

Southernizing Sociolinguistics

Colonialism, Racism, and Patriarchy
in Language in the Global South

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Introduction

In this chapter, engaging with Resende's (2021) call for decolonizing critical discourse studies (CDS), we propose that employing the notions of abyssal line (Sousa Santos 2018) and coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007) can expose (covert) racialized dimensions of Norwegian media representations of minoritized youth language and their purported speakers. We analyse a debate on "Kebabnorsk" (Kebab Norwegian) which took place in Norwegian mass media in 2020, sparked by the statements of a PR mogul in an interview in *Kampanje*, a news site directed to the media and communication branch. "Kebabnorsk" is a speech style – a *contemporary urban vernacular* (Rampton 2015) or a *register* (Agha 2007) – that is largely associated with young people in areas of Oslo shaped by immigration and class stratification (e.g., Ims 2013; Opsahl 2009; Svendsen 2022; Svendsen and Røynealand 2008). Following Sousa Santos (2018), we argue that the notion of the abyssal line is useful in analyzing the discursive (re)production of social divisions and hierarchization between a purported "Us" and "Them," and we further suggest that the discursive construction of this abyssal line rests upon a social ontology where difference is seen as a threat (cf. Eriksen 2013). In turn, the notion of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007) sheds light on the lingering aspect of material and discursive structures of social differentiation which had a foundational role in the establishment of European nation states and their respective nationalistic ethos (cf. Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007).

What makes Norway particularly interesting as a locus of investigation is that it is both a former colony (under Danish and Swedish rule)¹ as well as a colonizer (of Sápmi, in particular). Further, from 1850 and onwards, the Norwegian authorities exercised a harsh assimilation policy towards the Indigenous Sámi people, the Kvens, as well as the Romani people, a policy that lasted for more than a century, with consequences up until today (e.g., Brandal et al. 2017). In Norway, as well as in the rest of Scandinavia, and quite contrary to the UK and US, race has, as social category, been banned in public discourse since WWII (Kyllingstad

2017), preceding the early 20th century's eugenics which culminated in the Nazi's genocide of the Jews. Since then, Norwegian society seems to have grappled with acknowledging ongoing processes of racialization, which has contributed to a particular inability to engage in self-critique. Bangstad (2019), for instance, suggests that, in Norwegians' self-understanding, racism is not present in contemporary Norway. Similarly, Helland (2014, 108) notes that "Norwegians perceive themselves as non-racists." This can, in turn, be understood in terms of a hegemonic colour-blind anti-racist discourse. To deliberately *not* talk about race as an anti-racist act goes hand in hand with the idea of being a progressive anti-racist, representing a Scandinavian exceptionalism that has managed to move beyond race (HübINETTE and Lundström 2011). Of course, such a discourse may also silence existing (covert) racist structures. Hence, there is a risk that subtle ways of social exclusion and discrimination emerge, such as the use of "language" or "culture" as proxies for other more entrenched, albeit silenced racialized structures (e.g., Bjørnset et al. 2021; Rogstad and Sterri 2018). This colour-blindness as well as a discourse that supports diversity but perhaps occludes inclusion make the Nordic countries excellent locations for investigating the role of language as proxy in the management of "majority" and "minority" relations.

Within the last 50 years of demographic shifts shaped by immigration to Norway (Statistics Norway 2021, henceforth SN),² certain issues related to diversity and integration remain unresolved. For example, 27 percent of children of parents with immigrant background, born and raised in Norway, have experienced discrimination, in education, at the workplace, in job interviews and/or in health care (Dalgard 2018). Additionally, in comparison to people with a 'Norwegian sounding' name, people with a 'foreign sounding' name are 25 percent less likely to be called in for a job interview, even if their CVs are exactly the same (Midtbøen and Quillian 2021, Midtbøen and Rogstad 2012). In trying to understand the underlying reasons that shape the lives of immigrants and people with immigrant background in Norway, Eriksen (2013) suggests that while Norwegian society might be good at giving to immigrants (e.g., the material and symbolic offerings that are part of the Norwegian welfare system), it might not be so good at receiving (e.g., acknowledging the material and symbolic contributions that immigrants make to Norwegian society). Eriksen's analysis draws on Mauss' ([1925] 1990) treatment of the institution of the gift exchange, which is composed of three elements: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to offer a return gift. Achieving reciprocity in intercultural relationships, Eriksen (2013, 83) argues, "presuppose[s] a social ontology where difference is not seen as a threat, and where the world is acknowledged to be a complex web of interlocking cultural worlds." We take Eriksen's (2013) presupposition as an entry point to suggest that media representations of "Kebabnorsk" and their purported speakers are oftentimes undergirded by a social ontology where difference *is* seen as a threat. Our analysis

aims to explore some of the particular ways in which Norwegian society fails to acknowledge the relevance of historical and ongoing processes of (covert) racialization and the ways they impact the everyday lives of people in Norway.

In the next section, we situate our chapter within a recent body of work that has analyzed the discursive construction of contemporary urban vernaculars and social differentiation in media discourse. We move on to describe the corpus generated for this study and then, present a CDS-oriented analysis supported by the notions of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007) and abyssal line (Sousa Santos 2018). We discuss more general processes of the ways language is ideologically stratified with representations of the “ethnic Other,” which is entrenched or “alive” merely by being projected as an opposition to a “normality,” a “white” or “neutral” conventionalized “Us” or a “standard language” (cf. Stroud 2004). We conclude this chapter proposing that the combination of CDS with theories of decoloniality and epistemologies of the South may represent a step towards southernizing sociolinguistics.

Theoretical frames: critical discourse studies from decolonial perspectives

In recent years, there has been an increased scholarly interest around the ideologically established interconnections between language practices and media representations of the “ethnic Other” (e.g., Bucholtz et al. 2018; Jonsson et al. 2020). Further, attention has been drawn to how language is construed and functions as proxy for questions of assumed race/ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000), and to how language practices become racialized, covering, and reinforcing structural inequalities in social and economic power (e.g., Rosa 2019). In turn, the linguistic practices of the youths growing up in urban neighbourhoods shaped by immigration have arguably been a very popular topic in sociolinguistics in the past 20 years or so. Researchers have discussed how to label these practices (e.g., Kotsinas 1988; Rampton 2015); the linguistic features and functions of these purported speech styles (e.g., Cheshire et al. 2011; Svendsen and Røyneland 2008); how these speech styles and their purported speakers are perceived by society at large, such as being (re)presented in the media (e.g., Androustopoulos 2010; Milani 2010; Svendsen 2014). This research on contemporary urban vernaculars has, however, mainly been conducted from a western European perspective – a part of the world that has – in the name of the construction of the national ethos – minimized its diversity in the name of unity (but see e.g. Erastus and Kebeya 2018; Hurst-Harosh and Erastus 2018, cf. also Kerswill and Wiese 2022).

The media has been an excellent site for investigating circumfluent ideologies due to its documented role in (re)producing stereotypes (Mastro 2015; Ross 2019). In media discourse, scholars have identified strategies for Othering such as stereotyping, in-group hegemony, racialization,

objectification, or wrongly ascribed ethnicity (Bucholtz and Lopez 2011; Reisigl and Wodak 2009; Strani and Szczepaniak-Kozak 2018). Essentialised mappings of language onto a particular body or the “ethnic Other” tend to be reinscribed rather than subverted in media discourse (Bucholtz et al. 2018). Particularly in relation to discursive representations of speech styles associated with the urban youth in “multi-ethnic” areas, studies have examined the role of the media in the construction of social differentiation. These studies have shown, inter alia, that: perceptions of the language practices associated with these groups are constructed in hierarchical opposition to a standard; essentialist understandings render urban youth as homogenous groups whose diversity – linguistic and otherwise – is erased; juvenile delinquency, unemployment, and low academic performance tend to be linked to alleged users of such speech styles, often young men with immigrant background; and place body and language practices seem to be interrelated in deterministic ways as though specific language practices result from inhabiting a specific body and a given place (e.g. Androutsopoulos 2010; Ims 2014; Milani 2010; Svendsen 2014).

Critical discourse analysis – lately rendered as critical discourse studies (CDS) – have provided sophisticated methodological and theoretical frames of analysis for researchers interested “in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society” (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011, 357). Yet, much of the theoretical background of the main CDS approaches, as proposed by Wodak and Meyer (2009), remain within a Eurocentric, critical theory canon. For example, Wodak and Meyer (2009, 20) identify Marx, Foucault, Critical Theory as the “main theoretical attractors” of various CDS approaches. Even though such theoretical frames have contributed towards mitigating social inequality and promoting social justice, Sousa Santos (2018, 21) argues they have failed to provide appropriate tools to address the conditions that engender “the colonial and neo-colonial state, apartheid, forced and slave labour, extrajudicial elimination, torture, permanent war, the primitive accumulation of capital, internment camps for refugees, the dronification of military engagement, mass surveillance, racism, domestic violence, and femicide.” It is within this context that Sousa Santos (2018, p. viii) claims that there is a need for “an alternative thinking of alternatives.”

In a similar vein, scholars have drawn attention to the need for scholarly engagement of critical discourse studies with decoloniality and southern epistemologies (Resende 2021, van Dijk, and Lazar 2020). Resende (2021), has noted the overwhelming reliance of CDS on English and French traditions of discourse analysis. She has suggested a decolonial turn in CDS, which would entail, among other things, “[r]ecognizing theories from the global North as what they essentially are: territorialized theories like any other, which are not universally valid or intrinsically superior.” Moreover, she calls for a continuous development of the “interest for locally produced knowledge and recognizing its explanatory potential” (Resende 2021, 38). In this chapter, we draw on theories

of decoloniality and epistemologies of the South to articulate epistemological frames that extend beyond the Eurocentric canon. Before moving on to analyse the media excerpts, we present the corpus generated for this study, the methodological steps undertaken during the analysis, and the CDS' tools that have guided our study.

Data and methodology

The digital media archive Atekst (Retriever) was used to generate the corpus for this study (April 2021). Employing the query term “Kebabnorsk,” we focused on articles published by Norwegian print media between 1 January 2015 and 1 April 2021. This time frame was established in order to build on previous research by Svendsen and Marzo (2015), which had its cut-off date in 2015. Besides focusing on the three national newspapers with the largest circulation figures in Norway (i.e., VG, Aftenposten, and Dagbladet), the analysis included Klassekampen and Dagsavisen due to the relatively high number of query results. A total of 90 query results were retrieved and analyzed. The types of articles included news reports, reviews, interviews, editorial and opinion pieces, and letters to the editor.

In an initial step of the analysis, we noted that four main subjects were topicalized in the articles surveyed: (i) a controversy around the statements about “Kebabnorsk” made by the PR mogul Geelmuyden, former manager of GK,³ (ii) reviews of books, films, and theatre plays, (iii) discussions about immigration, diversity, and integration, and (iv) eastern Oslo, the historically traditional working-class area. While the differentiation of topics can be analytically helpful, oftentimes articles contained more than one topic. In the second step of the analysis, we identified overarching themes emerging from each article (cf. David and Baden 2017 on the difference between topic and theme). Subsequently, we grouped the first set of topics into broader themes. This step led to the identification of two main themes, namely, “‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’” and “place-based language practices.” The first theme refers to articles in which, oftentimes, “Kebabnorsk” was projected as a marked linguistic practice indexical of urban youth with immigrant background. The latter theme represents a double bind in which “Kebabnorsk” indexes place affiliation to east Oslo at the same time as inhabitants of east Oslo – in general – are construed as speakers of “Kebabnorsk”.

In this chapter, we analyse excerpts from three different articles in our corpus between June to September 2020, all linked to the original statement by Geelmuyden in the interview in Kampanje (cf. excerpt 1 below).⁴ The excerpts analyzed illustrate positions in support of Geelmuyden (e.g., excerpts 2 and 3), positions that aim to expose the structural dimension of (race-based) discrimination in Norway as it is revealed in this debate (e.g., excerpts 4 and 5), as well as positions that overtly take up

“Kebabnorsk” as an integral part of claimed identities (e.g., excerpts 6 and 7). The excerpts, published originally in Norwegian, are the authors’ translations into English. Excerpts 2–7, below, are analyzed in light of epistemological tools and assumptions of CDS. We demonstrate the ways in which certain linguistic devices (e.g., deictics, nouns, adjectives, direct and indirect speech) are employed in texts in order to accomplish the strategies of nomination and predication (i.e., respectively “discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/action” and “discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/processes [more or less positively or negatively]”) (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 95). Before presenting the excerpts that are intertextually linked to Geelmuyden’s interview (2–7), we present an excerpt of the interview itself (excerpt 1) as well as an overview of the main events that followed his statements.

Geelmuyden’s initial statement in Kampanje

In June 2020, Kampanje interviewed three media and communication professionals about diversity in the PR business. When asked if GK had any concrete measures to ensure diversity in the firm, Geelmuyden replied:

Excerpt 1

Yes, when we look for people, it is no drawback to be called Ahmed, but you must know Norwegian. There are some with ethnic background who are not good enough in (knowing) Norwegian and we live in a written culture. Kebabnorsk is not good enough at GK.

(Kampanje 2020a)

A number of media articles and social media publications reacted to this interview. For example, the Facebook page of Kampanje shared an article in which a GK staff member supported Geelmuyden’s approach to diversity and presented Geelmuyden as “colour-blind” (Kampanje 2020b). One of the comments to this post was from a communication professional, Umar Ashraf, who criticized Geelmuyden for maintaining his position towards minorities, even after negative repercussions of Geelmuyden’s earlier statement about “Kebabnorsk”. Geelmuyden himself, replied to Ashraf and called him an “authoritarian extremist” and wrote that he should learn “Western values.” A few days later, IKEA as well as the Labour Organization terminated their accounts with GK. Geelmuyden, then, made a public apology in which he acknowledged the racist character of his own comments:

For me it has been a week marked by much realization, that we have discrimination and racism in Norwegian society. It has been

an awakening for me. No one becomes old until they stop learning.
Therefore, I feel like a young man.

(VG 2020a)

We will return to this apology, but first we turn to our analysis.

Surfacing the abyssal line between “Us” and “Them”

Geelmuyden’s apology framed as an act of bravery

Excerpts 2 and 3 below are taken from a piece entitled “Geelmuyden’s Brave Acknowledgment” written by the journalist Hans Petter Sjøli in VG as a response to Geelmuyden’s public apology. In this piece, the journalist situates Geelmuyden’s apology within a broader Norwegian context.

Excerpt 2

In a country where the r-word for many is as frightening as Nøkken painted by Kittelsen, he [i.e., Geelmuyden] said straight out that the statements were racist.

(VG 2020b)

Echoing the position of other scholars mentioned in the introduction (e.g., Helland 2014, Bangstad 2019), Kyllingstad (2017, 326) notes that “[t]he term ‘race’ is generally absent from Norwegian public debate.” Analysis of excerpt 2 illustrates this point. By using the r-word in place of race, racism, or racist, in the passage above the journalist employs the discursive strategy nomination to allude to race being a taboo word in public discourse in Norway. The discursive strategy predication is then used to qualify the “r-word” as frightening. “Many” would consider the “r-word” as frightening as the figure Nixie – a character of Germanic mythology and folklore – as painted by the renowned Norwegian artist Theodor Kittelsen (1857–1914). Stroud’s (2004) analysis of public discourses about race and language in the Swedish context can be useful here. He suggested that circulating discourses about language replaced explicit racist discourse, since the latter would be socially unacceptable in modern states (Stroud 2004). In Norway, Kyllingstad (2017, 324) proposed that although racism based on biological arguments had been in decline after WWII, and further with the rise of the anti-racist movement in the 1980s, “racism still existed in the shape of organized racism, everyday racism and institutionalized racism and it was increasingly legitimized, not by racial arguments, but by notions about insurmountable cultural group differences.” The absence of the term “race” in public debate, as pointed to by the journalist in excerpt 2, does not necessarily imply an absence of race-based discrimination in Norway

nor the nonexistence of social movements organized to fight it. Rather, it sheds light on a particular blind spot that might be forged by an arguably well-meaning stance. That is, many would agree with the idea that, in principle, all are equal, thus race-based differentiation would be inconceivable. A possibly unintended consequence of this reasoning would be a certain difficulty in locating as well as discussing racism in Norwegian society. Excerpt 3 further illustrates this point.

Excerpt 3

Although few of us are racists in the classic meaning of the term – it is the case that we, often inadvertently, use words and phrases and commit actions that cement us and them-divides rather than erase them, as most of us hopefully want.

(VG 2020b)

In this excerpt, the nomination strategy “few of us” is employed to delimit the number of people who could be considered racists in Norway. In turn, the predication strategy accomplished by the use of the term “classic” qualifies a specific kind of racist. These nomination and predication strategies are combined in order to oppose a view that racism is a pervasive phenomenon in Norway. Moreover, excerpt 3 touches on the idea of intentionality in relation to social practices that might contribute to creating social differentiation. The use of “inadvertently,” for example, exempts responsibility from those whose actions might be considered racist. Similarly, “hopefully” is used as a predication strategy to qualify a supposedly intended goal of many people, namely, to erase divides. Finally, the nomination strategy “most of us” constructs those who intend to erase divides as a majority in opposition to “few of us,” used in the beginning of excerpt 3.

Excerpts 2 to 3 illustrate how Geelmuyden’s apology was framed as an act of bravery in a context where speaking of race is a taboo. Yet, others have drawn attention to the institutionalized dimension of discrimination in Norway, as shown in excerpts 4 and 5.

A diversity problem

Excerpts 4 and 5 below, were taken from an article, entitled “The PR Industry has a Diversity Problem,” written by the journalist and jurist Maryam Iqbal Tahir and published in *Aftenposten* a few days after Geelmuyden’s original statement. In the article, the journalist suggests that the discussion occasioned by Geelmuyden’s statements might expose a more long-standing problem in Norwegian society. That is, it points to a gatekeeping mechanism whereby the language practices of immigrants and people with immigrant background serve as proxy for discrimination.

Excerpt 4

It will soon be 50 years since the first immigrants came to Norway. First, one blamed the parents' language skills when one did not give them jobs, now one blames the language skills of the children to explain the lack of diversity in their company.

(Aftenposten 2020)

In this excerpt, the author draws attention to the perpetuation of discriminatory practices against immigrants and Norwegians with immigrant background in the Norwegian job market. The use of blamed/blames accomplishes the discursive strategy of nomination in that it constructs the specific action of imputing responsibility for unemployment to the unemployed. What makes this passage particularly relevant is the juxtaposition of two generations who are refused work opportunities due to the same purported "deficiency," having an "immigrant background." One may infer, then, that the underlying reason for their not being offered jobs might not necessarily be their language skills. Excerpt 5 allows us to further explore this point.

Excerpt 5

In the survey on living conditions among Norwegian-born with immigrant parents, 22 percent of descendants state that they have experienced discrimination in the workplace in the last 12 months due to their immigrant background. There are no differences between immigrants and Norwegian-born with immigrant parents when it comes to the experience of discrimination.

(Aftenposten 2020)

The journalist's overarching argument that discrimination against immigrants persists across generations is supported by survey data (see also Dalgard 2018). While conflating categorizations such as country background and race might be analytically unsound, Führer's (2021) findings about the racialized dimension of particular connotations gained by the term immigrant in Norway open up important analytical possibilities to explore how these categorizations might be interrelated. She proposes that "categories like 'immigrant' are often used exclusively to refer to non-white, non-European immigrants" (Führer 2021, 205). Thus, in a context where talking about race has become a taboo, other signs of difference such as language practices and country of origin are rendered meaningful in processes of racialization.

Below, we present an example of lived experiences of such (c)overt racialization processes, an example which was a direct reaction to Geelmuden's original statement, *viz.* an opinion piece written by the artist

Yousef Hadaoui, who won the 2018 Oslo City Art Award. This opinion piece is particularly meaningful in the construction of social differentiation that sustain the abyssal line dividing “Us” and “Them.”

The story of us

In the opinion piece, printed in VG in September 2020, Hadaoui interweaves an overview of the shifting socio-political climate in Norway in the past 30 years, particularly in connection with racial issues, with lived experiences of the feeling of the gaze of others, and the ways those experiences and the socio-political changes have affected his own life.

Excerpt 6

The story is old. That people can be divided according to race, culture, language, and religion. That there are some differences between us that are always there. That will always be there. I have experienced it myself. When I stood at Smestad and waited for a friend who never came. The feeling of the gaze of others. Of being an intruder. A place I didn't belong. And I'm trying to find a reason for being there. Which isn't that I sell hashish. Steal bikes. Cars?

(VG 2020c)

In the opening of this excerpt, the discursive strategy predication employs “old” to characterize the processes of differentiating people. Taking a temporal perspective, this passage is intertextually linked to excerpt 5 in that both passages draw attention to the perpetuation of processes of social differentiation across generations in Norway. Moreover, the employment of “always” underlines the perpetuation and, possibly, the inexorability of such processes. Then, Hadaoui articulates some of the ways in which these long-standing processes have affected his own lived experiences. This is accomplished through the discursive strategy nomination in his description of the social actions linked to criminality (e.g., steal bikes, sell hashish). Hadaoui suggests these actions were possibly imputed to him by onlookers at Smestad, an upper-class neighbourhood in western Oslo. In such interactions, the white gaze interpellated Hadaoui as an intruder, as the racialized Other (cf. Shaikjee and Stroud 2017). These lived experiences seem to be embodied instantiations of race-based processes of social differentiation that rest upon a social ontology where difference is seen as a threat (cf. Eriksen 2013). Despite being affected by these experiences, and attending to their inexorable dimension, Hadaoui seems not to be immobilized, nor to conform to normative language practices, as shown in excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7

I will always call my friends “bro”. I will always speak Kebabnorsk. Never get a job at Geelmuyden Kiese. But I am not afraid anymore. Because I have learned to tell new stories. The story of us.

(VG 2020c)

Fear surfaces in Hadaoui’s text to describe an emotion that no longer marks his lived experiences. Understanding emotions as relational, Ahmed (2004, 63) has argued that “[f]ear involves relationships of proximity, which are crucial to establishing the ‘apartness’ of white bodies. Such proximity involves the repetition of stereotypes.” In Hadaoui’s case, fear seems to have worked in conjunction with a sense of apartness and of not belonging in encounters shaped by stereotypes mobilized by the white gaze. In contrast with the employment of “always” in excerpt 6, which alluded to the perpetuation of processes of race-based differentiation, in excerpt 7 “always” points to the resoluteness of Hadaoui’s language-related decisions, which include speaking “Kebabnorsk”. Moreover, Hadaoui discursively constructs GK as an undesirable workplace. Embracing decisions that encompass language practices was accompanied by not feeling afraid any longer. This shift was, according to Hadaoui, a result of taking ownership in the narrative of his life and of those with whom he shares a history of being positioned as minoritized groups, “the story of us.”

Discussion

Mignolo’s (2011) proposition of coloniality as the darker side of modernity conceives of modernity and coloniality as inseparable. A corollary of this understanding is that Eurocentric epistemologies have been profoundly impacted by the hierarchization of social categorizations such as social class, gender/sexuality, and race/ethnicity. That is, the construction of the colonized Other as inferior yielded an understanding of the European as superior. Despite the different roles of individual nation states during colonial times, the values upheld by Eurocentric modernity have shaped the discursive construction of a national ethos in many different countries. In other words, the construction of Western-centric nationalism across Europe presupposes the idea that people could be hierarchically differentiated. Recent analyses of media discourses that tap into an “Us” and “Them” divide in different Nordic countries provide insights that situate our study within a broader context.

In Sweden, for example, Milani (2020, 13) draws on Arendt’s (1963) notion of banality of evil to analyse political and media discourses in Sweden, to claim that “certain Other human positions are *consistently* portrayed as threatening” through “banal discursive processes.” He further argues that it is not only the far-right who are implicated in such

discursive processes. Rather, Milani (2020: 9) draws attention to the insidious “mundane nastiness of language” to demonstrate that the circulation and normalization of discourses that construct hierarchical subject positions in debates about immigration and diversity are more widespread (see also Stroud 2004; Milani 2008; 2010).

In Denmark, Suárez-Krabbe (2022) analyses an opinion piece – entitled “For the first time, my carefree generation felt fear” written by Christian Jensen – editor of a Danish newspaper. Published in the wake of the lockdown imposed by the Danish government in response to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Jensen’s piece approaches how he and his generation seemed to be impervious to the atrocities of war and terror because either they were not directly impacted by them or merely held the position of spectators. Suárez-Krabbe (2022: 6) challenges Jensen’s positionality as she writes “I am from the same generation of Danes that he is, but together with all other mixed Danes, Danes of colour and/or from the Global South, clearly I am not a Dane according to Jensen’s unspoken criteria.” Given Jensen’s detachment from the realities of many Danes, Suárez-Krabbe (2022) claims, his positionality can be conceived of as being outside of history, culture, race, and gender. This detachment is similar to the process through which, according to Sousa Santos (2018) those who inhabit the other side of the abyssal line are rendered invisible.

In the Norwegian context, discursive constructions of “Them” – in opposition to a normative, hegemonic “Us” – have been consistently present in media discourses about speech styles typically associated with urban youth in areas shaped by immigration (Svendsen 2022). Particularly in relation to discourses about “Kebabnorsk” in Norway, Svendsen and Marzo (2015, 68) have claimed that certain stances taken in media debates seem to be informed by an “outdated colonial discourse that argued that the European bourgeoisie was superior to the ‘regressive’ and ‘primitive’ others.” Svendsen and Marzo (2015) locate the hierarchical construction of Europeans vis-à-vis “primitive” others within broader colonial logics. The notion of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007, Quijano 2001) allows us to further Svendsen and Marzo’s (2015) proposition in that coloniality “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration” (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243). In turn, Sousa Santos (2018) conceptualizes an ontological division between two realms of social reality separated by an abyssal line as resultant of modern Western thinking. He argues that

[t]he division is such that “the other side of the line” vanishes as reality, becomes non-existent [...] Whatever is produced as non-existent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other.

(Sousa Santos 2007, 45)

The context described above provides the contours of a social democratic society where racist discourses are unacceptable and talking about race has become a taboo (Kyllingstad 2017; Helland 2014). In such a context, we argue, “Kebabnorsk” is represented in Norwegian media as a set of signs of difference that are rendered meaningful as they construct an axis of differentiation (Gal and Irvine 2019) between “Us” and “Them”. This axis of differentiation is regimented by ideological work whereby “Us” encompasses “ethnic Norwegian” people who uphold Western values and speak standard Norwegian. Oppositely, “Them” would describe those with racially minoritized background, uphold so-called non-Western values, and speak “Kebabnorsk”. We employed the notion of the abyssal line to conceptualize a social ontology where difference is seen as a threat (cf. Eriksen 2013), rendering some – in this context, racialized immigrants who purportedly use “Kebabnorsk” – as radically excluded, and because coevalness is denied to them (cf. Fabian 1983), they are unable to make meaningful contributions to society.

As shown, expressing racist views can have negative consequences for businesses in contemporary Norway. Yet, one may wonder whether Geelmuyden’s public apology represents a concrete step towards dismantling the structures that sustain racialized hierarchization which prevent (purported) users of “Kebabnorsk” from occupying positions of power in Norwegian society, including gaining employment at GK. Or if the apology is simply a strategic move to remain in business in response to liberal market anxieties where diversity is, in some ways, commodified. Either way, it is undeniable that reclaiming minoritized language practices, as in excerpts 6 and 7, illustrates a stance that has been taken by many artists in Norway. Hip hop artists like Danny Maroc/Kameleon, Minoritet 1, Karpe, and more recently, a number of books, TV series, theatre plays, and films have foregrounded “Kebabnorsk” and their self-identified users (e.g., Selmer-Anderssen 2020; Shakar 2017; Navarro Skaranger 2015). Despite the iterative discursive (re)construction of the abyssal line, the reclamation of “Kebabnorsk” by these artists can be conceived of as manifestations that rest upon a social ontology where difference is *not* seen as a threat, copresence and coevalness are viable, reciprocity is achieved, and “worlds and knowledges otherwise” (Escobar 2007) are legitimated and valued.

Conclusion

In this study, we employed CDS tools to better understand the manifestations in language of relationships marked by power struggles and discrimination (Baker et al. 2008). Engaging with the notions of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2007) and abyssal line (de Sousa Santos 2018) contributed to the conceptualization of a social ontology where difference is seen as a threat (cf. Eriksen 2013). Moreover, the vantage point afforded by the combination of CDS tools with theories of

decoloniality and epistemologies of the South allowed us to (i) frame the analysis of representations of “Kebabnorsk” in Norwegian media within a broader Scandinavian context, (ii) bring to surface an abyssal line that separates “Us” and “Them” in media representations of “Kebabnorsk,” (iii) shed light on a social ontology upon which such abyssal line rests, and (iv) interpret artistic works as manifestations of a social ontology where difference is not seen as a threat and worlds and knowledges otherwise are legitimated and valued. Following an understanding that engaging with southern epistemologies does not entail ignoring “northern” scholarship (Makoni et al., 2022 Pennycook and Makoni 2020), we argue that combining CDS tools with theories of decoloniality and epistemologies of the South, as we have in this chapter, represents an analytical gesture towards southernizing sociolinguistics.

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Notes

- 1 Due to the Black Death or Great Plague, Norway was part of the Kalmar Union from 1397, under the Danish crown from 1536–1814, and under the Swedish crown until 1905.
- 2 Norwegian society has been characterized by a somewhat steady increase in the number of immigrants since the late 1960s when labour migrants came to Norway mainly from Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, and India. Nowadays, the 997,942 immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents account for 18.5 percent of the total population (SN 2021). In Oslo, one-third of the population is either immigrant or born in Norway to immigrant parents (Oslo Kommune 2021).
- 3 GK is the largest partner-owned communication company in Scandinavia, established by Geelmuyden and his partner Kiese in 1989.
- 4 We have chosen to use Geelmuyden’s name as well as the names and occupations of the authors of the articles presented here. Rather than singling out individuals, we are interested in analyzing the discourses about diversity, immigration, and integration in Norway that traverse their subject positions.

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