Social Identities and Values in the Debate on «Kebab-Norwegian» – an Ideological Battlefield

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Present a discourse analysis of the debate on «Kebab-Norwegian» that took place in the Norwegian press in the period 4 June to 19 June 2009.
Purpose

Media’s role in enregisterment processes
Register and enregisterment (Agha 2007)

- processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population (Agha 2007: 81)

- **semiotic register**: a repertoire of performable signs linked to stereotypic pragmatic effects by sociohistorical process of enregisterment (Agha 2007:80, 81)
5 109 056 total population
633 100 ‘immigrants’ (12 % of the total population)
30 % of Oslo’s population
126 075 Norwegian born with immigrant parents

Statistics Norway 1.1.2014
1) iconization, 2) erasure and 3) fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal 2000:37f).
Language debates are excellent loci for studying (re)production of (hegemonic) language ideologies and to reveal how these ideologies create and reconstruct certain conceptions of social realities. (Blommaert 1999)
(web references, all accessed 7. September 2011)

• *NRK Fagdagen* 4. June 2009: [Det er vi som er Wergeland nå!](#)
  Performance by the rapper DannyBoy and B. A. Svendsen advocating ’Kebab-Norwegian’ as a ’new’ dialect
• *Dagsavisen* 12. June 2009: [Kebabnorsk sperrer for jobb](#)
• *Dagsavisen* 15. June 2009: [Krangler om kebaborsk](#)
• *Dagsavisen* 16. June 2009: [Sjefer vil ikke sjofe](#)
• *NRK Television* *Ikveld*, 17. June 2009, debate, [Kebab-Norwegian and job opportunities](#)
’Kebab-Norwegian blocks for employment’
Excerpt 1:

**Kebab-Norwegian blocks for employment**

Three young people from Holmlia NN (16), NN (19) and NN (17) warn their peers against using Kebab-Norwegian.

"You can't go to a job interview and say: 'Sjof my CV'," says NN (19) shaking his head while explaining that "sjof" means "look at".

His friends NN (17) and NN (16) nod in agreement.
Excerpt 2:
Unemployment among immigrants is higher than among the rest of the population. Working life researcher NN from the Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research explains that there may be several reasons for this:

"When employers are looking to hire people, they try to avoid risks. Employers may experience several factors as risky. Kebab-Norwegian is a good example of this. In most cases, it is not a good idea to talk Kebab-Norwegian in a job situation," she says.

The three friends have grown up in Holmlia, where Kebab-Norwegian is widespread. Now they want to warn children against speaking that way. "It is a bad habit that can be very difficult to drop," says NN. "And then you will have a hard time on the employment market," adds NN. "Many children talk that way because they think it's cool, but it's not cool when you can't get a job." continues NN.
Excerpt 3:
Worse in Norwegian
At Søndre Holmlia activity centre, the children are not allowed to speak in Kebab-Norwegian.
"It is excluding, as not everyone understands this way of talking," explains Ømer Simsker, the youth club leader.
"I also think the children's Norwegian suffers if they only speak Kebab-Norwegian. They forget words and terms they have learned in Norwegian, because they are so used to using other words," he says.

Ban it
The boys from Holmlia do not have a high opinion of Kebab-Norwegian.
"If it were up to me, I'd ban it," says Ershad.
His friends Ilias and Ali understand why very well:
"When I spoke Kebab-Norwegian all the time, I found it hard to write Norwegian essays. I had to spend extra time formulating myself correctly," says Ali.
Excerpt 4:

They must be allowed to be themselves and speak in a way that they feel is natural for them.

(senior inspector at the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority, *Dagsavisen* 16. June 2009)
Competing value ascriptions
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They must be allowed to be themselves and speak in a way that they feel is natural for them.

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Excerpt 5:

Strand: but first (. ) it is called Kebab (. ) Norwegian and is a mixture of Norwegian (. ) Kurdish (. ) Arabic and Urdu (. ) speaking this way makes it difficult for many minority-language speakers to get a job (1.0) and this is what this language sounds like (1.0)
Excerpt 6:

DL: here we heard a little Kebab-Norwegian Petter (.) and you represents employers in private sector and you call it a bad thing or not-Norwegian

PF: yes

DL: what do you mean by that?
PF: no ((laughing)) you can interpret yourself if you try to understand what’s being said here ((points to the screen where they broadcasted the video from Holmlia)) (1.0) and it’s for sure- we organize many companies in the service industries and they are struggling with with this to get language and communication to function ((looks at DannyBoy)) (1.0) and ehm then I think it’s very strange if you as a Norwegian or somebody who commands the Norwegian language (lit. sproget) shall de-learn and start to use a tribal language which you can’t use at work (.) then you ask for unemployment
If A (‘Kebab-Norwegian’) → B (‘immigrant youth’) → C (‘unemployment’)
The debate on «Kebab-Norwegian» reflects a limited and oversimplified comprehension of the linguistic practices of young adolescents.
Excerpt 7:
Kine: Kebab-Norwegian is [kind of] like (.) if you have to give it a name, then that's it
Bente: [yeah] like whether it is a kind of positive term or is it a negative term or does it like not have any like value
Kine: I think it's pretty positive because you can think that (.) it's a mixture of (.) Norwegian and a foreign language that kind of makes (.) and this shows that (.) there isn't so much racism and segregation in Norway since (.) Kebab-Norwegian developed because (.) Norwegian and foreigners (.) hang out together
Bente: yeah
Kine: like (.)
Bente: yeah
Kine: so (.) it shows that it is (1.0) that is (.) totally possible at least in Oslo to be (1.0) foreign, like
Bente: yeah (.) and it doesn't have kind of (.) um (.) there's nothing like negative in relation to that term (.) using that word (.) Kebab-Norwegian (.) it's like totally OK
Kine: yeah
This kind of objectification is far from value-neutral and constitutes an ideological battlefield of social identities, interests and values, and where our traditional understanding of social and ethnic categories is challenged. (Agha 2007; Bourdieu 1991; Gal 2013).
The generability of mediated language debates?

e.g.


