At the cinema: the Swedish "du-reform" mediated through film commercials

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Swedish address forms underwent a change from an intricate system of honorifics, titles and names, to a nearly universal use of the informal 2nd singular 'du'. This change, commonly referred to as the "du-reform", was more forceful than the corresponding processes of informalization in English, French or German (Clyne et al. 2009:7). It has been described in many studies, mostly based on reported use. Due to a lack of suitable data from the relevant time period, there are very few attempts at analyzing address forms in context, as they were used while the reform was taking place. (For some examples and discussion, see Tykesson-Bergman 2006, Widmark 1994.)

My presentation focuses on early instances of 'du' in commercials in the archival film collections of the Swedish Film Institute. By focusing on the first examples of 'du' found outside of the intimate contexts of family and close friends, I will argue that certain contexts, like rhymes and songs, or the use of inner dialogue, facilitate the use of 'du' where formal address otherwise would be expected – for instance in addressing the viewer.

The informalization process around 1970 did not only change the style of address, but also the language in a more general sense, as well as the looks and behavior of the protagonists in the film commercials at hand. I will also discuss a few illustrative examples of this.

References:


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