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Gay as classroom practice: A study on sexuality in a secondary language classroom

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In this study conceptions of sexuality in classroom praxis are investigated. Sexuality and education is a growing field of research, in Sweden as well as internationally[1], something which has been recently represented also in Confero[2], not least in the contributions in the special issue "Queering School, Queers in School"[3]. In the introduction to an anthology on gender, sexuality and education, Carlson and Meyer[4] point out that school, as an institution, plays an important role in society when it comes to regulating gender and sexuality since school is a producer of differences in terms of "separable binary oppositions" [5] such as man-woman and straight-gay, that are easily understood within the dominating culture and where one in each couple is usually more highly valued than the other. Carlson and Meyer further assert that

[1] See e.g. Ullman and Ferfolja, 2015; Martinsson and Reimers, 2010, 2014; Pascoe, 2007/2012; Rasmussen, 2006.
[2] See e.g. Ringrose and Rawlings, 2015.
[3] Malmquist, Gustavson and Schmitt, eds., 2013.
[4] Carlson and Meyer, 2014.
[5] Carlson and Meyer, 2014, p. 1.

school as an institution, in this way, produces gender and sexuality[6]. One example of this is presented by Dalley and Campbell[7], who in their study of pupil interaction in high school conclude that the male pupils produce heterosexuality, whether actual or pretended, as normal by referencing homosexuality as abnormal. Our reading of these studies indicates that within both formal and informal schooling, meaning and knowledge is produced through everyday practices in which conceptions of gender and sexuality are crucial. In these practices, heterosexuality holds a position as taken-for-granted and normative[8].

The field, in general, gives important insights on how gender and sexuality influence pupils' conditions and choices as well as the norms re/producing classroom praxis. Also the related area of "queer education research" includes a broad set of angles and interests[9] even though, as Malmquist, Gustavson, and Schmitt note, many studies in resent years have put particular focus on schools being unsafe for non-straight pupils.

This study answers to a growing call for research analyzing subjectivity within cis-normative school contexts[10]. It aims at analyzing the production of pupil subjectivity in relation to sexuality in the context of a specific language instruction context. Moreover, this article aims at highlighting the role of sexuality in the context of language instruction specifically, as opposed to education in general. Although sexuality and education in a broader sense is a growing field of research, the specificities of sexuality in the specific context of language instruction practice has not been studied to a large extent[11]. Given the centrality of language in the production of meaning and knowledge, the context of language instruction offers an interesting site for the in-

[6] Carlson and Meyer, 2014.
[7] Dalley and Campbell, 2006.
[8] See e.g. Kehily, 2002; Youdell, 2006; Bromseth and Wildow, 2007.
[9] Malmquist, Gustavson and Schmitt, 2013, p. 6.
[10] See e.g. Malmquist, Gustavson and Schmitt, 2013, p. 6.
[11] Nelson, 2006.

vestigation of subjectivation and sexuality within the context of instruction. Learning a new language, or developing your first language, offers opportunities to learn new words and concepts that help you understand, make sense and communicate in ways not yet accessible to you[12]. Hence, learning a new language, or developing your first language, gives opportunities to conceptualize and express gender and sexuality in sometimes new, or at least other, ways, thus making it a venue interesting to investigate from the perspective of production of subjectivity and normativity. There is an intriguing tension between the prominent focus of language instruction on linguistic proficiency[13] in relation to the inherence of production of meaning in language, i.e. the function of language to be simultaneously representative and constitutive of that which it signifies[14]. This means that what and how we say or write things is interconnected to the conceptual meaning making of that, which is being said or written.

Some of the studies that have been conducted within the area of language education and sexuality have focused on issues of representation in textbooks. Nelson concludes that we seem to have collectively imagined the classrooms as a "monosexual community of interlocutors"[15], where classroom cohorts seem to have been thought of as domains for straight people. Representation in textbooks has been stressed as important for the production of legitimate speakers[16] and, hence, representation in relation to sexuality in teaching materials can be emphasized as significant in the production of heteronormativity in school. Nelson stresses that the instructional situation needs to be thought of as multi-sexual and that it needs to be acknowledged "that sociosexual meanings infuse language, social interactions,

[12] Tornberg, 2000; Pavlenko, 2004.
[13] Tornberg, 2000.
[14] Butler, 1993/2011, p. 6.
[15] Nelson, 2006, p. 1.
[16] Amizova and Johnston, 2012.

and public discourse"[17]. Both Liddicoat[18] and Nelson[19] have shown that heteronormative discourses in the language classroom can have limiting effects for the possibilities of pupils who do not identify as heterosexual to express themselves and participate in the classroom activities. Furthermore, Godley[20] has shown that classroom behavior in language education can be connected to the production of sexuality.

The questions asked within this area of research are related to how gender and sexuality affect the processes of learning a language, and, how learning a language affects the processes of producing gender and sexuality. This article deals directly with these questions. The general aim is to analyze and discuss the production of sexual pupil subjectivity. More specifically, focus is on how sexual pupil subjectivity is produced as an effect of the particular discursive practices of interaction (among pupils and teachers) around a gay male couple featuring as the main characters in a pupil skit presented in class. This pupil skit is part of a pupil speaking assignment in a grade 8 English class[21] in a Swedish public school. We ask questions about how male sexuality is conceptualized as part of the production of sexual pupil subjectivity as well as how language instruction is integrated and function within this process. We also ask how the pupils' use of humor in the classroom may contribute to the orientation of the production of subjectivity and how the genre of humor is used in this particular instance of language instruction.

Theoretical framework and method

In the analysis we look at the meaning-making aspects of language, the discursive production of sexuality and subjectivity, and the interconnectedness of these in the pupil and teacher inte-

[17] Nelson, 2006, p. 4.
[18] Liddicoat, 2009.
[19] Nelson, 2010.
[20] Godley, 2006.
[21] The pupils were between 14-15 years old.

raction within a specific language instruction context. Our theoretical starting-point is that language is representative and productive of meaning[22], and that it, conceptually, encompasses both speech and actions. Meaning is seen as created through discourse, and hence, language practices will be referred to as discursive practices. In line with Howarth and Laclau and Mouffe, we also suggest that "all objects are objects of discourse"[23] and that nothing is meaningful outside of discourse[24]. In this sense, practices become meaningful when they repeat something that already exists. For instance, Kulick and Cameron suggest that "The meaningful expression of desire depends on the existence of codes which are quotable, iterable."[25], illustrating how meaningfulness of practices depends on that which already circulates in "social life"[26]. In other words, things become understandable through discursive practices.

Butler argues that the performative act is where the discursive production happens[27]. Hence, Butler[28] is able to describe how the subject emerges performatively as recognizable through discursive practices. More specifically, she states that the body "… becomes accessible on the occasion of an address, a call, an interpellation that does not "discover" the body, but constitutes it fundamentally"[29]. This means that the body is given "social definition", and hence becomes understandable and meaningful, performatively through discourse. Performativity, then, denotes "… the process through which the subject emerges"[30].

[22] Butler, 1993/2011, p. 6.
[23] Howarth, 2000, p. 8.
[24] Laclau and Mouffe, 1985/2001, p. 107.
[25] Cameron and Kulick, 2003, p. 127.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Butler, 1993/2011, p. 70.
[28] Butler, 1993/2011; 1997; 2009.
[29] Butler, 1997, p. 5.
[30] Kulick, 2006, p. 286.

In order to make sense of the "discursive subjectification"[31] in the classroom we also draw on Butler's thinking about the emergence of the subject through processes of "exclusion and abjection"[32] in which "… identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge."[33]. This means that the analysis takes into consideration that which is repudiated and produced as "abject" in relation to that which is repeatedly and smoothly invoked in the pupil and teacher interaction. This is because these are regarded to be simultaneous processes in the production of subjectivity. Following this, it is crucial to analyze what is said and enacted against what is not said and enacted[34].

As means of analyzing the empirical data we draw on this understanding of the discursive production of meaning and subjectivity and the function of performativity. However, in order to be able to problematize and discuss sexuality in relation to the processes that bring about intelligible pupil subjectivity and constitute "socially viable beings"[35] we also make use of Butler's thinking about gender and gender norms. We see gender as produced through discourse, i.e. gender is done, and the relationship between sex, gender and desire we deploy is explained by the "heterosexual matrix"[36] which denotes a "… grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized."[37]. In this model, that point to the discursive doing of hegemonic heterosexuality, two stable sexes (male and female) are assumed and they become intelligible only if they are articulated correctly through two stable genders (masculine

[31] Ringrose and Rawlings, 2015, p. 88.
[32] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Kulick, 2003/2006, p. 286.
[35] Butler, 2004, p. 2.
[36] Butler, 1990/1999, p. 194.
[37] Ibid.

and feminine) and then engage in heterosexual practice[38]. Thus, gender and sexuality are results of discursive practices and femininity and masculinity are crucial in the emergence of "culturally viable sexual subjects"[39].

Finally, we also use Kulick's[40] accounts of what does and does not produce humor in terms of gender and sexuality. Kulick's main point is that as long as masculinity is seen as unproblematic and natural, masculinity itself is not seen as funny. Femininity, on the other hand, is taken to require constant "doing" and effort to accomplish and is, therefore, also easy to ridicule. Hence, humor is a way to both express, deal with and value gender and sexual "failure". Kulick[41] concludes that it is the accomplishment of femininity that produces humor, as well as the failure of "natural" masculinity.

To sum up the theoretical underpinnings of this study, language instruction in school is regarded as embedded in, and producing, hegemonic meaning making discourses of e.g. gender and sexuality. Our analyses and discussion make use of this in order to discuss the production of sexual pupil subjectivity within discursive practices in the pupil and teacher interaction. More specifically, these theoretical aspects are used in order to examine how the use of a male gay couple as the main characters in a pupil play works to produce sexual pupil subjectivity in different respects, and how the genre of humor works to produce male homosexuality a feasible pedagogical tool. The concepts of performativity also help us deal analytically with the fact that a substantial part of the course of event at hand is an actual "on stage" performance in shape of a pupil play performed in the classroom.

[38] Ibid.
[39] Butler, 1993/2011, p. 70.
[40] Kulick, 2010.
[41] Ibid.

Producing data

The data analyzed in this study was produced by using classroom observations in a grade 8 English class in a public secondary school in Sweden[42]. The data consists of field notes of observed pupil and teacher interaction and activity in the classroom. An excerpt from one particular instance of interaction from one lesson has been chosen for this article to serve as an example of how language practices generate subjectivity. This selection was made since we see it as an example that reflects "recurrent and enduring discursive practices"[43]. In other words, the example was chosen because it reflects, theoretically and empirically, the discursive production of normative heterosexuality in school, as we discussed in the introduction. The selection of this specific instance of interaction to analyze was thus theoretically and methodologically driven because the example lends itself so well to the analysis of the production of sexual pupil subjectivity. As we see it, the example illustrated and problematized in this article offers an opportunity for in-depth analyses of "subjectivation-in-practice"[44] and we regard it as a valuable example both of the discursive production of subjectivity itself and of the way an analysis of such production can be undertaken.

[42] This article is based on empirical data from a bigger (PhD) study that investigates the significance of socio-sexual aspects in language education. For the bigger study, a total of 31 classroom observations were carried out during a period of four consecutive months (in 2012) in two different groups of 8th graders (14-15 years old) during a selection of their Swedish and English classes. The two groups were located in two different public secondary schools in two different districts in a large city in Sweden. Each class had one English teacher and one Swedish teacher respectively. The observations were carried out by first author, explaining why reference to one person is used in the excerpts from the field notes below. During the observations first author most often sat at the back of the classroom (but sometimes she sat with smaller groups of pupils when group activities were undertaken), observing and taking notes, interacting sporadically with the teachers and pupils.

[43] Youdell, 2006, p. 70.

[44] Youdell, 2006, p. 70.

We use discourse analysis in order to analyze the empirical data. Howarth state that "Discourse analysis refers to the process of analyzing signifying practices as discursive forms."[45], a wide definition that we subscribe to. Methodologically speaking, the discourse analytical perspective stresses that the theoretical underpinnings of a study frame the starting-point for the entire research process[46], including the formulation of the problem, the conducting of the observations, the primary sorting out of themes for further analysis, the analysis itself, and, in the end, the conclusions drawn. In a broad sense, the aim of this type of analysis is to destabilize that which is taken-for-granted[47]. More specifically, the aim of this analysis is to make visible and problematize a specific "subjectivation-in-practice"[48], which "… involves the detailed unpicking of the minutiae of discursive practices"[49]. This means that the selection of the example itself, and the way it is represented in the text as an excerpt from first author's field notes, needs to be regarded as a part of the analytical construct.

The analysis was undertaken in multiple steps, of which the observations and writing of field notes were a great part. Having selected this example, the analysis was conducted by a theoretical deconstruction of the activity in the excerpt. Firstly, language practices were singled out, and their discursive potential was rudimentary unpicked in terms of gender and sexuality performativity. Secondly, we looked more deeply into the way subjectivity was produced through explicit processes of abjection in the discursive practices. Thirdly, aspects of humor were weighed in, in order to analyze its meaning making effects and function in the production of sexual pupil subjectivity. This micro-level analysis of language practices in the classroom was also put in the context of discourses of language instructional practice in

[45] Howarth, 2000, p. 10
[46] Bolander and Fejes, 2015, p. 93; Youdell, 2006, p. 68.
[47] Bolander and Fejes, 2015, p. 95.
[48] Youdell, 2006, p. 70.
[49] Ibid.

order to discuss the educational implications of the discursive doing of male sexual pupil subjectivity.

The criteria for selection of participating classes in the bigger study[50] were primarily ethically and theoretically founded. The object of study calls for a research design that is highly sensitive to ethical dimensions of the research process. For example, trying to secure anonymity as far as possible was prioritized. Therefore, in the bigger study, the two groups are represented as one following Sikes[51], and the names of people and schools are pseudonyms. The choice was made to rely solely on field notes as data production method, as this would minimize the risk of recording e.g. sensitive instances of harassment, or any types of personal records regarding individual pupils' or teachers' expressions of their sexual identity. Due to the methodological aspects of this study and the character of the observations, ethical considerations strongly influenced the approach first author had as an observer in the classroom. During the observations Simonsson only sporadically took an active part in the conversations, and, more importantly from a methodological perspective, she did not ask questions explicitly mentioning sexuality. Primarily, the reason for this was a fear, informed by Simonsson's own experience of working as a secondary teacher, of spurring explicit harassment or implicit heterosexism in the classroom. To her experience, these were fairly common pupil responses when sexuality was made a conversation topic in school. In the information sheet to the participants, the study was framed to focus on "gender, relationships and basic values in language education" (translation from Swedish original). These three concepts were chosen to conceptualize gender and sexuality without explicitly using the possibly value-laden word "sexuality" which, following the reasoning above, by its presence in the text alone was believed to carry with it a risk to cause unwanted reactions among the pupils.

[50] Described in detail in a footnote above.
[51] Sikes, 2010.

Examining the production of subjectivity and normativity in this study meant, to a large extent, trying to deconstruct that which was taken-for-granted, i.e. the "ordinary" and therefore "invisible" and unnoticed[52]. The analytical interpretations of possible subjectivity and normativity production in this article may therefore not be shared by the pupils or teachers themselves. Their accounts of what was going on would be another type of data, answering other types of questions. For reasons presented above classroom observations were chosen as a suitable method for undertaking the study, pursuing depth and richness in theoretically underpinned researcher accounts of the classroom practice. Given the in-depth character of the analysis a transcribed verbatim of, for instance, a video recording may have generated other analytical paths or opportunities than those that came present by "only" using field notes. However, given the perception of knowledge pursued in this study, the aim was primarily to create opportunities for new and meaningful ways of theorizing[53] around the practices illustrated rather than pursuing any futile attempt of giving a "neutral" account of what "really" happened, which would be an undertaking in stark contrast to the epistemological starting points of this study.

Findings

The analysis deals with one particular instance of pupil and teacher interaction which has been analyzed closely in order to problematize and discuss how sexual pupil subjectivity is produced discursively through language practices. The example taken, where the talk and staging of "gay" appear, is within a particular scope of a classroom drama assignment, where *male* homosexuality is explicitly negotiated and contested. Below we use empirically grounded themes to structure the analysis and discuss the production of subjectivity and normativity within

[52] Ripley, Anderson, McCormack and Rockett, 2012.
[53] Howarth, 2000.

this specific classroom practice: 1. The Comedy Producer: What's so funny about a gay male couple?, 2. "No Homo, man!": Producing straight subjectivity through repudiation, and, 3. The Sexless Classroom: Sexuality as interaction facilitator and resistance.

1. The Comedy Producer: What's so funny about a gay male couple?

During one English lesson the pupils were given the assignment to write and then enact a "mini play" in front of the class. The lesson started off by the pupils having to sit quietly and take a homework test in which they were supposed to write a summary of a chapter from their textbook, a chapter which had been their homework for this particular day. The text was called "The skin" and was, put shortly, an explanatory text about different aspects about the skin, e.g. that it is an organ, that you can decorate it with tattoos, etc. Allotted time for this writing task was about twenty minutes, but as the pupils gradually handed in their texts, they were grouped together by the teacher and given instructions for what to do next, namely write and enact a mini play, loosely based on or inspired by the textbook chapter "The skin". The pupils were not supposed to hand in any manuscripts, but instead the focus was on their presentation of the mini plays. Group after group quietly left the room and sat down, both in the hallway and in the classroom, to work on their plays. In the end, most of the groups had about twenty minutes at their hand to complete the task before it was time to act it out "on stage" in front of the class.

The following is an excerpt from the field notes, written down as Simonsson sat at the back of the classroom watching the different groups presenting their plays. The groups of pupils took turns acting out their mini plays at the front of the classroom with the entire class, their English teacher and the researcher, as their audience. The following field notes were made by first author:

The different groups are now presenting their plays. The first group presents what seems like a commercial for a skin cream. They do not seem to have any characters, but instead they read different sections of a text they have prepared. The second group then presents a fairytale and one of the girls reads the story to the class while the other pupils in the group act out what she reads. The fairytale begins with:
Once upon a time there was a girl and a boy who wanted tattoos (the girl reads). Then two of the pupils in the group get fake tattoos and the play is over.
Group three then enters the "stage". The group consists of three boys and one girl. Before they start acting out their play, they tell the class to imagine that the scene is now a tattoo studio. Then the play begins. Two of the boys walk up to a third boy who asks them in English: *What would you like?*
The first boy replies in English: *A dragon. And my man wants to have a tatoo.*
Immediately upon this reply some of the pupils in class react (verbally). One boy calls out: *No homo, right*. Then he and a few others start to laugh, and yet another boy calls out encouragingly, in my interpretation, and laughing: *A kiss*!
The girl in the group then shows a picture of a dragon that she has drawn on the white board, and asks if that will do. The first boy confirms that a dragon like that will do. He then sits down on a chair and the third boy starts to pretend tattoo him on his arm. The boy getting a fake tattoo makes a grimace that signals pain and, at the same time, his man (husband), the second boy, stands closely behind him, holding his hand tight.
Many of the pupils in the class are laughing out loud now, and so is the teacher. I perceive the atmosphere in the classroom to be jovial.
The boy getting a tattoo now starts, with his free hand, to caress his man (husband) on his stomach and says whining: *Oh, baby*. Again with a grimace signaling pain.
Upon this, the classroom laughter intensifies, and amidst the laughter one of the pupils says in a, in my interpretation, annoyed and challenging tone: *Carl, seriously!* (comment made in Swedish: *Carl, seriöst!*)
It is now the man's (the second boy's) turn to get a tattoo, and the first and the second boy on stage change positions with each other. While the second boy now gets a fake tattoo on his arm, he and the first boy hold hands and he caresses the first boy on his stomach.
Most people in the class are now laughing hysterically at the scene. The play ends seconds later and loud applauds break out. The teacher says laughingly and in a loud voice as if trying to

> make herself heard above the noise of the applauds: *Good acting skills!* She then continues laughing.
> Through the noise of the applauds and laughter I hear one of the boys in the class yell out loud: *No homo, man!*
> The fourth group then enters the "stage" and presents their play which also takes place at a tattoo studio. One of the girls says that she wants a flower on her arm. Another girl takes out a black whiteboard felt pen and starts drawing on the first girl's arm. She asks if she wants *A big blac*k?, which the first girl confirms that she does. Upon this reply she starts laughing and so do the rest of the class and the teacher. One of the boys in the class shouts out *Black mamba*. Seconds later the first girl rises up and shows her tattoo to the rest of the class. On her arm there is a sketch of a large black penis. Upon seeing this, the pupils in the class are nearly laughing their heads off, but I notice that the teacher now looks a little bit perplexed.
> A few minutes later, after the teacher has summed up today's lesson and given the remaining groups instructions to present their plays the next time since there was not enough time for all groups to present today, the class is over. The teacher then comes up to me with a smiling face, saying:
> *That was fun, right? I thought we needed to lighten things up a little bit.*

In order to create a deeper understanding of the situation presented in the excerpt above we suggest that this can be seen as part of a discursive "doing" that produces subjectivity and normativity in the classroom. The fact that a "fictive" play is central to the pupil activity here is an interesting feature of the interaction taking place. The fictive feature of some of the pupil interaction does not rid it from its subjectivity and normativity producing effects. On the contrary, this kind of a performance, occurring in an instructional environment such as a classroom, we think needs be seen as a discursive doing with performative effects. However, drama in the classroom differs from drama performed in a theatre in multiple ways. For example, the actors are not professional and the audience is not there voluntarily or in their spare time. Additionally, the assignment to perform is mandatory and the relation between "actors" (pupils), "audience" (pupils and teacher) and "stage" (front part of classroom) is already known and part of the "doing school" discourse. Drama in the classroom is thus part of an already established

classroom discourse and should therefore in this case be seen as part of the discursive doing of language instruction. The point that we want to clarify here is that drama in the classroom cannot analytically be disconnected from the classroom discourse. Instead, this circumstance lends itself well for a multi-leveled analysis of the performative effects of the presentations of these mini plays.

"That was fun, right?" On the inherently funny gay man and humor in the classroom

The performance of the groups in the excerpt above and the atmosphere that was created as the performance of the skits went along could in one sense be described as jovial and easy-going. The pupils in group three and four seemed to thrive up on stage in their roles as providers of comedy to the class. Most of the pupils were laughing out loud at multiple occasions and the teacher was laughing out loud as well from her position at the back of the classroom. The pupils up on stage talked in English, and three of the four spontaneous pupil comments they got were in English. In this sense, the classroom activity described can by all means be seen in terms of an example of a classroom pervaded by a relaxed and easy-going atmosphere, created and recreated in and by the pupils' use of humor in their plays.

As is visible in the excerpt, the comedy in the play is a strong feature of the performance. The excerpt shows both that the presence of a gay male couple as the main characters in the skit produces comedy in the classroom, but also simultaneously that the accessibility of the genre of comedy in the classroom discourse actually produces gay men as feasible and easily accessible play-script characters. But why would a gay male couple be particularly suitable play script characters for producing humor? Along the lines of Kulick's reasoning about humor and sexuality, we argue that this classroom situation needs to be seen in relation to a larger heteronormative discourse in which the supposed failure of the unproblematic and "natural" masculinity produces humor alongside with the "achievement of femi-

ninity", whereas masculinity in itself is never taken to be funny[54]. The task is then to investigate how the gay male couple performed by the pupils in group three produces and exhibit "failed" masculinity, which we assert that they do on at least three levels. Firstly, both boys moan and clearly exhibit pain, i.e. they do not take pain "as a man". Secondly, they show love and affection openly. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, they love another man, i.e. they are gay and hence fail to fulfill the crucial criterion of masculinity to desire women. Hence, the gay male couple on stage offers "a staple of comedy"[55] in their performance of failed masculinity. In their performance, the pupils express the essence of Kulick's reasoning of how "… masculinity only becomes funny when it is seen as failed masculinity, as masculinity that does not manage to embody the understated, self-evident, contained and non-performative quality that characterizes mainstream notions of what a man ought to be"[56]. By all means, this male couple even fails on the performance level; they are play script characters being performed as men on a stage in front of a classroom filled with teenagers.

We also argue that placing a gay male couple in the middle of the play-script action, emphasizing the physical intimacy aspects of this couple's relationship, clearly directs the performance to feature something extraordinary and that the humor is raised from the incongruity between the portrayal of the physically involved gay couple and the permeating heteronormative discourse. In an instructional environment seemingly heavily pervaded by heterosexual default narratives and thereby possibly drained of homosexual representation the occurrence of a gay male couple is likely to produce some kind of response. Our reasoning here follows the idea of the logics of the workings of normalization presented by Ripley et al.,[57] in which the hallmark of that which is not ordinary is that it does not go unno-

[54] Kulick, 2010, p. 75.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ripley et al., 2012.

ticed. As an example of this we see that the male gay skit characters, portrayed using intimacy and bodily contact as one of the main ways to underscore the trait of character of the men's relationship to each other, did not by any means go unnoticed in this classroom. Rather, it created a "good" atmosphere, laughter and spontaneous outbursts among both pupils and teacher (as it appeared anyway). This also highlights another incongruity within this context. School is a place where sexual practice is usually seen as inappropriate, and drawing on the physical intimacy aspects when portraying the gay male couple the pupils effectively draw on a stereotype about male gays as hyper sexual, thus bringing in a dimension of sex into the classroom discourse. This challenges the notion of school as a venue of platonic relationships and could function as resistance. We assert that the gay male couple in the skit therefore functions both as a producer of comedy and a "jovial" atmosphere, underscored by the teacher's comment at the end of the play, as a producer of normativity around sexuality, and as a means of resistance towards dominating school rules.

At the same time, we suggest that the genre of comedy and the way it facilitates this seemingly jovial classroom atmosphere and locus of pleasurable learning also needs to be underscored as producing opportunities for the pupils to perform a "funny" version of a gay male couple in the middle of the classroom. Comedy and its accessibility to the pupils in the classroom thus make male gay characters available to the pupils as a means of producing comedy in the classroom, because, when acted out, the gay couple adds to the "comic" effects of the play. The genre of comedy thus also makes possible the entrance of male homosexuality into the classroom, in the shape of a stereotype about gay men. In other words, comedy as a classroom genre here facilitates the production of male homosexual subjectivity in the classroom. However, it is not just any subjectivity that is being produced here but instead an account of male homosexuality that draws heavily on a stereotype. As explained above,

Kulick[58] stresses that failed masculinity is often considered fun perhaps since masculinity is often taken to be natural as opposed to performed. Gay men, however, tend to be stereotyped as "sparkingly witty and campy"[59]. Furthermore, Kulick asks why gay men "are stereotyped in the *opposite* way"[60] in relation to the stereotype about lesbians as humorless, which he asserts is a homophobic stereotype. He continues by asking "… why is humor socially distributed in such a way that some groups – gay men, for example, or Jews, or African-Americans, come to be thought of as inherently funny, while others – lesbians, for example, or Germans – are stereotyped as congenitally humorless?"[61]. In light of this, drawing on the culturally viable stereotype about the inherently funny gay man in a classroom skit seems like a sure thing to do for the pupils in order to raise humor and achieve laughter and pleasurable learning.

2. *"No homo, man!": Producing Straight Subjectivity through Repudiation*

The expression "No homo", which nowadays pervades public discourse, originated as a "discourse interjection"[62] in US hip hop lyrics in the 1990s. Since 2011 it is also present in Swedish hip hop lyric[63], and, as the excerpt above shows, it is also present in Swedish public youth discourse. Brown shows how "no homo" functions discursively in different contexts as a negation of a "supposed misconception or misreading of a previous utterance"[64]. The pupils making the "no homo" comments can in this sense be seen as "protecting" the pupil actors on stage from any "misinterpretations" on the behalf of the audience. Put dif-

[58] Kulick, 2010.
[59] Kulick, 2010, p. 61.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Kulick, 2010, p. 67.
[62] Brown, 2011, p. 299.
[63] Berggren, 2012.
[64] Brown, 2011, p. 301.

ferently, the repeated utterings of "no homo" possibly save the pupil actors on stage from having their role characters incorrectly merged with their own "off stage" characters. For reasons of clarification we present a shortened version of the excerpt here, with the two "no homo" remarks underscored:

> [---]
> The first boy replies in English: *A dragon. And my man wants to have a tatoo.*
> Immediately upon this reply some of the pupils in class react (verbally). One boy calls out: *No homo, right*. Then he and a few others start to laugh, and yet another boy calls out encouragingly, in my interpretation, and laughing: *A kiss*!
> [---]
> Most people in the class are now laughing hysterically at the scene. The play ends seconds later and loud applauds break out. The teacher says laughingly and in a loud voice as if trying to make herself heard above the noise of the applauds: *Good acting skills!* She then continues laughing.
> Through the noise of the applauds and laughter I hear one of the boys in the class yell out loud: *No homo, man!'*

At first glance, the "no homo" interjections seem to qualify the actors' performances as purely platonic and rid them of any potential "real" sexual agency causing effect on the pupils' "real" off stage subjectivities. The "no homo" interjection can thus in part be seen to function efficiently to protect the playscript characters from getting glued on to the bodies of the actors as they leave the stage. However, following Kulick's reasoning about the discursive functions of 'no', where "…a sexual advance acts as an interpellation, a calling into being of a sexual subject"[65], the "no homo" remarks can be seen, not only as an acknowledgment of the sexual connotations of the action on stage, but actually as bringing about sexual subjectivity in the classroom. The acting pupils on stage thus emerge as sexual subjects. Upon repudiating the "homo" the pupils in the audience actually affirm this sexuality as being a possible subject position available to all of them in the classroom. The repudiation,

[65] Kulick, 2006, p. 290.

or refusal, produces that which is being refused as a possibility, otherwise there would have been nothing there to refuse in the first place. The scene on stage acts as an interpellation, "a calling into being of a sexual subject"[66], through the repudiating "no homo" remarks that simultaneously act as acknowledgment of that subjection. The "no homo" remarks act as disqualifiers that produce male homosexual subjectivity both as an option and as a threat. The threatening aspect is underscored by the disqualifiers that per se must disqualify something. If male homosexuality was not there as a real life possibility with conceivable futurity embedded, what Butler calls "liveable lives"[67], there would be no need for the discourse interjecting "no homo" remarks that in effect may disassociate the acting pupils' performances of gay, their "doing gay", from actually "being gay". However, it is not only the acting pupils' allegedly straight subjectivity that is at play here. The pupil comments can be seen as functioning as rescue actions of the general male straightness of the male pupil subjectivity in the classroom. The "no homo" remarks, coming from the audience, stretch the reach of the interpellative call to the audience. The remarks function to discursively secure the position of the performing pupils as straight, preserving the stage performance as "performance" and thereby preventing the performance from being read as a representation of any "real" homosexual pupil subject position. The performance thus discursively remains a faux gay act.

Along these lines we see that male homosexual subjectivity is produced through this classroom practice, but perhaps only on the premise of its refusal. The "no homo" comments rid the play of its comic innocence producing contingent gay subjectivity where the stage ends and the alleged "real life" begins. The semantic meaning of the disavowing "no homo" is obviously the refusal of homosexuality, or a demand for its removal from

[66] Ibid.
[67] Butler, 2004, p. 39.

this context. Using performativity theory however, we see that this refusal can also be seen as simultaneously producing contingent male gay subject positions that would otherwise have remained within the realm of fiction and theatre. On the other hand, the "no homo" remarks are indeed efficient repudiations pushing the male gay positions in the direction of the abject "uninhabitable"[68] zone.

3. The Sexless Classroom? Sexuality as interaction Facilitator

We have argued that the availability of the gay couple, brought forth by the genre of humor, opens up for the pupils to dedicate to this school assignment, go through it with great enthusiasm and simultaneously enthuse the audience, i.e. their peers and the teacher. The male gay couple, and the ridiculing thereof, can therefore be seen as fulfilling a number of pedagogical functions, which the classroom context itself has paved the way for. For instance, the performance of male homosexuality lends itself as laughingstock efficient enough to direct both the teacher's and the rest of the pupils' attention towards this pupil presentation. Humor appears to create an "in-group" characterized by people laughing at the same thing. Thus, the humor produced by group three and their performance of a tattoo studio, including the responses and reactions from the audience, and the normative expectations in the classroom, have several pedagogical consequences. One is that the humor and its various reactions create legitimacy for the normative expectations put at work. Another is that the instance of interaction presented here also challenges normativity and opens up for new ways of performing subjectivity.

However, this process of inclusion and creating an "in-group" is paralleled by a process of disavowing exclusion[69]. The

[68] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[69] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xii.

straight pupil subjectivity that laughs at a parodied version of male homosexuality simultaneously produces its own outside, the abject: the uninhabitable male gay pupil subjectivity. This overly stereotypical form of a gay man is constructed as a position in a play, a subjectivity to perform and function as a punch-ball, facilitating social and perhaps also learning benefits for the performers and those in the audience who laugh. Male homosexuality can thus be seen as a facilitator in maintaining and constructing straight centered classroom interaction during this instance of interaction, producing the downside effect of male homosexuality being singled out as something to laugh at, something positioned in an "unhabitable zone"[70] not present in the classroom as real livable subjectivity.

Subjectivity produced by means of drawing on a stereotype like this needs to be seen through the lens of Butler's thoughts on how "… identification takes place through a repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge"[71]. Thereby we suggest that male homosexuality is here being produced as "abjection" functioning as a "threatening spectra"[72] for the heterosexual male pupil subjectivity simultaneously being produced. The male homosexual position is produced as an "unlivable" zone in which those who enter will be, at least, laughed at in the periphery of the forming of male heterosexual pupil subjectivity in the classroom.
However, male homosexuality was not the only aspect of sexuality that caused laughter and general joviality during the pupil presentations. The following sequence takes place at the very end of the presentations of the mini plays:

> The fourth group then enters the "stage" and presents their play which also takes place at a tattoo studio. One of the girls says that she wants a flower on her arm. Another girl takes out

[70] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

> a black whiteboard felt pen and starts drawing on the first girl's arm. She asks if she wants *A big blac*k?, which the first girl confirms that she does. Upon this reply she starts laughing and so do the rest of the class and the teacher. One of the boys in the class shouts out *Black mamba*. Seconds later the first girl rises up and shows her tattoo to the rest of the class. On her arm there is a sketch of a large black penis. Upon seeing this, the pupils in the class are nearly laughing their heads off, but I notice that the teacher now looks a little bit perplexed.

In this sequence we see that an explicit reference to a penis in shape of a sketch on a girl's arm renders humor as well. This time it is not homosexuality that produces humor and, we claim, not necessarily heterosexuality either, but instead the public exhibition of a caricatured version of the male genitalia on a girl; it is a reference to sex and sexual practice. We suggest that the humor here is produced by the incongruity between the conception of the classroom as a sexless space, as part of the discourse of "childhood innocence"[73], and the explicit presence of a drawing of a large penis on a girl, i.e. the general baldness of the girls challenging these discourses. Sex, here represented by the public drawing and exposure of a sketch of a penis on a female pupil's arm, functions in this example as a way to challenge these discourses, as does the example about the male gay couple discussed above. The drawing of the large penis can also be seen as an explicit production, or doing, of male sexuality and masculinity, as opposed to the normative and seemingly not funny version of natural and "self-evident" masculinity[74]. The drawing thus produces a conception of "constructedness"[75] and therefore, in a sense, failure of masculinity, inherent of comic potential.

Interestingly enough, it appears as if sexuality in these various cases nevertheless challenges the seriousness of the school culture, as a sort of comic relief, therefore simultaneously reinforc-

[73] Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford, 2003, p. 15.
[74] Kulick, 2010.
[75] Kulick, 2010, p. 74.

ing, at least on a surface level, the desire to learn, and provoking, or resisting, the limits of the classroom. Our point is that by bringing sex into this otherwise allegedly sexless space[76], by using drama and humor, new and possibly "dangerous" fields are tried out partly because of the promise of the "not for real" and partly because of the humorous framing. Comedy and drama therefore appear as facilitating ways to deal with male homosexuality and sexuality within the instructional frames.

Discussion

A positive and permitting classroom climate where the pupils feel safe is often held up as something to strive for by politicians, school departments and teachers in class. In the teaching of a foreign language, where you want to optimize the conditions for the pupils to feel secure enough to dare to speak the new language they are learning, humor could be an efficient way to achieve a "comfortable classroom atmosphere"[77]. It has even been suggested that humor in the classroom also can advance learning and enhance test scores[78]. However, our results show that humor seems to be paralleled with processes that lead to partly the opposite effect. Our analysis of an example of the function of sexuality and the way sexuality seems to lend itself so well as a pathway to joking practices in the classroom, particularly the parodying of gay men and its effects in terms of production of humor in this pupil assignment, illustrates how the pupils through joking practices in a sense get caught in the simultaneous production of normative straight pupil subjectivity and the gay man as the abject within a "threatening spectra" [79].

[76] Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford, 2003, p.15.
[77] Bell, 2009, p. 241.
[78] Hackathorn, Garczynski, Blankmeyer, Tennial and Solomon, 2011.
[79] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.

Hence, our detailed analysis of this "subjectivation-in-practice"[80] in the example used illustrates that sexuality, and in particular male homosexuality, in some situations can play a crucial part in language classroom practice in how it maintains and constructs "smooth" interaction during the lesson, and how it both maintains and challenges school as a simultaneously heterosexual but also sexually innocent[81] place. The results show that male sexual pupil subjectivity is here produced by the staging of gay men as "not natural", hyper-sexual and, at least partly, as the "abjected outside"[82]. This simultaneous discursive production of male homosexuality as a performance, a set of stereotyped behaviors, a staged form of being that renders ridicule, is problematic in a number of respects. We, therefore, suggest that this example of the production of pupil subjectivity needs to be discussed in relation to what seems to be an overriding discourse in Swedish school policy of fostering linguistic proficiency within language instruction rather than focusing the meaning making aspects of language and learning of a new language[83]. If the objective of language instruction is unilaterally oriented towards linguistic proficiency in terms of enhancing the pupils' productive and receptive skills, then speaking per se, no matter the character of the topic of the conversation, will be understood as something positive and conversations will per se be valuable. Simultaneously, disruptions of pupil production of language, such as for instance speech, will be understood as negative. However, if the meaning making aspects of language and language learning are taken into account, the topic of the learners' conversations becomes a more problematic issue and cannot be understood just as a neutral medium or vehicle for the production of speech. The discursive production of meaning within pupils' and teachers' language practices in the language classroom perhaps therefore needs to be discussed more in

[80] Youdell, 2006, p. 70.
[81] Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford, 2003, p. 15.
[82] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[83] Tornberg, 2000.

terms of the facilitating and limiting effects it may have on the production of pupil subjectivity in the classroom.

We suggest that the staged male gay couple functions as a comedy producer through means of the couple being portrayed as failing masculinity on at least three levels: by not "taking pain as a man", by being affectionate publicly, and last but not least, by being gay. We assert that humor and drama in this example need to be seen as ways for the pupils to deal with sexuality and male homosexuality within the scope of instruction, but also to keep its conceptions under control, thus reproducing the hierarchical dominance of heterosexuality. Furthermore, the results illustrate how a discursively known and accepted discourse interjection like 'no homo' can be used as opening up the classroom space for homosexual subjectivity. The pupils' discursive access to and use of this phrase as a repudiation produces the presence of "real" homosexual subjectivity as "liveable"[84] and possible but also so threatening that it needs to be refused. This threatening liveable male homosexuality needs to be analytically contrasted against its genesis in this classroom context, i.e. the abjected gay man as a staged "funny" character in a skit who can be "taken off", like a set of stage clothes, and got rid of upon leaving the stage. In line with Kulick, we suggest that the "no homo" comments can be seen as performatively producing subject positions that potentially undermine the performance of coherent straight male pupil subjectivity[85]. In other words, the public and explicit use of the parodied gay man as abjected, an identification to "disavow"[86], is simultaneously an acknowledgement of its constitutive importance in the production of straight male pupil subjectivity. On surface level, however, the "no homo" remarks constitute a clear refusal of homosexuality and a demand for its removal from the classroom space, which is obviously very problematic.

[84] Butler, 2004, p. 39.
[85] Kulick, 2010, p. 288.
[86] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.

In conclusion, the desire to learn can be seen as a national requirement[87], something that schools are to build their work around and teachers are to reinforce in the children. In the light of this, the pupil and teacher interaction in the excerpt here discussed can be seen as a product of an environment secure enough for pupils to open up, express themselves and produce spoken English in front of the entire class, give each other feedback in English and laugh together. In this sense, the "permitting" learning environment made possible a social arena in which the pupils used the target second language in order to express themselves within the genre of comedy in front of the entire class, eliciting jovial feelings and verbal reactions, also in the target language, from the peers in class, thus reproducing the "permitting" learning environment. We therefore see how pupils, by using drama and comedy in this classroom skit, deal with sexuality and male straight and homosexual subjectivity, by elaborating with possible subject and abject positions. This, however, seems to have clear downside effects, which have been discussed here in terms of reproducing straight male pupil subjectivity as normative and male homosexuality as an abjection, a "threatening spectra"[88], thus reproducing heteronormativity. In the light of an overriding policy discourse that encourages linguistic proficiency the contingent jovial atmosphere pervading this classroom practice may be more easily understood as something positive. However, we assert that we need to return to Nelson[89] and the acknowledgment of the sociosexual aspects infused in language and ask ourselves if the production of straight male pupil subjectivity as normative and gay male subjectivity as its "abjected outside"[90] is an acceptable spin-off from a language classroom speaking assignment. Indeed, we assert that the result of this in-depth analysis of the "subjectivation-in-practice" [91] in this single example suggests that the

[87] Sanderoth, 2002.
[88] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[89] Nelson, 2006, p. 4.
[90] Butler, 1993/2011, p. xiii.
[91] Youdell, 2006, p.70.

meaning making aspects of language learning and language instruction needs to be pondered seriously.

Conclusions

This study departed in questions on how school as an institution, and in particular language education in secondary school, produces conceptions of gender and sexuality in the classroom and how that produces sexual pupil subjectivities. The ambition has been to discuss the production of subjectivity and normativity taking place as an effect of discursive negotiations in the pupil and teacher interaction in a specific language classroom assignment, namely the performance of a pupil skit. Our analyses indicate that the staging of a gay male couple in this classroom skit is an example of a discursive doing that primarily produces straight pupil subjectivity and heteronormativity in the classroom. However, we also suggest that, as simultaneous processes, openings for gay male pupil subjectivity and space for pupils to resist dominating school discourses are produced as effects of the staging of this gay male couple and the interaction around the performance.

The presence of a gay male couple and the sketch of a large penis on a female pupil's arm generate a massive response from the rest of the class. Most of the responses consist of loud laughter. The gay characters on stage become possible sexual subject positions as a performative effect of the scene acting as an interpellation of these sexual subjects that the discourse interjection 'no homo' refuses and simultaneously "calls into being"[92]. Although the "no homo" comments efficiently protects the gay role characters from getting merged with the pupils' "real" off stage subjectivities, these comments also render the male homosexual subjectivity performed on stage a possibility available to all of the pupils in class. What was previously perhaps only a play, imaginary characters acted out on a stage with

[92] Kulick, 2006, p. 290.

the promise of leaving the character upon leaving the stage, performatively becomes something that concerns them all also outside of the stage. However, male homosexuality seems to be represented in the classroom only on the premise of the public refusal of it.

Our final remark concerns how this article in its analyses has dealt with notions of masculinity and male sexuality, and thus omitted discussions about notions about femininity and the absence of lesbians in this example. Questions about the ease with which male homosexuality was dealt with using drama and humor, and the response of laughter, joyfulness, in this classroom in relation to the absence of female homosexuality would be a pertinent way to continue discussing the presence and absence of sexuality and its function in language instruction.

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