grammatical constructionalization who might wish to examine such a process within an ecology characterized by social stratification and superdiversity.

I have proposed here that this unique and special emergence of *benim* was made possible by the concert of four factors: (1) the initial salience of *benim* usages in Turkish; (2) the availability of dissociative third-person “illeisms” in vernacular performances of bravado; (3) the unique typological feature of left-dislocated “double subjects” in Swedish; and (4) the surface form of *benim* resembling a proper noun within Swedish phonotactics. I claim further that the contemporaneous *actuation* of these four factors has been emergent class and racial exclusion, which has urgently expanded the need for oppositional practice – a gap which *benim* has helped satiate. The pronoun’s other-deprecatory function also enables the reproduction of hegemony within the community at a fractal level, operating as one of many symbolic resources.

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## Discography

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This volume contains a selection of papers from the 10th International Conference on Language Variation in Europe (ICLaVE 10), which was organized by the Fryske Akademy and held in Leeuwarden/Ljouwert (the Netherlands) in June 2019. The editors have selected thirteen papers on a wide range of language varieties, geographically ranging from Dutch-Frisian contact varieties in Leeuwarden to English in Sydney, Australia. The selection includes traditional quantitative and qualitative approaches to different types of linguistic variables, as well as state-of-the-art techniques for the analysis of speech sounds, new dialectometrical methods, covariation analysis, and a range of statistical methods. The papers are based on data from traditional sources such as sociolinguistic interviews, speech corpora and newspapers, but also on hip hop lyrics, historical private letters and administrative documents, as well as re-analyses of dialect atlas data and older dialect recordings. The reader will enjoy the vibrant diversity of language variation studies presented in this volume.

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