

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Salö, Linus; Karlander, David; Leppänen, Sirpa; Westinen, Elina; Spindler Møller, Janus

**Title:** Introduction : spaces of upset in the Nordic region

**Year:** 2022

**Version:** Published version

**Copyright:** © 2022 Linus Salö et al., published by De Gruyter.

**Rights:** CC BY 4.0

**Rights url:** <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Please cite the original version:**

Salö, L., Karlander, D., Leppänen, S., Westinen, E., & Spindler Møller, J. (2022). Introduction : spaces of upset in the Nordic region. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2022(275), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2021-0115>



## Editorial

Linus Salö\*, David Karlander, Sirpa Leppänen, Elina Westinen  
and Janus Spindler Møller

# Introduction: spaces of upset in the Nordic region

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2021-0115>

**Abstract:** This introductory article opens the thematic issue *Spaces of Upset in the Nordic Region*. It introduces the contributions of the issue, outlines the concepts that unite them, and discusses the sociolinguistic area in which they are set: the Nordic region. Centering on Denmark, Finland and Sweden, the article offers an overview of some of the sociolinguistic, ideological and political characteristics of the region and the countries it comprises. The Nordic region is widely seen as a paradigm case of social stability, consensus and cohesion. This vision is, however, a mirage. To be sure, upset often lingers below the discursive veneer of Nordic harmony, concord and agreement. Breaking with this outlook, this thematic issue takes a closer look at some of the antipodes of this sociolinguistic and ideological condition. Its contributions engage with ‘spaces of upset’, that is, with manifestations and experiences of sociolinguistic rupture, upheaval or change, in and through which visions of sociolinguistic stability and cohesion are disrupted and challenged. These spaces of upset bear witness to social, ideological and linguistic tensions and changes, be they incipient, enduring or surpassed. They accordingly provide a new take on processes of continuity and change, pointing out the ideological faultlines of the orders they disrupt, or upset.

**Keywords:** migration; language ideology; language and the welfare state; social cohesion; spaces of upset; The Nordic region

---

**\*Corresponding author: Linus Salö**, Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University, 106 91, Stockholm, Sweden; and Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden, E-mail: [linus.salo@biling.su.se](mailto:linus.salo@biling.su.se). <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3997-1149>

**David Karlander**, School of English, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Sirpa Leppänen**, Department of Language and Communication Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7167-4649>

**Elina Westinen**, Department of Music, Art and Culture Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1071-8871>

**Janus Spindler Møller**, Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6343-6739>

# 1 Introducing spaces of upset

The articles in this issue are united by their focus on three Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Adopting a sociolinguistic gaze, they take a close look at relatively enduring forms of social change – with instant ruptures or prolonged upheavals that in some way “*upset* established orders” (Cresswell 2014: 712; our emphasis) in these national spaces. Such orders may be grasped as normative notions of regional and national significance, akin to what Taylor (2004) terms ‘social imaginaries’, “carried in images, stories, and legends” (Taylor 2004: 23). They concern, more precisely, notions of Nordic idylls and utopias entrenched in regionally distributed nation-state ideologies and, as such, are implicated in sustaining the nations they concern (Heller et al. 2016). From the vantage point of the concept spaces of upset,<sup>1</sup> the contributions in this issue offer an empirical, analytical and conceptual challenge to received views of Nordic cohesion and consensus – sociolinguistic and otherwise. A critical interrogation of these dynamics calls into question state-consecrated visions as articulated (or, at least presupposed) in dominant systems of thought. Through six empirical contributions, followed by a commentary by Monica Heller, this is what this thematic issue seeks to accomplish.

This introduction serves to frame our collective endeavor. It seeks to contextualize the social fabric of Nordic region in pursuit of unraveling the threads of which it is made. In doing so, we draw attention to a set of banal yet foundational concepts around which collective visions and social divisions have long been modeled. At the regional level, a vocabulary of ‘consensus’, ‘stability’, ‘harmony’ and ‘cohesion’, and, more recently, ‘equality’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘well-being’, is often invoked to define, and thereby sustain, a Nordic model society. At the level of each nation-state, it includes an additional range of historically rooted watchwords, notoriously hard to translate, such as Danish *hygge* (an everyday philosophy of coziness), Finnish *talk-oohenki* (a spirit for communal collaboration), and Swedish *lagom* (‘just about’, connoting a balanced and moderate approach to life). Such quotidian shorthand for conviviality has a cultural and political significance that extends beyond the realm of mundane linguistic exchange. As Thompson argues,

---

1 The work presented in this issue emerged out of a series of inter-Nordic workshops 2017–2019, with participants from the universities of Copenhagen (Denmark), Jyväskylä (Finland) and Stockholm (Sweden), funded by the Nordic research councils in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOS-HS; grant 2016-00270/NOS-HS). The term ‘spaces of upset’ was proposed by Monica Heller as the invited discussant at the Stockholm seminar, September 2017. Since then, the term has increasingly come to denote a phenomenon common to the participants, whose work dealt with ideologically charged exchanges over visions of sociolinguistic normality. ‘Upset’ eventually became shorthand for the main themes in this body of work. We accordingly see it as a suitable keyword for this special issue, an end result of the seminar series.

in using language we are constantly engaged in a creative, imaginary activity. We are [...] also involved, knowingly or not, in altering, undermining or reinforcing our relations with others and with the world (1984: 6).

Language, in short, provides an inroad to Nordic nation-state ideologies as well as to Nordic imaginaries upheld across the region (see also Anderson [1983]; Heller and McElhinny [2017]).

It goes without saying that the received view of Nordic cohesion and consensus of course conceals a more complex, fragmented, and conflictual reality. Lived sociolinguistic realities, to be sure, are rife with counterpoints to this social imaginary. Linguistic exchange in the Nordic countries abounds with momentary and situated disruptions, all of which point to existing tensions between sociolinguistic continuity and change, between unity and fragmentation, between stasis and mobility. As proposed by the contributions in this thematic issue, these dynamics can be captured by an analytical focus on the bisemic notion of ‘upset’. As evidenced by this collection of articles, occurrences of upset do not only constitute a break with normative visions of order, but may also serve as an effective analytical framing, apt for pointing out the ideological faultlines and expectations of the very order it disrupts. The notion of spaces of upset can accordingly be used for capturing more or less momentary manifestations of deep-seated sociolinguistic tensions as they unfold across a range of more or less demarcated contexts where questions of language and communication occupy central stage. Exploring this dynamic, the articles included in this thematic issue should be viewed as a set of counterexamples and contrarian evidence to received views of the Nordic countries as non-antagonistic and exceptionally harmonious, prosperous and well-functional spaces. The contributing authors offer a variegated set of analytical and empirical engagements with the unstable notion of Nordic stability. All center on the propensity of language and communication to become objects or arenas of social struggle, tapping into social change as it manifests sociolinguistically. Before introducing the specific contributions, we shall dwell in some detail on the spatial framing of this thematic issue, the Nordic region, after which we will unpack the novel concept of spaces of upset.

## **2 Setting the scene: cohesion and consensus in Denmark, Finland and Sweden**

The Nordic region encompasses the sovereign states of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. As autonomous overseas territories under the Danish crown, the Faroe Islands and Greenland also form part of the region, as does the Åland

archipelago, which constitutes an autonomous region of the Republic of Finland. The indigenous Sámi people have a varying degree of subnational political representation in Norway, Sweden and Finland. The history of the Nordic region contains many troubled interrelationships, manifested in wars, political unions, conquests, colonization and other relations of dominance and subservience. The notion of Nordic similarity is nonetheless of a more recent date. Following the Napoleonic Wars, which effectively put an end to the imperial aspirations of Denmark and Sweden, a Romantic idea of a shared Nordic identity began to emerge. It ushered in a vision of the Nordic region as an exceptional case, united by a set of cultural and linguistic commonalities, shared political interests and sometimes even a common fate (Czarny 2017). This vision is still tangible today, albeit in a slightly modified form.

Following World War II, which affected the Nordic countries in dramatically different ways, the region emerged as a firmly democratic space, with few experiences of social upheaval or massive changes in the political system. Instead, a regional style of governance – the so-called Nordic model – which combined parliamentary democracy, Keynesian capitalism and extensive social welfare, became firmly established across the region. Yielding not only economic growth but also a redistribution of wealth, it gave the sovereign states of the region a reputation as stable ‘consensual democracies’, set apart by supposedly non-antagonistic modes of conflict solution and decision-making (Elder et al. 1982; Petersson 1994). The idea of consensus can be understood as a vision of imperturbable agreement. It is as much imagined as a political culture as a civic ideal and a personal virtue. Whereas differences between the Nordic countries exist (e.g., Kulick and Rydström 2015), consensus features as a common trait of Nordic model and its political mode of communication (Grøn et al. 2015; Skogerbø et al. 2020). In turn, consensus is considered a vital factor in the collective production of ‘stability’, whether this stability pertains to political economy, politics and culture, or to social order more generally. At the historical zenith of this order, Swedish political scientist and public intellectual Herbert Tingsten (1966: 12) tellingly dubbed the Nordic countries “happy democracies” – united through national, linguistic and religious cohesion, and supposedly void of social tensions.

To this day, the region has an international reputation of stability. It is widely recognized as a benchmark for the combination of economic and social reform emblematic of the modern welfare state (Kautto et al. 1999). Despite the onset of a neoliberal dismantling of public and welfare institutions, ideas about regional stability, harmony and cohesion remain vigorous. The region is widely seen – and sees itself – as a forerunner of high living standards, economic growth, job security, free education, gender equality, sustainability and minority rights. Somewhat anecdotally, all the Nordic countries are also held to be among the seven “happiest” societies in the world, as indicated by high GDP per capita, extensive

social support, long life expectancy, substantial freedom to make life choices, personal generosity, trust and absence of corruption (Finland ranking first, Denmark second and Sweden seventh; see Helliwell et al. [2020]). Reports from the regional cooperation organization Nordic Council of Ministers – an organization that is heavily invested in Nordic cohesion and consensus – tend to stress that “the peaceful, democratic and inclusive nature of our communities helps make our societies strong and resilient” (Grunfelder et al. 2020: 11). The Nordic countries are officially committed to becoming the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030, a goal that includes “an inclusive, equal and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchange and welfare” (Nordic Council of Ministers 2020: 2).

It goes without saying that overly shiny images of the Nordic countries leave out less flattering facets of the region. Visions of a harmonious past, a happy present and an ever-improving future are necessarily selective. The reputation and self-understanding of the Nordic region as the epitome of social cohesion and consensus – the antithesis of change – has disguised many tensions lurking beneath the ostensibly stable surfaces of these polities. The Nordic countries are certainly not spared from inequality, antagonisms and conflicts: increasing income gaps, political conflicts, discrimination and ever visible xenophobia are all cases in point (Hervik 2019; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). In European comparison, the gap in the employment rates between foreign-born and native-born residents are particularly high in Denmark and Sweden (OECD 2020). The radical right has seen electoral success in most Nordic countries: far-right parties are firmly established in Sweden, as well as in Denmark and Finland (Widfeldt 2018). In stark contrast to widespread ideas of Nordic contentment, people suffer “in the shadow of happiness”, as evidenced in disproportionately high suicide rates (Andreasson 2018). Yet, the idea of the Nordic region as a space of cohesion and consensus prevails. Notions of homogeneity loom large, despite being at odds with social reality (Keskinen et al. 2019).

By the same token, despite attempts to add nuance and complexity, ingrained ideologies of a Nordic way reach deep into the realm of sociolinguistic affairs (see Hervik 2019; Hutton 2017; Strang 2016). The Nordic countries are thought of as linguistically unified polities. Despite widespread multilingualism, the linguistic market of each country is dominated by a national standard language, which permeates all tiers of society (see Vikør 1993; Kristiansen and Sandøy 2010; Kristiansen and Coupland 2011). With respect to regional linguistic cohesion, the continental Scandinavian national standard languages – Danish, Swedish and Norwegian – are mutually intelligible. While the transnational intelligibility does not extend to Finnish and Icelandic, nor to Faroese and Greenlandic, Swedish is one of the two national languages of Finland, and Danish is taught in Iceland, as

well as in the Faroe Islands and Greenland. As language, ideological representations, consensus and unity are similarly emblemized in linguistic conflict avoidance, enunciative moderation, tactfulness, strategic silence, hedging and even non-engagement (Kulick 2014; Østergaard 2002; see also Nordic Voices 1984). In fact, even if there exists no consensus, a semblance of agreement and harmony may still be discursively performed (e.g., Jenkins 2016). Such performances may, too, be conceived of as consensus and thus are implicated in the construction of Nordic idyll. The idea of Nordic noir has sociological – and indeed sociolinguistic – relevance.

Again, it must be remembered that apparent large-scale commonalities rarely correspond to the situated realities of sociolinguistic life. Neither are they uniformly structured nor evenly distributed across regions and states. The discrepancies and differences between the Nordic countries do indeed require some further contextualization. We outline these below, offering some relevant pointers on the historical, political and, not least, sociolinguistic contours of each country covered here, adding necessary background to the articles included in this issue.

## 2.1 Denmark

In medieval times, Denmark was a major power of substantial size controlling the area around the Baltic Sea. However, a number of wars lost in 1600–1900 significantly reduced the country's size. In this way, Denmark is an old monarchy with a relatively new status as a peaceful pocket state that needs to adjust to stronger powers. Remaining neutral in World War I and adhering to a so-called “policy of collaboration” when occupied by Germany in World War II, Denmark came relatively unharmed out of both. An increasingly strong Danish resistance movement towards the end of World War II saved Denmark's reputation in the eyes of the victorious side. On a national level, the stories about these “freedom fighters” have become a myth (see Stenius et al. [2011] for a comparison on Nordic narratives).

In the 1950s, the construction of unified Danish people taking care of each other was strengthened by the increased political focus on public welfare, where, for example, tax-funded health services and social security benefits were considered civil rights. The economic boom in the 1960s made it possible to carry out many of these visions for a welfare state. Today the idea of public welfare has been naturalized across the range of political parties from left to right. Generally, Danes consider their welfare system unique compared to countries outside Scandinavia, and it is sometimes referred to as the Danish model (Østergaard 2002). In this way, the welfare system has become synonymous with Danishness in the eyes of many Danish citizens (e.g., Jenkins 2016). Politically, the welfare program was connected

to the arrival of a wave of migrants in the late 1960s and 1970s. Men from Turkey, Pakistan and the former Yugoslavia were welcomed into the labor force in order to enhance the economic boom. The political expectation was that they would leave when the work possibilities were exhausted, but many of the migrants chose to settle in Denmark with their families. Consequently, the government introduced stricter rules on immigration, but still accepted refugees, reunification of families, and workers utilizing the free movement of labor within the EU. Today 14% of the population in Denmark consists of immigrants and their descendants. Since the arrival of the first wave of migrants, Danish politicians have debated to what degree and how this group should have access to welfare benefits (Padovan-Özdemir and Moldenhawer 2016). Language has been a central component in many of these debates. To what degree should, for example, the public school system integrate minority languages (Kristjánsdóttir 2018; Lehtonen and Møller this issue)? And how does the legal system handle (and finance) interpreting in cases where the accused does not speak Danish (Karrebæk and Kirilova this issue)? Another characteristic of the construction of Danishness is the notion of *hygge* – the ability and responsibility to create coziness and social well-being. Recently, social media and especially mobile phones have been constructed in public discourse as a threat to *hygge* in, e.g., families and relationships. Madsen (this issue) investigates how an eminent voice in this public debate constructs digital communication as a bad habit that not only constitutes a risk to social relations, but also to the health of the individual.

## 2.2 Finland

Unlike Denmark and Sweden, Finland lacks a history as a former empire. It gained independence relatively recently (1917), following centuries of imperial “foreign rule”, first as a part of Sweden and later as part of the Russian empire. A short but brutal civil war broke out in early 1918, dividing the nation into conservative “whites” (supported, in part, by the Germans) and the socialist “reds”, associated with the labor movement. Reconciliation and reunification after the war was a prolonged process. A nationally “united front”, an iconic example of the Finnish spirit of communal collaboration, emerged, for instance, in the Winter War against the Soviet Union (1939–1940) (Tepora and Roselius 2014), as well as in the national consensus in the construction of the welfare state, the reach of which encompassed all public institutions. In the decades after World War II, in the spirit of national consensus, Finland managed to evolve into a country characterized by social security, equality and democratic governance. Internationally, Finland is nowadays well known for the high level of its technological know-how and public education. For instance, it has been ranked as one of the top countries for years



both in The International Digital Economy and Society Index (Foley et al. 2021) and in the U21 ranking of national higher education systems (William and Leahy 2020).

In contrast to other Nordic countries, and largely due to its strict immigration policies, Finland was long a country of emigration, rather than of immigration. Thus, it also remained ethnically, culturally and linguistically rather homogeneous, at least on the surface. Beneath, the diversity concealed various long-term linguistic and ethnic minority groups including the Sámi, Roma, Russian-origin minorities and Swedish-speaking Finns. From the 1990s onwards, and, in particular, after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (Rapo 2011) and the European “refugee reception crisis” in 2015, this picture of static homogeneity started to change: at this point, a larger-scale immigration to Finland properly began. Currently, people with a “foreign background” constitute some 7% of all people inhabiting Finland, with roughly half living in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Currently, the largest ethnic groups residing in Finland are people from the former Soviet Union or Russia, Estonians, Iraqis and Somalis. Besides first-generation immigrants, there are some 70,000 second generation people with a “foreign background”, i.e., people born in Finland, which means that every sixth person with a “foreign background” was born in Finland. Despite this diversification of the society, as well as its long-term ethnic and cultural minorities, white, Finnish-speaking ethnic Finnishness is still seen by many as the norm (Keskinen et al. 2019; Rastas 2012). Recently, the myth of homogeneity has, however, clashed with the evolving multiculturalism and multiethnicity of Finnish society, triggering upsets that range from debates for political, social and educational reform to public protests, xenophobic and racist practices and discourses, and conflictual and disparaging social media reactions. Such tensions are at the center in both the analysis of classroom interactions investigated by Lehtonen and Møller (this issue) and the social media performances focused on in Leppänen’s and Westinen’s analysis (this issue).

Sociolinguistically speaking, since 1922, Finland has officially been bilingual, with two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. Currently, out of the 5.5 million citizens, 87.3% state that Finnish is their first language; for 5.2% it is Swedish. Swedish is offered as an obligatory second language to Finnish-speaking students and vice versa. The language rights of the official minorities are protected by the Finnish constitution; it ensures that the three Sámi languages, as well as Roma, Karelian and Finnish Sign Language, are to be maintained and developed. Many members of minoritized linguistic communities are bilingual or multilingual, having either Finnish or Swedish as their first language. With the recent demographic diversification, the number of languages spoken in the country has increased considerably: in 2019, there were approximately 400,000 “foreign language speakers” in Finland, compared to roughly 25,000 in 1990 and about 200,000 in 2009. The top five foreign languages spoken in Finland include Russian, Estonian, Arabic, English and Somali.

## 2.3 Sweden

Among the Nordic countries, Sweden is the largest sovereign state, with the largest population, as well as the highest number and ratio of inhabitants born abroad (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012). Beginning in the 1930s, Sweden became known for its middle-way approach to economic politics (Childs 1936), as well as for its rational use of social engineering, as materialized in the reformist political project *folkhemmet*, ‘the People’s Home’ (Andersson 2009; Eyerman 1985; Hirdman 2010). By and large, Sweden’s twentieth century was marked by Social Democratic dominance – including 44 years of undisrupted governance (1932–1976). Consensus and stability came to be characteristic traits of “the Swedish model” as the country transitioned from an agricultural society dominated by an urban bourgeoisie into an industrialized, urbanized welfare state (Lewin 1998; Tingsten 1955; Rydell and Hanell this issue). Here, the word *lagom* (‘not too much, not too little – just enough’) became the conceptual signifier of a social ideology of moderation, incorporating an element of moral judgment (Ruth 1984), which in turn bolstered the rationality of Swedish middle-way politics (Zetterberg 1984).

The Swedish take on questions of linguistic and cultural difference is rife with paradoxes and historical shifts. Sweden long maintained an official self-image as a monoethnic and monolingual space – a stance largely at odds with the existence of subjects or *folk* whom the People’s Home was not designed to encompass (Andersson 2009). This ideology nonetheless prevailed well into the second half of the twentieth century, as exemplified by an egregious comment by long-standing prime minister Tage Erlander (1965): “the population of our country is homogeneous, not only with respect to race but also in a range of other respects.” (Riksdagen 1965: 60, our translation). As a paradigm case of “sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak 1999), any such contention glosses over the existence of minority groups and a history of oppressive policies. Indeed, it was only in the mid-1970s that Sweden became an early European adopter of an official policy of multiculturalism (e.g., Borevi 2012). This change of tack should be viewed precisely against a backdrop of centuries of state-backed subordination and subjugation – economic, cultural and political – of its minoritized communities, including the Sámi, Roma, Finns, Jews and Catholics. Viewed as such, the multicultural shift was a repentant response to institutionalized monoculturalism and monoglossia – historically manifested in forced segregation and assimilation, official support for scientific racism, and restrictive immigration policies – not least during World War II. It can, furthermore, be read as an institutional response to the increase in labor immigration, and subsequently in refugees, that followed upon the country’s industrial expansion in the postwar period (Byström and Frohnert 2013).

Language was and continues to be a key element in Sweden's official commitment to multiculturalism (see Salö and Karlander 2018). In terms of policy, Sweden is the most pluralist state of the Nordic region. The approximately 200 languages that are estimated to be spoken in the country enjoy a degree of support in Sweden's language political framework. Five so-called national minority languages – Sámi, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani and Yiddish – as well as the Swedish Sign Language are recognized and officialized through the Language Act of 2009. According to the same law, speakers of all other languages are to be given the opportunity to “develop” and use their languages. In practice, this commitment precedes the Language Act, with minority mother tongue instruction being provided in the public education system since 1977 (see Salö et al. [2018] for a comparison with Denmark). The recognition of pluralism notwithstanding, Swedish is officialized as the “principal” language of the Swedish state and nation. The Language Act underscores that Sweden's commitment to multilingualism is upheld within the language ideological framework of the nation-state. It is hierarchical in nature, ranking Swedish as the sole language of institutional transactions. Indeed, a “native-like” command of standard Swedish is often deemed vital for participation in public life. Linguistically non-conforming, racialized agents may be severely punished (see Salö this issue).

As outlined with reference to Denmark, Finland and Sweden, visions of stability, consensus and cohesion are foundational to a national self-image widely upheld in the Nordic countries. This image is a porous one that far from always corresponds to the social realities of sociolinguistic life in the region. On the one hand, however, whenever discrepancies prevail, the notion of Nordic stability effectively disguises the manifold facets of sociolinguistic differentiation and hierarchization that are at play in late-modern nation-states (Duchêne and Heller 2012). On the other hand, whenever the screen of cohesion shows signs of cracking – in moments of manifest or perceived rupture, upheaval or change – these very cracks can be regarded as testimonies of ongoing struggles over the regimentation of social change, and of the notions of stability and upheaval existing on a par with these struggles. They tend to occur in relation to what we have termed ‘spaces of upset’, as outlined presently.

### 3 Approaching spaces of upset

Theories of space at once enable and constrain our analytical freedom. Any sociolinguistic theory of space has a direct effect on the possible scope of sociolinguistic analysis (Karlander 2021). In this thematic issue, aligning with scholars like Massey (2005), Cresswell (2019), Bourdieu (1992) and Heller (2011), we

approach space as being closely linked to social practice. We assume space to be defined and delineated in the course of social practice, treating it less as a precondition for than as an outcome of practice.

In the contributions of this special issue, space implies an interplay of emplacement and mobility. The authors engage with the sociolinguistic economies of three different countries, focusing on occurrences of upset across different sites and settings. Some studies engage with institutional milieus, ranging from analyses of controversies surrounding outsourced courtroom interpreting in Denmark (Karrebæk and Kirilova) to exposés of racist attacks on a news presenter for Swedish public service television (Salö) and to conflict and interactional breakdown in two multilingual classrooms (Lehtonen and Møller). Other studies engage with the forms of upset that unfold in the indistinct borderland between public and private space. They analyze the threat of upset that encapsulate the use of migrant domestic workers in Sweden (Rydell and Hanell); they scrutinize medicalized and panic-ridden debate on the use of smartphones and social media in Denmark (Madsen), and they offer a detailed analysis of performative social media interrogations of the racist and xenophobic undercurrents in the Finnish interaction order by people of color (Leppänen and Westinen). While all these different practices can be described in a register of emplacement – as unfolding in “domains” or “institutional contexts”, as “online” or “offline”, and so on – this construal would be reductive and hence would not serve our ends (see Heller 2008, 2011). By opting for a practice-driven approach, we privilege space over a range of kindred concepts such as sphere, domain, setting, moment, event and so forth. Spaces are by no means hermetical or static. Spaces of upset may extend across or unite a range of sites, modalities and media. Institutional deliberations and exchanges are discussed across a range of settings and media, locating the main manifestations of upset outside the institutional frame (Karrebæk and Kirilova this issue; Salö this issue). Small-scale online exchanges may effectively serve to comment on durable discursive formations that permeate society at large (Madsen this issue; Leppänen and Westinen this issue). Seen through the lens of practice, it is clear that even a seemingly demarcated space vibrates with mobility, originating beyond and reaching outside the space in question (see Heller 2011; Cresswell 2014). This intentional sensitization to reasonably regularized social action allows us to develop an approach to ‘upset’ in which practice occupies center stage.

As evidenced by the contributions to this issue, upset is also an element and a configuration of practice. Upset is indeed experienced individually, but must nonetheless be enacted socially, played out in the actuality of communicative practice. Just like space, as argued by Doreen Massey, upset is embedded in material practices “which have to be *carried out*” in order for upset to matter (2005: 9, our emphasis). Upset is not merely an internal response, the effects of which lie

beyond the reach of agentivity, but a controllable and contestable feature of deliberate human action. Upset does not simply occur, but is actively made and remade.

Semantically, upset may denote a sense or occurrence of change, a rupture or destabilization in an apparently durable order of things. Upset implies mobility in that it brings *something* into motion. As such, it “shifts our gaze from stability to mobility” (Heller 2011: 5). Understood in this way, upset refers to moments when normative expectations are shattered, or when attempts to uphold normative expectations are met by unforeseen or unexpected reactions or outcomes. This form of upset may be “turbulent”, insofar as it arises in “moments of dissonance, disagreement and contest” (Stroud 2016: 15; see Cresswell and Martin 2012), where upset may surge on an individual – bodily or private – scale, as felt and conveyed by acting subjects. In this regard, the notion of upset directs attention to a variety of strong reactions or emotional expressions, often ushered in by change.

Upset is consequently a two-tiered notion. Invoking it, we seek to profit analytically on its dual meanings. To perceive an external order as having been ‘upset’ or disrupted seems often to coincide with the ‘upset’ of an internal order. Upset, in these cases, may thus denote the ways in which affects and emotions are enacted, linguistically and otherwise. Yet, upset may likewise denote disruptive events or reactions to the perceived disruption of order. The latter object in fact makes an important point for analytical reflection. Upset resonates with the idea of affect, sentiment and emotion, be it in classic accounts (e.g., Spinoza, Descartes or Kierkegaard) or more recent applications (e.g., Ahmed 2004; Thrift 2004), not least in research on the interrelationship between affect, language and discourse (e.g., Milani and Richardson 2021; Wee and Goh 2020; Wilce 2009). Indeed, a change in a given state of affairs may be manifested most vividly in expressions of an upset mind. It connotes real or perceived social change, along with reactions – felt or expressed – to such forms of change.

Our construal of upset thus gestures at a fundamentally social phenomenon. Whatever makes an individual angry, depressed, cheerful or ‘upset’, as argued by late Husserl (1970 [1936]: 322), “are questions relating to *persons*; and so are questions of a similar sort relating to communities of every level” (our emphasis). The idea that “what the person does and suffers” (Husserl 1970 [1936]: 322) is not merely a private reality, but at once a social and socially formed one, resonates with the way in which the notion of ‘upset’ is treated by the articles in this issue. A case of upset may occur when a given state of affairs is brought out of order, or when it is perceived as having been brought out of order. Upset may be a momentary or prolonged event. It may go away, endure or integrate into a new state of normality. Upset is not an exclusively private sentiment, nor is it a disembodied discourse, but rather a feature and an outcome of social practice.

As such, it offers a means for “negotiation between continuity and change” (Cresswell 2003: 269), and may serve as a lens for grasping the interplay between stability and mutability, between mobility and inertia, and between change and effects of change, along with the representations, stakes and sentiments that this interplay engenders.

However, upset not only pertains to the movement of a feeling, an affect or a discourse. As seen in the contributions of this special issue, upset in the Nordic region often unfolds in relation to contemporary forms of migration. Arguably, such forms of human mobility constitute some of the most pervasive challenges to notions of Nordic cohesion and consensus. As outlined above, in the postwar period the Nordic countries have, albeit to a different extent, transitioned into increasingly heterogeneous societies. Debates on immigration, diversity and the politics of difference indeed loom large in all countries under study here (see also Brochmann and Hagelund 2012; Kivisto and Wahlbeck 2013). The interplay of sociolinguistic manifestations of immigration with the imaginary of Nordic stability is likewise a paramount example of a condition under which upset occurs. As shown in the contributions to this thematic issue, notions of stability, cohesion and consensus are concerns and stakes that take primacy across a range of spaces. When nationally coded notions of stability are framed as threatened, they easily become bound up with expressions of anxiety, distress, anger or rage. This dynamic is often sociolinguistically invested, with language and communication being the standard topics and objects of upset. Such tumultuous moments add to protracted language ideological debates, latching onto or challenging nationalist imaginaries, including the imagined ethos of the Nordic nation-states (see Blommaert et al. 2012; Madsen et al. 2015; Milani 2020). The included articles tap into these issues.

## 4 Introducing the contributions

In the opening contribution, Karrebæk and Kirilova discuss the legal system in Denmark, where matters of language and multilingualism have come to attract ample, and somewhat unexpected, attention when court interpreting has been outsourced. Danish law demands that suspects accused of crimes are to be heard in a language they understand. In order to meet this requirement in a diverse, multilingual society, the use of professional interpreters has become widespread in Danish court proceedings. As Karrebæk and Kirilova show, this practice triggers upset across a range of scales, from the minutiae of courtroom interaction to racist online rants.

Salö, in the next article, explores similar sociolinguistic matters in another institutional space: Swedish public service television and one of its subspaces, the

newsroom. The contribution discusses the experiences of a news anchor – Dina Haddad – who speaks Swedish with a “foreign accent”, and the fierce forms of upset that have been directed at her on account of her speech. Members of the public, but also some of her peers, target Haddad’s language use with racist insults and injurious remarks. What is at issue in this case is the broadcasting of a subject whose speech ruptures with long-standing expectations of who is allowed to speak, where and how – and who ultimately can become an index of undesired change.

Lehtonen and Møller explore linguistically diverse classrooms in Denmark and Finland, tapping into the sociolinguistic realities of two Nordic polities. While their account is not straightforwardly a comparative one, certain country-specific differences as well as similarities surface in their analyses. Their article focuses on classroom situations where resources associated with minority languages are introduced or highlighted by teachers and researchers. They also explore the ensuing upset, such as the hostility or embarrassment that the teachers’ interventions cause among their young students. The investigated classrooms in the two states can be viewed as spaces of upset where sociolinguistic friction is generated by competing normativities for language use, as well as by negotiations of linguistic ownership, characterized by questions of legitimacy and expertise.

In Rydell and Hanell’s contribution, the relationship between the notions of “language for work” and “work for language” provides the entry point to an inquiry into the valorization of language in domestic labor. Here, the avoidance of ‘upset’ is a major concern. Adopting a historical lens, the authors explore how the willingness to learn a new language has been strategically invoked by domestic workers and companies as a way to mitigate and prevent upset, and thereby facilitate the commodification of labor. Historically, domestic workers’ aspirations to immigrate to Sweden, as Rydell and Hanell show, have been presented in public as an ambition to learn the Swedish language. Early twentieth-century immigrant domestic workers often claimed to seek out the language, rather than seeking out work. Reiterating this discourse, contemporary cleaning companies frame linguistic integration as a positive effect of their services, thus marketing a socially questioned enterprise as beneficial to precarious workers, and to society at large.

Madsen explores how upset arises in public discussions about digital communication technologies. Her article analyzes the medicalization of the use of smartphones and social media in contemporary Denmark, focusing on how notions of normality, emergency, self-control and neurochemistry are mobilized in popular accounts of these modes of communication. She analyzes how digitally mediated communication has become a pervasive space of upset, replete with anxieties over social, communicative and medical deviation and abnormality. Upset, in this case, implies moral and media panics over digital practices, and broaches the expansion of digital communication technologies in the Nordic

societies more generally. Madsen's analysis shows how reluctance and skepticism are rearticulated by a medical authority, and how this intervention becomes a powerful means of enforcing communicative norms, invoking notions of disturbance of normality and lack of control. This mode of panic effectively taps into people's private concerns – in particular of their families' well-being and safety. More broadly, Madsen demonstrates how the notion of upset can serve as a conceptual frame for cases and topics lying beyond the politics of difference.

In the final article, Leppänen and Westinen explore how the ripple effects of societal debates on integration and belonging seep into grassroot social media practices, where upset in the form of hate speech can be expressed and debated in more direct ways than in more traditional media. In their case, however, social media is shown to function as an arena for interrogating and countering such upset. Here, language-related upset is investigated specifically in two social media videos by performers of color. Their first case focuses on a job applicant whose supposedly unintelligible heterogeneous language is translated using an app. Their second case deals with a vlogger who investigates and critiques racist remarks, and, in particular, their poor linguistic form. In both cases, upset is crucially related to the entanglement of language(s) intertwined with the (im)possibility of belonging for ethnic and/or racial minorities. The article shows how performers of color take center stage in social media for their carnivalist yet critical performances that challenge the supposed normative order of white Finnishness and the language of which it claims to have sole ownership.

The issue closes with a commentary by Monica Heller, who offers a three-dimensional, dialogic reading of the contributions, contextualizing the Nordic cases in relation to globally pervasive themes: the legacy of empire, the durability of racial doctrines, the advent of post/neocolonialism, and the North as frontier. These optics – we agree with Heller – place the Nordic cases in a more expansive social and historical frame. As guest editors, we share her hope that they – just like the cases, frameworks and analyses presented in the articles – “eventually allow for the extension of the problematics pointed to in this issue to the obvious next places to examine” (Heller this issue). As an analytical notion, then, spaces of upset may serve well to detect and grasp disruptions of durable sociolinguistic orders – in the Nordic region and beyond.

**Research funding:** This work is supported by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOS-HS) funded by 2016-00270/NOS-HS.



## References

- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Andersson, Jenny. 2009. Nordic nostalgia and Nordic light. The Swedish model as Utopia 1930–2007. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 34(3). 229–245.
- Andreasson, Ulf. 2018. *In the shadow of happiness*. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Blommaert, Jan, Sirpa Leppänen, Päivi Pahta & Tiina Räisänen (eds.). 2012. *Dangerous multilingualism. Northern perspectives on order, purity and normality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Borevi, Karin. 2012. Sweden: The flagship of multiculturalism. In Grete Brochmann & Anniken Hagelund (eds.), *Immigration policy and the Scandinavian welfare state 1945–2010*, 25–96. New York: Palgrave.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Brochmann, Grete & Anniken Hagelund (eds.). 2012. *Immigration policy and the Scandinavian welfare state 1945–2010*. New York: Palgrave.
- Byström, Mikael & Pär Frohnert (eds.). 2013. *Reaching a state of hope. Refugees, immigrants and the Swedish welfare state, 1930–2000*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Childs, Marquis W. 1936. *Sweden: The middle way*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Cresswell, Tim. 2003. Landscape and the obliteration of practice. In Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Pile Steve & Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Handbook of cultural geography*, 269–282. London: Sage.
- Cresswell, Tim. 2014. Mobilities III: Moving on. *Progress in Human Geography* 38(5). 712–721.
- Cresswell, Tim. 2019. *Maxwell Street: Writing and thinking place*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cresswell, Tim & Craig Martin. 2012. On turbulence: Entanglement of disorder and order on a Devon beach. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 103(5). 516–529.
- Czarny, Ryszard M. 2017. *A modern Nordic saga: Politics, economy and society*. Cham: Springer.
- Duchêne, Alexandre & Monica Heller (eds.). 2012. *Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit*. New York: Routledge.
- Eyerman, Ron. 1985. Rationalizing intellectuals. Sweden in the 1930s and 1940s. *Theory and Society* 14(6). 777–807.
- Elder, Neil, Alistair H. Thomas & David Arter. 1982. *The consensual democracies? Government and politics of the Scandinavian states*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Foley, Paul, David Sutton, Richard Potter, Selina Patel & Alexandra Gemmill. 2021. *2020 International Digital Economy and Society Index – SMART 2019/0087*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Grøn, Caroline Howard, Peter Nedergaard & Anders Wivel (eds.). 2015. *The Nordic countries and the European Union: Still the other European community?* New York: Routledge.
- Grunfelder, Julien, Gustaf Norlén, Linda Randall & Nora Sánchez Gassen (eds.). 2020. *State of the Nordic region*. Copenhagen: The Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Heller, Monica. 2008. Language and the nation-state: Challenges to sociolinguistic theory and practice. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4). 504–524.
- Heller, Monica. 2011. *Paths to post-nationalism. A critical ethnography of language and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Heller, Monica, Lindsey A. Bell, Michelle Daveluy, Miriam McLaughlin & Noël Hubert. 2016. *Sustaining the nation: The making and moving of language and nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heller, Monica & Bonnie McElhinny. 2017. *Language, capitalism, colonialism*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Helliwell, John F., Richard Layard, Jeffrey D. Sachs & Jan-Emmanuel De Neve (eds.). 2020. *World Happiness Report 2020*. New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Hervik, Peter (ed.). 2019. *Racialization, racism, and anti-racism in the Nordic countries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hirdman, Yvonne. 2010. The happy 30s: A short story of social engineering and gender order in Sweden. In Helena Mattsson & Sven-Olov Wallenstein (eds.), *Swedish modernism: Architecture, consumption and the welfare state*, 66–71. London: Black Dog.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970 [1936]. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Hutton, Christopher. 2017. Racial ideology as elite discourse: Nordicism and the visual in an age of mass culture. *Social Semiotics* 27(3). 335–347.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2016. *Being Danish. Paradoxes of identity in everyday life*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Karlander, David. 2021. Cities of sociolinguistics. *Social Semiotics* 31(1). 177–193.
- Kautto, Mikko, Matti Heikkilä, Björn Hviden, Staffan Marklund & Niels Ploug (eds.). 1999. *Nordic social policy: Changing welfare states*. New York: Routledge.
- Keskinen, Suvi, Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir & Mari Toivanen (eds.). 2019. *Undoing homogeneity in the Nordic region. Migration, difference, and the politics of solidarity*. New York: Routledge.
- Kivisto, Peter & Östen Wahlbeck (eds.). 2013. *Debating multiculturalism in the Nordic welfare states*. New York: Palgrave.
- Kristiansen, Tore & Nikolas Coupland (eds.). 2011. *Standard languages and language standards in a changing Europe*. Oslo: Novus Press.
- Kristiansen, Tore & Helge Sandøy, (eds.). 2010. The linguistic consequences of globalization: The Nordic countries. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 204. 1–172.
- Kristjánsdóttir, Bergthora. 2018. *Uddannelsespolitik i nationalismens tegn [Educational policy in the light of nationalism]*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Kulick, Don. 2014. Danes call people with down syndrome ‘mongol’: Politically incorrect language and ethical engagement. In Marie Bruvik Heinskou & Morten Emmerik Wøldike (eds.), *Byen og blikkets lyst: festskrift til Henning Bech*, 85–105. Copenhagen: Centrum for Seksualitetsforskning.
- Kulick, Don & Jens Rydström. 2015. *Loneliness and its opposite. Sex, disability, and the ethics of engagement*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lewin, Leif. 1998. Majoritarian and consensus democracy: The Swedish experience. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 21(3). 195–206.
- Loftsdóttir, Kristín & Lars Jensen (eds.). 2012. *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region. Exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*. New York: Routledge.
- Madsen, Lian Malai, Martha Sif Karrebæk & Janus Spindler Møller (eds.). 2015. *Everyday languaging. Collaborative research on the language use of children and youth*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For space*. London: Sage.
- Milani, Tommaso M. 2020. No-go zones in Sweden. The infectious communicability of evil. *Language, Culture and Society* 2(1). 7–36.

- Milani, Tommaso M. & John E. Richardson, (eds.). 2021. Discourse and affect. *Social Semiotics* 31(5). 671–804.
- Nordic Council of Ministers. 2020. *The Nordic region – Towards being the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. Action Plan for 2021 to 2024*. Copenhagen: The Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Nordic Voices. 1984. Special Issue of *Daedalus* 113(2), 1–277. Cambridge: The MIT Press and American Academy of Arts & Sciences.
- OECD. 2020. *International migration outlook 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Østergaard, Uffe. 2002. Dansk identitet – folk, stat, nation, sprog og kirke. [Danish identity - people, state, nation, language and church]. In Annette Lerche Trolle, Merete Ipsen, Michael Steen Hansen & Jens Thorhauge (eds.), *Herfra min verden går. Dansk identitet i fortid, nutid og fremtid*, 21–30. Vejle: Sammenslutningen af Lokalarkiver.
- Padovan-Özdemir, Marta & Bolette Moldenhawer. 2016. Making precarious migrant families and weaving the well-fare nation-state fabric 1970–2010. *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 20(6). 723–736.
- Petersson, Olof. 1994. *The government and politics of the Nordic countries*. Stockholm: Fritz.
- Rapo, Markus. 2011. *Kuka on maahanmuuttaja* [Who is an immigrant]. *Tieto ja Trendit 1*. Helsinki: Statistics Finland.
- Rastas, Anna. 2012. Reading history through Finnish exceptionalism. In Kristín Loftsdóttir & Lars Jensen (eds.), *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: Exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, 89–103. New York: Routledge.
- Riksdagen. 1965. *Riksdagens protokoll 13 första kammaren* [Minutes first chamber 13]. Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag. March 23–24.
- Ruth, Arne. 1984. The second new nation: The mythology of modern Sweden. *Daedalus* 113(2). 53–96.
- Salö, Linus, Natalia Ganuza, Christina Hedman & Martha Sif Karrebæk. 2018. Mother tongue instruction in Sweden and Denmark. Language policy, cross-field effects, and linguistic exchange rates. *Language Policy* 17(4). 591–610.
- Salö, Linus & David Karlander. 2018. Semilingualism: The life and afterlife of a sociolinguistic idea. *Urban Language & Literacies* 247. 1–14.
- Skogerbø, Eli, Øyvind Ihlen, Nete Nørgaard Kristensen & Lars Nord (eds.). 2020. *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 1999. *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stenius, Henrik, Mirja Österberg & Johan Östling (eds.). 2011. *Nordic narratives of the Second World War: National historiographies revisited*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press.
- Strang, Johan. 2016. *Nordic cooperation: A European region in transition*. New York: Routledge.
- Stroud, Christopher. 2016. Turbulent linguistic landscapes and the semiotics of citizenship. In Robert Blackwood, Elizabeth Lanza & Hirut Woldemariam (eds.), *Negotiating and contesting identities in linguistic landscapes*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Taylor, Charles. 2004. *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tepora, Tuomas & Aapo Roselius (eds.). 2014. *Finnish civil war 1918. History, memory, legacy*. Boston: Brill.
- Thompson, John B. 1984. *Studies in the theory of ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Thrift, Nigel. 2004. Intensities of feeling: Towards a spatial politics of affect. *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* 86(1). 57–78.

- Tingsten, Herbert. 1955. Stability and vitality in Swedish democracy. *The Political Quarterly* 26(2). 140–151.
- Tingsten, Herbert. 1966. *Från idéer till idyll. Den lyckliga demokratin* [From ideas to idyll: The happy democracy]. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Vikør, Lars S. 1993. *The Nordic languages. Their status and interrelations*. Oslo: Novus Press.
- Wee, Lionel & Robbie Goh. 2020. *Language, space and cultural play: Theorising affect in the semiotic landscape*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Widfeldt, Anders. 2018. The radical right in the Nordic countries. In Jens Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilce, James M. 2009. *Crying shame metaculture. Modernity, and the exaggerated death of lament*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- William, Ross & Anne Leahy. 2020. *U21 ranking of national higher education Systems 2020*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Zetterberg, Hans L. 1984. The rational humanitarians. *Daedalus* 113(1). 75–92.