Language and belonging across time and space: Young adolescents in multilingual urban contexts in Sweden

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Abstract

This article examines how time and space are embedded in young adolescents' reported language practices and experiences of (un)belonging. Drawing on interview data from 13- to 14-year-olds in socioeconomically disadvantaged and linguistically diverse urban areas in Sweden, the study explores how these practices are shaped by spatial contexts (school and peer environments, local neighborhoods, urban and transnational spaces) and temporal dimensions (including past experiences, present practices, and imagined futures). Adopting a Bourdieusian approach, the analysis illustrates how time and space are interwoven in language practices, and how adolescents' awareness of linguistic and social hierarchies informs their experiences of (un)belonging. The findings demonstrate how spatiotemporal conditions interact in shaping adolescents' linguistic habitus, their (un)belonging, and their social positioning within and beyond their immediate environments.

Keywords: *multilingualism, adolescents, belonging, time and space, linguistic habitus, urban contexts*

1 Introduction

Speakers' language practices and negotiation of belonging are both influenced by and constitutive of the spatial and temporal conditions in which they are situated (Blackledge & Creese, 2012; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). In their daily lives, young people navigate multiple settings marked by varying linguistic norms and expectations. These contrasts are particularly evident between language practices in and out of school

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(e.g., Van Avermaet, 2007), but also span across urban, peripheral and culturally distinct environments. While sociolinguistic inquiry generally involves an acknowledgement of the significance of time and space, these concepts rarely take center stage as explicit analytical foci of interest.

In recent years, public discourse in Sweden has increasingly focused on the issue of belonging for adolescents with migration backgrounds in urban areas, particularly in debates around "integration," "social cohesion," and "segregation" (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018). These narratives often portray urban youth through deficit framings that emphasize risk and marginality, while offering limited attention to how young people navigate and make sense of their social worlds (Milani, 2020). This study responds to such framings by foregrounding how adolescents engage with language and belonging across spatiotemporal contexts, drawing on interview data and employing a Bourdieusian analytical lens.

Time and space are integral to Bourdieu's oeuvre, particularly in relation to positions and boundaries tied to the valorization of linguistic practices and senses of belonging. From a Bourdieusian perspective, they are socially embedded dimensions that encompass past experiences, present practices, and imagined futures. This study draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice and its relational conceptual framework, which holds that individuals possess different forms of capital that shape their positioning within social space—a relational field structured by the distribution of these capitals. While the concept of habitus is further elaborated in the theoretical section, it is here introduced as the embodied dispositions shaped by individuals' experiences and position within social space, guiding how they perceive, interpret, and act in the world (Bourdieu, 1991).

In this study, interview accounts from 13- to 14-year-old adolescents in socioeconomically disadvantaged and linguistically diverse Swedish urban areas make visible how "distance in social space, i.e., the unequal distribution of the different kinds of capital in geographical space" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 219) influences language practices and perceptions. Like many speakers, these adolescents move across multiple cultural and linguistic contexts — at home, in school, and within their local and broader communities. Yet their experiences are shaped by unequal distributions of capital and symbolic hierarchies, which stratify language use and render some linguistic resources more visible and valued than others (Bourdieu, 1991; Higgins, 2017; Piller, 2016).

1.1 Aim and outline

This study aims to explore how spatiotemporal dynamics influence young adolescents' language practices, dispositions, and experiences of (un)belonging. In doing so, it also seeks to advance discussions on the integration of time and space as central analytical concepts in research on youth language practices. Building on scholarship that foregrounds Bourdieu's spatial conceptualizations (Reed-Danahay, 2017, 2020; Salö, 2022) and highlights their relevance for understanding urban differentiation and inequality (Wacquant, 2018), this article contributes to this line of inquiry by demonstrating the analytical relevance of these concepts in sociolinguistic research. The article addresses the following questions:

1. How do young adolescents describe and navigate their language practices across different times and spaces in their everyday lives?

2. In what ways do these practices influence their experiences of (un)belonging and positioning within social and linguistic hierarchies?

The article begins with a brief overview of the linguistic context in Sweden, followed by a review of previous research on youth language practices that foreground spatial and temporal dimensions. It then introduces a Bourdieusian framework for analyzing how language, time, and space intersect in young people's experiences of (un)belonging.

The method section outlines the empirical material, research contexts, participants, and analytical procedures. The findings are presented in two thematic sections, reflecting patterns featured in the interviews. The article concludes with a discussion of implications and suggestions for future research.

2   Background and context

2.1 Socioeconomic and linguistic stratification in Sweden

The sociolinguistic context in Sweden is shaped by the coexistence of multilingual realities and monolingual norms. While the Language Act (SFS 2009:600) formally recognizes linguistic diversity, including five national minority languages, Swedish Sign Language and the right to develop and use one's mother tongue, it also establishes Swedish as the principal language of society, with a particular responsibility placed on public institutions to ensure its use and development. This dual orientation reflects an ongoing tension whereby approximately 200 languages are spoken in Sweden (Parkvall, 2015), yet Swedish retains a dominant position in educational and institutional settings. This hierarchy influences how different linguistic resources are perceived and valued, especially in contexts marked by social and linguistic diversity.

Since the 1990s, Sweden has experienced growing socioeconomic and ethnic divides, particularly in metropolitan areas where high- and low-income earners often reside in separate neighborhoods. In fact, Swedish cities are now among the most segregated in Europe (Marcińczak et al., 2021) and socioeconomically disadvantaged urban areas are generally located in suburban neighborhoods outside the city center. Due to the overlap of socio-economic and ethnic segregation, individuals with migrant backgrounds are overrepresented in these areas (Delmos, 2022).

This demographic pattern is argued to perpetuate "hegemonic whiteness," reinforcing representations in which "Swedishness" is tacitly equated with being white (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). Adolescents growing up in socioeconomically disadvantaged urban areas are disproportionately affected by residential segregation, economic and educational inequality, and exposure to gang-related violence, conditions often compounded by persistent political and media portrayals that reinforce marginalizing narratives (Dahlstedt & Eliassi, 2018; Mastro, 2009; Milani, 2020). Research continuously shows that children and adolescents are acutely aware of the stigmatized images and negative stereotypes associated with their neighborhoods (e.g., Axelsson, 2014; Bylund, 2022; Milani & Jonsson, 2012; Senter, 2022). Accounting for these spatial and social inequalities is thus crucial to analyzing language practices and experiences of (un) belonging among young adolescents in contemporary urban settings.

2.2 Research on youth, language, and the significance of time and space

Adolescents often adopt the linguistic norms and practices of their peer groups to signal belonging, align with communities, or differentiate themselves from others (Jaspers, 2006, 2011; Milani & Jonsson, 2012; Rampton, 1995; Senter, 2022; Årman, 2021). These practices are shaped by the social, spatial, and cultural contexts in which they occur and often involve the production, reproduction, or contestation of representations (see Bourdieu, 1991). While research on youth language and positioning in multilingual urban environments has at times addressed spatial or temporal dimensions (e.g., Bylund, 2022; Jaspers, 2006; Rampton, 1995), few studies have placed these dimensions at the center of analysis. However, a smaller body of work has explicitly explored how space and time shape linguistic practices and subjective positioning among young people.

In the European context, studies such as Aalst and Nortier (2018), Blackledge and Creese (2012), and Li (2011) foreground spatiotemporal dimensions. Aalst and Nortier show how youth language use is attuned to physical place and social presence in urban environments, revealing an internalized awareness of unwritten spatial norms. Blackledge and Creese (2012), drawing on research across four cities, examine how language practices link to heritage, memory, and shifting contemporary contexts. They show how speakers invest in language as a connection to earlier times and places, while also transforming it in relation to global mobility and changing communicative environments. Their work foregrounds how the negotiation of belonging is shaped by layered influences of national affiliation, transnational movement, and digital interaction. Li (2011) similarly emphasizes this relational perspective, showing how Chinese youth in Britain draw on their full repertoires to challenge monolingual norms, and create alternative spaces of belonging.

In Sweden, Löfdahl et al. (2024) offer a rare example of explicitly linking language to spatialized inequality. Drawing on interviews with Finnish, Somali, and Arabic speakers aged 20–80, they examine how language, (in)visibility, and (im)mobility intersect in racialized urban spaces. Employing a comparative spatial-diachronic approach, the study explores how these groups navigate "Swedish" spaces over time. The findings illustrate how white normativity constrains linguistic expression and reinforces inequality by functioning as a binary sorting mechanism. This work demonstrates how language, race, and power intersect in Sweden's evolving sociolinguistic landscape. While this and many of the studies mentioned primarily focus on adult or young adult populations, the present study contributes to this field by centering adolescents' perspectives and placing time and space at the core of the analysis.

3   Situating time and space: Sociolinguistic developments and a Bourdieusian approach

This section outlines the theoretical perspective that informs the analysis, focusing on how Bourdieu's concepts help illuminate the interplay of time and space in young adolescents' linguistic practices and experiences. The "spatial turn" in the social sciences during the late 1970s and early 1980s — shaped in part by the work of French philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, and to which Bourdieu also contributed — helped reframe space as socially constructed and shaped by everyday practice (Higgins, 2017). This shift influenced sociolinguistic work that treats space and time as central to understanding multilingual practices and speaker positioning (Baynham, 2012). Since then, several conceptual developments have contributed to sociolinguistic theorizing of how spatial and temporal dimensions are navigated and embedded in language practices (Blommaert et al., 2005; Canagarajah, 2013, 2018). Contributing to these discussions, the present study draws specifically on Bourdieu's conceptualizations, as they inherently involve relational analysis, connecting spatial and temporal dimensions to language, positioning, and power. Time and space are interconnected, and from a Bourdieusian perspective, they are dimensions through which social hierarchies are embodied and reproduced. As Bourdieu (1989, p. 17) puts it, "social distances are inscribed in bodies or, more precisely, into the relation to the body, to language and to time," underscoring how spatial and temporal hierarchies are embedded in social life. Thus, practices and ideologies permeate different spatiotemporal settings where dimensions of space and time jointly interact (Canagarajah, 2013).

Building on the concepts introduced earlier, this section elaborates how habitus, field, and linguistic market interact in the analysis of language, time, and space. In line with Bourdieu's relational thinking, the notions of field and linguistic market are introduced here as part of the broader structure in which habitus operates. As durable dispositions formed through upbringing, habitus shapes how individuals respond to the social

conditions they inhabit, including the spatial and temporal structures embedded in everyday language practices. These dispositions are not static but evolve through life experiences, informing how speakers perceive their possibilities and constraints across different contexts in social space. Fields, such as education, are structured arenas in which individuals and institutions compete over legitimacy and access to valued resources, including language practices. Each field operates according to its own internal logic and dominant forms of capital. Within and across these fields, linguistic practices acquire symbolic value in relation to dominant norms—what Bourdieu refers to as the *linguistic market* (1991). Different fields may privilege particular styles, accents, or registers, shaping how speakers evaluate and adjust their language accordingly. Multiple linguistic sub-markets may coexist within a single field, each with distinct hierarchies and expectations for language use. Fields are situated within the broader social space, and one's position in a field reflects one's place in the larger social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1985).

The interdependent concepts of linguistic habitus and linguistic market together account for how speakers anticipate and adjust their language use in relation to socially structured expectations (Bourdieu, 1991). *Linguistic habitus* refers to a practical, embodied sense formed through socialization in specific linguistic environments, shaping perceptions of what is linguistically appropriate or valuable in different contexts. As a "subentity of habitus" (Salö, 2022, p. 126), it reflects a socially conditioned linguistic predisposition, governing visions of how linguistic products will be received in various markets, although typically not through conscious calculation, but through an "anticipation of the sanctions of the market" (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 76–77). This process generates an embodied awareness of symbolic hierarchies, prompting speakers to modify their linguistic production in response to perceived norms and expectations (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 78). The symbolic value of language practices not only shapes production but also contributes to how individuals perceive their social position. To account for this, Bourdieu developed the concept of *linguistic sense of placement* (Bourdieu, 2000; Salö, 2015), which conveys a practical sense of one's position in social space, governing one's relational experiences of the place occupied and one's ways of being, to be in or "out of place". The term signifies how symbolic struggles over legitimate visions of the social world, govern or manipulate "the image of one's position in social space" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 20). The experience of being in place is also directed by time since habitus through its embodied dispositions, and the capital one possesses produces practices and aspirations adjusted to ones' perceived possibilities in the present and the future (Bourdieu, 2000). Together, these concepts illuminate how time and space intersect with symbolic and material hierarchies, structuring who is recognized, included or excluded.

3.1 Social space as an analytical concept

Social space, in Bourdieu's theoretical framework, refers to the underlying structure that organizes the positions of individuals and groups in relation to symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991). It is a relational space, shaped by the distribution of various forms of capital, and distinct from physical space in that it reflects power relations rather than geographic proximity. Although distinct from physical space, the structures of social space are manifested in it – inscribed in bodies and physical locations and environments – and made visible through spatial oppositions (Bourdieu, 1996). It includes "the coexistence of social positions" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 130) and constitutes a space of "position takings" (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 10, 14), which shape how individuals perceive, classify, and navigate the social world. The structures of the social world, incorporated in physical spaces, shape our mental representations of the world, ourselves and others, and the "point of view" from which we see the world is a point located in the social space (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 21). This point of view is also directed by the dimension of time, since "the experience of time is engendered in the relationship

between habitus and the social world" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 208). The embodiment of habitus is "inseparable from a relation to language and to time" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 72) and thus essential to the understanding of how social space interact in shaping practices and dispositions (Bourdieu, 2000).

While integral to Bourdieu's work, the concept of social space is less well known and remains relatively underused as an explicit analytical tool, potentially due to its implicit and varied articulation compared to his more commonly employed concepts like habitus or field (Reed-Danahay, 2020). Yet, some recent studies have explicitly engaged with the concept of social space in sociolinguistic research. Salö (2022) applies spatial thinking to linguistic dispositions in Swedish higher education. Moraru (2020) combines social space, habitus, and market to examine youth multilingualism in Cardiff, focusing on how speakers navigate linguistic hierarchies.

This study engages with social space to examine how adolescents' reported language practices and representations are shaped by time/space dynamics and their perceived positions within symbolic and material hierarchies. Drawing on Bourdieu, it explores how experiences of (un)belonging in physical space are filtered through one's position in social space, shaping how the participants see themselves in relation to others and to institutional and societal structures. In this study, social space is used to understand how participants' accounts reflect spatial and temporal orientations embedded in social hierarchies and structures that shape the conditions and predispositions for (un) belonging.

This study draws on multiple, interconnected concepts from Bourdieu's theory of practice not to multiply frameworks, but to engage with them as part of a relational system. Habitus, capital, field, and social space are analytically inseparable in Bourdieu's work, and each helps illuminate different aspects of how language practices are embedded in temporal and spatial structures. Rather than treating time and space as background conditions, the study examines how they are internalized through embodied dispositions, made visible through struggles over resources and legitimacy, and experienced through one's sense of position in social space. Taken together, these concepts offer a coherent framework for analyzing the interrelation of language and (un) belonging across time and space.

4   The study

4.1 Method

This study draws on interview data originally generated as part of a larger research project on young adolescents' language practices and dispositions in multilingual, socioeconomically disadvantaged urban areas in Sweden (Bylund, 2022). While the original study identified time and space as one of several intersecting dimensions, the present analysis re-engages with both previously explored and under-examined data, with a renewed focus on how temporal and spatial conditions shape linguistic practices and experiences of (un)belonging. This approach is further extended through an engagement with Bourdieu's concept of social space, alongside habitus and linguistic sense of placement.

The original study employed a mixed methods design, including a questionnaire (N = 92), language diaries (n = 50), and individual interviews (n = 16). This article focuses on four purposefully selected semi-structured interviews with adolescents aged 13–14. Interviews were conducted in Swedish and explored language use across different contexts (e.g., family, school, peer group interactions), linguistic dispositions and, imagined future language use. While the interview themes were consistent, the content varied based on participants' responses. These four participants were selected

for the unique perspectives they bring to the conceptual focus of the study, offering insight into how time and space are experienced and articulated among young adolescents. Concentrating on these accounts thus allows for an in-depth analysis of the spatiotemporal dynamics at the center of this article.

4.2 Research contexts

The empirical material was generated with participants living in multilingual, socioeconomically disadvantaged suburban areas in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. While these cities differ in size, population, and demographics, the suburban areas represented in this study share similar characteristics in that they are all low-income neighborhoods, characterized by public rental housing, low education levels and high unemployment rates. These sociodemographic conditions provide important context for understanding how time and space intersect with language practices and senses of belonging among young adolescents with migrant background.

4.3 The participant cases: Ali, Avin, Hilal, and Lana

The participants in focus are four young adolescents, referred to by the pseudonyms Ali, Avin, Hilal, and Lana. While Hilal, Avin, and Lana were born in Sweden, Ali was born in Syria and moved to Sweden with his family three years prior to the interview. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences provide a meaningful basis for examining how temporal and spatial dynamics intersect with language practices and dispositions. The study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. Participants and their parents or guardians were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any time.

Table 1.   Participant cases

Pseud. name	Age	Stated gender	Stated country of birth	Age at arrival	School experience from other countries	Stated "mother tongue" languages	Main languages in family interactions	Named languages in overall use*
Ali	14	Boy	Syria	11	Lebanon	"Arabic"	Arabic	ara, swe
Avin	13	Girl	Sweden	-	-	"Kurdish"	Kurdish[1]/ Swedish	swe, eng, kur
Hilal	13	Boy	Sweden	-	-	"Arabic"	Swedish/ Arabic	swe, ara, eng
Lana	13	Girl	Sweden	-	-	"Kurdish"	Kurdish[2]	swe, kur, eng

Note: All information is based on participants' self-reported practices and perceptions. The term *mother tongue* reflects how participants themselves responded on the survey. *Main language(s) in family interactions* refer to the primary language(s) used in everyday family contexts. *Named languages in overall use* include all languages participants reported using across domains (e.g., home, school, peers), regardless of frequency.

4.4 Analytical procedure

The procedure for revisiting the dataset began with an initial reexamination of the material, during which interview accounts and participant cases were manually selected based on the degree to which they included content pertaining to time and space. The selected accounts were then qualitatively re-examined and analyzed through a Bourdieusian lens, focusing on how time and space entered participants' reported

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1. Sorani (also known as central Kurdish)
2. Sorani

language practices and experiences of (un)belonging. The analytical reading focused on how participants positioned themselves in relation to institutional norms and spatial environments across past, present, and imagined future time frames. The identified instances were then categorized by topic. In the larger dataset, dimensions of time and space occur with varying prominence across different contexts and subjects. Some instances relate to everyday situations, interactions, and leisure activities, such as daily routines, family dynamics and various casual or organized activities. Others highlight the role of language in shaping experiences of belonging, including discussions centering on cultural heritage, identities, imagined future language use and language practices across different contexts. Two categories particularly included elements of time and space: participants' experiences of language practices both within and outside of school, and their navigation of expectations across local, urban, and cultural settings. While the larger dataset also includes interviews where time and space were less prominent, the selected accounts form a crucial subset where temporal and spatial dynamics are particularly salient, offering key insight into their roles in linguistic practices and (un) belonging.

5   Analysis

The interview accounts center on two topics regarding how temporal and spatial dimensions influence language practices and senses of belonging. These are: in versus and out-of-school as oppositional spaces and navigating senses of belonging across urban and cultural spaces.

5.1   *In* versus *out*-of-school as oppositional linguistic spaces

During the interviews, participants consistently drew clear distinctions between their language practices in and out of school. They were specifically asked whether they perceived a difference, but also independently highlighted divergences between these two spaces. In the following example (Extract 1), Ali was asked what he thought about the lessons in Swedish at school. As mentioned earlier, Ali had been in Sweden for about three years at the time of the interview.

> Extract 1[3]:
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> Ali: It's ok, but outside of school with my friends and so I've learned more. At school it's a bit difficult to learn Swedish.
>
> JB: Okay, in what way?
>
> Ali: I mean uhm… like I've learned Swedish but... here at school it's "exact" Swedish, or like, I mean, outside here on the street it's not an exact Swedish you know like "*yani*"[4] and stuff, that's what I mean, I've learned it with my friends.
>
> JB: Okay, so is there a difference between how you talk in and out of school?
>
> Ali: Yeah, so outside I talk in a completely different way. But here I'm talking I don't know...the real, like the real…
>
> JB: What do you mean by "the real"?
>
> Ali: I mean the real Swedish, not "*ayo*" (Swe:"*Shoo*[5]"), "*yani*" and stuff like that. Here (in school) I'm talking... like, without these words and stuff.

Without having been specifically asked about a difference, Ali initially distinguishes

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3.   Transcriptions are presented verbatim, with minor adjustments for readability. Overlapping speech is indicated with brackets (..).

4.   Contemporary urban vernacular term of Turkish/Arabic origin meaning e.g., "you know" or "like".

5.   Term commonly used as greeting phrase in some Swedish contemporary urban vernaculars.

between language practices inside and outside school, characterizing the language used in school as "exact" Swedish. When specifically addressed about a perceived difference, Ali refers to the Swedish in school as the "real" Swedish, thereby positioning this mode of speaking as the most socially legitimate and institutionally sanctioned variety.

Using illustrative examples, he emphasizes the Swedish spoken at school as distinctly different from the more contemporary urban vernacular used outside of school, indicating a clear divergence in language practices between these two spaces.

Ali contrasts the language practices in school with the languages "outside", "on the street" indicating how his representations of language are shaped by spatial distinctions. This distinction shows a representation of "spatial oppositions" between these two spaces, expressing a hierarchization where the dominant language practice of institutional spaces is considered a "standard" practice (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 124). As we shall see, Ali's account mirrors the experiences of the other participants who were born and raised in Sweden, indicating that this perceived division between language practices in and out of school is a shared experience, regardless of the amount of time spent in a particular context or one's familiarity with specific linguistic practices.

When asked about a perceived difference, Hilal expressed how language practices vary depending on the interlocutor, noting a distinction between the language practices in school versus out of school spaces (Extract 2).

> Extract 2:
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> Hilal: Then the Swedish can like vary with the Swedish I speak with my friends and the Swedish I speak with an adult, because at school…because then you use a school language and with my friends maybe an everyday language.
>
> JB: In what way do they differ, do you think?
>
> Hilal: It's like more school…like…uhm...it's not you don't say like: *"ayo"* and stuff, like we speak, me and my friends. It's more like: "Hello there, how are you today" and stuff like that.

Hilal initially describes how he varies his language use depending on the interlocutor but in doing so, also marks a distinction between what he calls a "school language" in school and an "everyday language" with friends. When asked to elaborate, Hilal explains that everyday language includes contemporary urban vernacular terms, while school language is characterized by more traditional phrasing and politeness. By offering, what most Swedish speakers would regard a very polite example *("Hej hur står det till?"/ "Hello there, how are you today?")*, Hilal exemplifies how the language use in school is characterized by adjustments to more formal linguistic norms and politeness levels. Similar to Ali's account, the formality and politeness in Hilal's example can be seen as representing a "standard" practice. This highlights how these contrasting language practices are shaped not only by space (and their inherent structures) but also by the social positions of those who occupy them (see Aalst & Nortier, 2018; Löfdahl et al., 2024). Through repeated experiences, habitus generates a feel for the game, a practical sense to act in alignment with perceived linguistic market values (Bourdieu, 2000). The hypercorrected (or hyper-polite) speech example Hilal provides thus illustrates a linguistic sense of placement, as he describes an alignment to be in or out of place (Bourdieu, 2000). However, the exaggerated politeness present in Hilal's example may also function as a deliberate, playful caricature, a strategic language practice that echoes what Rampton (2001) describes as the tactical use of dominant racialized discourses by speakers from minority backgrounds (see also Jaspers, 2011).

When asked about differences between language practices in and out of school, Lana starts out by pointing out what she considers to be the contrast between Kurdish at home and Swedish in school. In making this comparison, Lana mentions how Kurdish can be "quite loud" (see Löfdahl et al., 2024) and not as "calm" as Swedish in character.

The interview then continues as follows (Extract 3):

Extract 3:

JB: Do you think you speak differently in Swedish?

Lana: Yes.

JB: Are there different ways to speak Swedish, then?

Lana: Yes, maybe like slang, and then when you come to school, you use a bit of proper and clean Swedish.

JB: How so? What's that like?

Lana: Like, the way we're talking now, but if I were talking to X *(classmate)*, I'd talk like: "What are you doing!? What the fuck are you doing!? Why are you doing that!?" (raises her voice to illustrate) "bro, come here", or like, I would talk like that… so there's more slang and stuff in the language I use with them than when I'm talking to teachers in class.

Lana too distinguishes between her way of speaking in school and with friends, describing the linguistic practice in school as representing a "proper and clean Swedish". This representation reflects the hierarchization of language practices in society where certain ways of speaking are considered more esteemed than others, as well as associated with different group categories and different residential areas in social space. Like Hilal and Ali, when illustrating the differences between these practices, Lana describes peer-group language as more slang-based, and in her view, more direct and expressive. Through this contrast, her account (like Ali's and Hilal's) reproduces a perceived opposition between institutionally valued forms of language and those associated with peer interaction and informality, illustrating how social and symbolic hierarchies are inscribed in everyday speech. This is consistent with representations found in other studies (see Milani & Jonsson, 2012; Senter, 2022)

In Extract 4, Avin provides a similar response to the question of language practices in inside versus outside school spaces, offering further insight into how time and space intersect with social positioning and the ways spatial arrangements can reflect and reproduce social inequalities:

Extract 4:

Avin: Yes, it depends, like usually it depends on who I hang out with. Because, like, now since you grew up in the suburbs (…) many like you speak *"ortenspråk"*[6] like often with friends and stuff. But when it comes to people, like older people you can't talk to them like that because it's like really disrespectful (…) you can't say "man what are you doing?" like it's not polite. You should say like this "oh hi, how are you, how is it going?" (…) And when you're a teenager, you kind of think like friends are fun and like you want to follow friends, so if they say something (…) you suddenly learn the language they speak.

Like Hilal, Avin initially notes that her way of speaking may vary depending on who she is talking to, aligning her speech with anticipated linguistic expectations to signal "respect" when speaking to "older people". She then links her language use to physical space, referencing her upbringing in "the suburbs" and how people there often speak "ortenspråk" (Suburban Swedish). Avin thus associates her language practices with friends as being shaped by the spatiotemporal context of her upbringing, emphasizing

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6. Multilingual urban practices traditionally associated with migrant youth in the suburban areas surrounding Sweden's larger cities are often referred to in research, media, and public discourse as Suburban Swedish (*ortensvenska*), Suburban slang (*förortsslang*), or Rinkeby Swedish (*Rinkebysvenska*) (see e.g., Milani & Jonsson, 2012; Stroud, 2004).

the influence of the physical and social environment of the suburbs, tacitly including its demographic structures and social positioning. Avin's account illustrates how physical and symbolic spaces interact in shaping linguistic practices and senses of belonging, positioning the suburb in relation to other physical locations within the social world (Bourdieu, 1999, 2000; see also Milani & Jonsson, 2012). This example not only shows how practices are shaped by habitus in alignment with the social order, but also how representations can contribute to making social groups perceptible to themselves and to others.

   Like the other participants, Avin illustrates the differences in language practices inside and outside of school, offering descriptive examples that highlight varying degrees of formality and politeness. Avin's account further underscores the situatedness of language practices as modified depending on the situation and particularly the age of the interlocutor. This reference to age also brings attention to the role of time in shaping language use, as Avin links certain ways of speaking to a specific life stage: "when you are a teenager". This suggests that linguistic practices are not only seen as socially situated but also temporally contingent and subject to change over the life course. As the interview progresses, Avin addresses whether her language use with friends could also be described as "youth language" (Extract 5):

> Extract 5:
>
> Uhm, it depends like I think it depends on where you're from because there are a lot of young people in Sweden who don't speak like that, like the way I speak or like many at X-school speak, because there are like, if you're for example going to X (other area in the city) where my cousin lives then there are like really few people who speak like that, at least what I've heard there in the neighborhood where they live. I think it depends because we who are foreigners maybe have more of this like "Ey yalla[7] let's go" like this "yalla" and stuff, (…) it comes from Kurdish and like Arabic. Or like "para" it's also like this slang word and it's from Kurdish or "bram[8]" like this "Yalla bram" let's go, that's also in Kurdish so (…) it depends, I think, if you're from Sweden you are more used to the Swedish and you only speak Swedish at home also, so I think it becomes like that, like it depends.

Avin further identifies *ortenspråk* as closely tied to social space, emphasizing that it "depends on where you're from" and that young people in different areas speak differently. In doing so, she implicitly refers not only to distinctions between neighborhoods and their perceived status, but also to the social trajectories of those who inhabit them. She associates this way of speaking with having a migrant background, positioning herself with the phrase "we who are foreigners." Her account highlights the multilingual influences shaping this practice, including words from Kurdish and Arabic. Rather than presenting *ortenspråk* as a uniform youth register, Avin links it to social position and the linguistic environment in which one is socialized.

5.2 Navigating senses of (un)belonging across urban and cultural spaces

This section deepens the exploration of belonging through the interviews with Avin and Lana. While not intended to be representative, their accounts offer particularly vivid illustrations of the theoretical concerns at the core of this study. The accounts of Avin and Lana illustrate how habitus and social space are reflected in linguistic practices and experiences of (un)belonging. Focusing on these two participants allows for a deeper exploration of how temporal and spatial dimensions manifest in everyday linguistic practices and dispositions across contexts. This section examines how the relational

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7. Yalla from Arabic meaning: "hurry up" or "let's go".
8. Bram as in "bro" commonly used when addressing someone, especially a male friend

dynamics of time and space jointly influence adolescents' experiences of (un)belonging across local, urban and cultural settings. Avin and Lana both expressed an awareness of how the peripheral suburban areas tend to be positioned in the urban social hierarchical space and how they, as a suburban youth collective, tend to be perceived by the dominant society. The interviews addressed (to varying degrees) issues of language use and local belonging. During the interview, Avin was asked about whether the sense of belonging could alter between different physical places within the local urban space, to which she replied (Extract 6):

> Extract 6:
>
> Oh yes, for example in X (name of the suburb), you feel at home because it's usually people like yourself who live here. Like people who have parents who have an immigrant background, who may not know Swedish very well or like, people who have fled from Syria to Sweden and then they usually live here in X (name of suburb), like this, in X (name of another similar suburb), and such, that's where they usually move in. And then when you go to town, to like, X (name of inner-city shopping mall), you can notice like, how sometimes there are very loud young people there and it's like, this is town, here you cannot be like in X (name of suburb). Cause X (name of suburb) it's like, I don't know how to explain, it's X (repeats name of suburb) it's like here live… like, mostly… young people who are like this "orten" (suburban youth kids), they can like (…) shout a lot. You feel at home, like, this is my neighborhood, this is where I live, this is my suburb. This is everything. Kind of like that. Not just X, not just the neighborhood center square, it can be X, X, X, X (lists other local demographically similar suburbs) all those places. You feel like this, "yeah this, this is my place."

Avin's account of the inner-city mall reveals an embodied awareness of social positioning within a stratified urban setting. She described the "loud young people" from the suburbs as linguistically and behaviorally out of place, expressing the view that they should conform to the dominant norms and conduct anticipated in the linguistic market that characterizes this central urban space (see Bourdieu, 1991; Wacquant, 2018). This predisposition reflects how structures of the social order are internalized through repeated, spatially patterned experiences, reinforcing symbolic boundaries between groups (Bourdieu, 1999). The example further illustrates the power of dominant language practices and how the relation between linguistic habitus and linguistic markets can exert a need to adapt to anticipated norms and expectations. It also indicates how dispositions develop over time through cumulative exposure to linguistically stratified spaces, contributing to an embodied sense of what is considered legitimate or "in place" in different contexts (Aalst & Nortier, 2018; Blackledge & Creese, 2012).

Avin then returned to her initial response of feeling at home by referring to young people in the suburbs as a collective with shared experiences, indicating how the upbringing in suburban areas can become a marker of habitus, providing a sense of belonging and linguistic sense of placement. The feeling of ease and connection Avin recounts of in the suburb in which she lives, signifies how similar habituses, with shared experiences and social conditions, generate mutual points of view and a deep embodied sense of belonging (see Blommaert, 2015; Löfdahl et al., 2024; Senter, 2022; cf. Årman, 2021). Avin's emphatic remark: "yeah this, this is my place" can also be seen as reflecting how the space(s) we inhabit can become entwined with our sense of who we are and our place in the social world.

As the interview progressed, Avin continued to reflect on belonging and linguistic sense of placement, bringing the temporal dimension further into focus. As shown in earlier examples, Avin positioned herself as a "foreigner" and during the interview she shared how her legitimacy as a Swedish speaker has been questioned, expressing a sense of lacking authority (see Bylund, 2022). The interview then continues (Extract 7):

Extract 7:

JB: Yes, but uhm you were born in Sweden…

Avin: Yes, but it still doesn't feel like my language because it still feels like I am,
           I don't feel Swedish. I would not say "yeah hey I'm Swedish". I would say
           "hello I'm Kurdish". Because I'm not Swedish, I am, even though I was
           born in Sweden, it doesn't feel like I am Swedish, it feels like I come from
           Kurdistan, and I am Kurdish. Because it's part of my background, it's part of
           my parents' background, it's where my parents come from. And then I think
           you are very drawn to the parents, like this if the parents decide "yeah I
           should be a Muslim", you'd be like "yeah I will also be a Muslim" but then
           when you get older you can make more of your own choices. So maybe when
           I'm older, I feel like a Swede more than a Kurd, but right now I feel like a
           Kurd and not a Swede.

Despite being born and raised in Sweden, Avin explained that she does not "feel Swedish" but instead identifies more closely with her Kurdish heritage. From her perspective, ethnic and cultural origins play a central role in shaping her sense of (un) belonging, as well as her position and sense of place in the social world. Avin referred to Kurdish as an integral part of her linguistic and cultural background and expressed a strong connection to her parents' heritage. She also reflected on how identification with parental values, such as religion, may evolve over time, highlighting temporally shifting senses of belonging linked to age. Her statement, *"maybe when I'm older, I feel like a Swede more than a Kurd"*, illustrates the experience of (un)belonging as a process that unfolds temporally and is subject to change.

   Avin's account illustrates a system of dispositions in which her Kurdish heritage provides a sense of pride and forms a core part of her sense of self. This signifies habitus as "a product of history" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54), demonstrating the relationship between habitus and the social world by which social structures shape practices and embodied orientations. Her ambivalent sense of belonging appears to be shaped by an interplay of her personal history and the broader conditions and structures of the social world. By suggesting that her cultural sense of belonging may shift over time, Avin's account addresses the changeability of habitus as influenced by both temporal trajectories and spatial positioning. This theme recurred later in the interview (Extract 8), as Avin further reflected on how her sense of belonging might alter with time, while affirming a strong and enduring connection to her Kurdish background.

Extract 8:

JB: Do you think that it can change over time also how you feel about that
           affiliation?

Avin: Yeah, I think so. Because it depends on like, if you feel that you belong in a
           place then you feel you can say something like this, this, "yeah this is me"
           but now like, even if I feel that I belong in Sweden I would never say that I'm
           Swedish because I'm not Swedish, I'm Kurdish, even though I was born here.
           Do you understand what I mean? It's part of my background, Kurdish, it's part
           of me. It will always be in me like this.

When asked whether her sense of affiliation might change over time, Avin emphasized belonging to a physical place as central to one's sense of self and cultural identification. Her reflections suggest that belonging is both relational and contingent, shaped by one's positioning within social space and accumulated experiences over time (Bourdieu, 1989). Although she expresses a sense of attachment to Sweden, Avin resists identifying as Swedish, despite being born and raised there. A position among suburban youth in Sweden found also in other studies (Milani & Jonsson, 2012, for a more comprehensive

discussion see Bylund, 2022). Instead, she expresses a strong and embodied connection to her Kurdish heritage, positioning it as enduring and integral to her sense of self. This ambivalence reveals how belonging is socially negotiated and constrained by perceived boundaries of legitimacy. Her account illustrates how habitus develops through temporally structured experiences, as she navigates between cultural affiliations and contexts. The example underscores how time and space jointly influence how experiences of (un)belonging is felt, articulated, and contested.

Discussing the topic of belonging, Lana shared experiences of having her cultural affiliation questioned, particularly during visits to relatives in Kurdistan. She noted that while her sense of "being Kurdish" deepens during these visits, people still accuse her of not being a "real Kurd," questioning her authenticity because she lives in Sweden. The interview continues as follows:

> Extract 9:
>
> JB: Mm, and so you mention that here (in Sweden) people would say you are
>   Kurdish and over there (in Kurdistan) people say…
>
> Lana: Exactly you don't know, you are in between. I wouldn't be called Swedish the
>   first time when you see me but like, I don't know. I'm not a Swede in Sweden,
>   but I'm not a Kurd in Kurdistan.
>
> JB: Is that how you feel?
>
> Lana: Yes, or so people say. Like, when I'm in Kurdistan: "Yeah you are Swedish
>   you live in Sweden you can speak Kurdish, you can speak Swedish. You are
>   Swedish." Or when I'm here: "Yeah you know Kurdish, you have Kurdish
>   background you are Kurdish, you are not Swedish, you are not real Swedish.
>   So, you're in between."

As seen in Extract 9, Lana seems to navigate her national and cultural sense of (un) belonging between Sweden and Kurdistan, as cultural spaces, finding herself — and being perceived by others — as existing somewhere in between. Lana describes how her cultural belonging has been questioned by others, who do not see her as a "valid" or "true" member of either cultural context. When asked if this perception aligns with her own feelings, Lana initially agreed but then amended her response, saying, "or so people say". This remark highlights that the sense of cultural in-betweenness is not simply self-ascribed but socially imposed on her by others, accentuating how she is subjected to external acts of positioning. Lana's account thus showcases how her sense of (un) belonging is negotiated in relation to competing cultural expectations and how she is placed in an in-between space (cf. Li, 2011; Milani & Jonsson, 2012). The description Lana makes here, illustrates how one's (ascribed) position in social space (including one's connections to physical places) interacts with habitus and the perceived value of the capital one possesses in different linguistic markets (Bourdieu, 1989), shaping both self-perception and the ways individuals are positioned by others.

6   Concluding notes

This study has shown how time and space are embedded in the reported language practices and dispositions of four adolescents in multilingual and socioeconomically disadvantaged suburban areas of Sweden. The interview accounts reveal how temporal and spatial dynamics are present in the ways in which these participants engage with language, reflecting their awareness of broader social hierarchies and positioning.

These findings contribute to an understanding of the interconnectedness between language, time, and space by showing how the participants' linguistic practices and experiences of (un)belonging vary across different spatiotemporal settings. Consistent with what has been shown in other studies (Jaspers, 2006, 2011; Milani & Jonsson, 2012;

Van Avermaet, 2007), the analysis shows a perceived divergence between the language used in school—often regarded as a "standard" practice—and the contemporary urban vernaculars used in out-of-school spaces. This perceived contrast illustrates how spatial and social hierarchies inform young people's linguistic representations and experiences of belonging, reflecting similar findings from previous studies in the Swedish context (Årman, 2021; Senter 2022). The accounts suggest that representations of language practices in different spaces are influenced by habitus, which both structures and is structured by one's position within the social space (Bourdieu, 1989, 2000). The participants' awareness of living in socioeconomically disadvantaged suburban areas, both physically and symbolically distanced from more affluent urban spaces, is entangled in their linguistic practices and embodied habitus by governing predispositions to adjust their linguistic practices based on perceived market values in different settings. These findings echo the spatial oppositions observed in youth language research, particularly in Aalst and Nortier's (2018) work on linguistic behavior across urban spaces.

This bodily inscribed spatial awareness underpins their linguistic sense of placement, demonstrating how habitus, through repeated encounters with linguistically stratified and socially hierarchized spaces, evolves over time. The young adolescents evaluate their language practices based on their perceived positions and those of others within broader social space. Additionally, this suggests that the participants' linguistic sense of placement is shaped by both global and local dynamics. Their reported experiences of belonging and non-belonging in relation to national categorizations (cf. Li, 2011), combined with their experiences in stratified urban spaces, underscore the complex interplay between language, time, and space. Their accounts highlight how cultural and national affiliations are fluid, situational, and temporally contingent, emphasizing the analytical relevance of a spatiotemporal approaches in explorations of linguistic practice.

The findings thus affirm how time and space interact in young adolescents' perceptions of themselves in the social world. The participants' accounts exemplify how the structures of the social spaces they occupy, along with temporal dimensions, shape their understandings of social divisions and hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1990). Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of how young people's language practices are influenced by their spatiotemporal contexts and social positioning, shedding light on the nuanced ways in which experiences of (un)belonging are formed and negotiated.

Like previous studies, this research underscores the importance of spatiotemporal perspectives in understanding how young people navigate linguistic hierarchies in their daily lives, while contributing new insights into how these dynamics manifest in early adolescence within Swedish urban contexts. To extend this research, a practice-oriented approach could explore how children and adolescents encounter and navigate shifting linguistic norms as they move across different social domains and urban spaces. Future research could follow adolescents and young adults as they move between fields in social space, for example, as they transition into higher education or the job market, examining how their linguistic practices and ideologies evolve over time. Given the high level of linguistic and spatial awareness demonstrated by the participants in this study, further investigation into the linguistic positioning of younger children could provide valuable insights into how such dispositions are formed and reproduced in early childhood.

Acknowledgements

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