

# MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS IN SWEDEN: HOW IT RECONTEXTUALIZES AND FRAGMENTS SCHOLARLY PRACTICES AND WORK PROCESSES

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## Abstract

Studies in CDA have revealed the nature of the marketized language that now infuses universities and other public institutions, but there is no comprehensive study as to how this language enters the everyday practices of the university through different levels of steering documents and meetings. In this paper, taking one example from a corpus of data from a larger project on New Public Management in Sweden, we show how successively more detailed documents are created by professional administrators in order to present vision statements, that are first operationalized into strategies and then into more concrete 'activities' for the subject level that are related to bundles of performance indicators. These documents re-contextualize practices of teaching and research in line with marketized goals, yet do so through consistent lack of clear agency, causality and process. A number of linguistic and multimodal resources are deployed in a chain of interrelated documents legitimizing this process as one made by careful, technical, management expertise, although the result is a fragmentation of the actual interconnected processes that comprise university work.

**Keywords:** Marketization; Universities; Multimodality; Management; New Public Management; Critical Discourse Analysis; Recontextualization of social practice.

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1980s a new form of public management, taking principles from the private sector, has been adopted across Europe (Mautner 2012; Pollitt & Bouchaert 2013) and over the past three decades increasingly in Sweden, about which we write. This New Public Management (NPM), as it is known in Sweden, like its counterparts in other European countries, involves various initiatives presented as being remedies for problems with quality, efficiency, transparency and large costs in the public sector and which comprise one part of the marketization of the public realm. It is a way, it is argued, by which public institutions can be operated effectively and be best aligned with the needs of the public and society using terms like 'accountability' and 'value for money' (Ek et al. 2013; Ball 2004; Mautner 2014). This has seen the Swedish education system shift rapidly from of the most centralized and controlled in Europe to one of the most deregulated (Östberg & Andersson 2013). This marketized discourse is realized, as scholars in CDA have shown, in a form of language that comes from the private sector in a prevalence of terms such as 'innovation' and 'entrepreneurial' (Fairclough 1993;

Mautner 2005; Morrish & Sauntson 2010). But what has received less attention by critical linguists is how this marketized language is disseminated through chains of management steering documents. This is our concern in this paper. We take the example of one sequence of steering documents from a larger corpus collected at three Swedish universities. We show how the management discourse is materialised in a language ensuring monitoring. A general ‘vision’ statement is operationalized in a document with expanded strategies, which in turn are the basis for writing an Operational Plan at the level of departments and subjects. What happens linguistically is that management buzzwords are used by professional administrators to produce a one-size-fits-all set of decontextualized components related to targets, which are then passed on to departments and subject areas, which are held accountable and have to report activities. In this process it is important to show, using multimodal analysis, how language is transformed through the use of bullet points, lists and tables. These features are important to contain the levels of abstraction created in the language and in themselves to connote measurement and the breaking down of processes into components.

## **2. Marketized language in the universities**

Critical linguists have mainly studied the emergence of marketized language in the context of higher education. They have shown that universities, academic leaders and higher education research were found to be increasingly using words imported from the corporate sector: buzzwords like ‘human capital’, ‘innovative’, ‘competitive’, ‘globally engaged’ and ‘enterprise’ (Holborow 2013; cf. Machin & Mayr 2012; Mautner 2005). It was argued that this language showed that higher education institutions had turned into businesses trying to sell “goods, services, organizations, ideas or people” (Fairclough 1993: 14; Morrish & Sauntson 2010), rather than to foster an educated citizenship. But it was clear that these same institutions never concretely defined what they meant by ‘globally engaged’ or ‘dynamic’. These kinds of terms were more about display and self-presentation than actual substance (Alvesson 2013).

This new regime of management also influenced the professional identities of employees. Discussed in social theory through the concept of ‘governmentality’ (Peters et al. 2009; Davies & Bansel 2007) managers at a distance require employees to continually report back to them often through a language which does not have its origins within the expertise of the professionals themselves but through terms and priorities imposed by management, who may not share in the local expertise of that particular professional group (Waring 2009). This process of communication has been usefully discussed as ‘textualization’ (Iedema 2003). Put simply professionals must continually report on what they do through a language that is not their own. And in this process it becomes necessary to use this kind of language in order to simply sound professional (Mautner 2014: 470), even if this language is fundamentally alien to existing professional practices and knowledge. Such monitoring language is implemented across the working environment in the recruitment process, in team meetings and through regularly supplying information about outputs, targets, strategic plans and their facilitation (Kärreman & Alvesson 2004). It is how such language is implemented in chains of steering documents laying out targets for teaching and research across all areas of the university that is of interest to us in this paper.

### **3. Theory and methods**

Central to the analysis in this paper is the notion of discourse as it is used in CDA. Here the broader ideas communicated by a text are referred to as discourses (Fairclough 2000; van Dijk 1993). These discourses can be thought of as models of the world (Foucault 1977) and can include kinds of participants, ideas, values, goals, and settings (van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999). In CDA texts are analysed for the details of their linguistic and grammatical choices in order to reveal what these broader discourses are. The management documents we analyse in this paper realise and legitimize their discourses of steering and marketization through specific kinds of linguistic and grammatical features best drawn out by CDA.

The documents we analyse in this paper, however, realise discourses also through multimodal features such as images, design and the way text is presented in lists and tables. Since the groundbreaking work of Hodge and Kress (1988) and Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) scholars have begun to analyse how discourses along with their values, participants, actions and settings can be communicated and connoted through both language and visually. We will draw on concepts and tools from multimodal analysis which will be explained in the relevant sections.

We place this analysis in the context of the notion of the ‘recontextualization of social practice’ in order to pin down how semiotic resources are deployed in the representation of a social practice (van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999; van Leeuwen 2008). This is useful as it draws particular attention to the sequences of activity, or ‘scripts’ that can be understood as the ‘doing’ of discourses. These discourses represent a kind of knowledge about what goes on in a particular social practice, ideas about why it is the way it is, who is involved and what kinds of values they hold. van Leeuwen (2008) offers detailed analytical models for the representation of social actors, social actions, time and space which we use in the analysis of our documents. By combining different linguistic features, e.g. reference, lexis, nominalization, passivation, actors can be represented through exclusion or inclusion, personalization or impersonalization, categorization or nomination etc. (ibid: ch. 2), and types of processes and participants are the basis of representing social action (ibid: ch. 3). Thus, we get a pragmatic analysis in which different linguistic features are drawn upon in the representation of a social practice. This is relevant for us as this new form of management involves ways of representing social actors and actions, in our case the doings of teachers and researchers, in a way that best suits their marketizing agenda. So in our analysis of the management documents we ask who is involved and what kinds of actions are carried out. We can then point to very particular kinds of substitutions, additions and deletions, accomplished through language grammar and multimodal resources and form an authoritative, logical steering discourse which risk to come at odds with professional practices and in the worst case silence professional knowledge.

The data we analyse in this paper is taken from three large documents produced by the management at Örebro University. These have been translated from Swedish by the authors for the purpose of illustration, although analysis was carried out on the Swedish texts. The first is the vision or the university. The second is a strategy document where four targets are listed, and each given a set of strategies that will allow each to be attained. The third is the Operational Plan, a document ensuring the

accountability of departments and subject areas by demanding concrete activities to be specified in relation to target areas and strategies.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. *Vision 2016*

This document provides the first step in the process. After the appointment of the new Vice Chancellor in 2008 along with the arrival of new senior administrators it was decided that there was a need for a new vision statement, which would then lead on to clearer strategies and be part of a shift to intense performance management. This was set against shifting priorities in education driven by the Conservative government and a new emphasis on league tables and financing based around performance monitoring.

Vision 2016 is a 20-page prestige brochure in color. It comprises statements from the Vice Chancellor and also the management, combined with success stories from established professors who are interviewed. Pages contain small amounts of text and photos. There is an emphasis on space in the composition as can be seen in Fig. 1. The space itself here suggests the luxury of space, the power over space, room to breathe. We could imagine the opposite where a document was densely crowded, where images of staff were crowded in by sections of text and other images.

Images are slightly more severe in character than we would find in more promotional material, as analysed by Zhang & O'Halloran (2013). But these contain many of the kinds of observations made of these kinds of design. Images are often of reduced modality with out-of-focus backgrounds or other elements, allowing them to take on an idealized and symbolic quality (Machin, 2004). Cropping is used to create more exciting angles. Colors coordinate across images and with text as in advertising designs (see Fig. 2). Visually the look of the university is in this management discourse brought through a prestige design look.

Here we analyze the vision statements for teaching (*utbildning*) and research (*forskning*). These statements are important as they form a reference point from which senior administrators must then generate first the strategies and then activity plans for the subject areas. We analyse these in terms of social actors and actions, but point in the first place to the fact that these are very much characteristic of the kinds of marketized language found by other scholars (e.g. Mautner 2005; Morrish & Sauntson 2010).

The goal for teaching:

Our goal is to create opportunities for education and training that contribute to development and self-cultivation in a wide range of areas of society.

The goal for research:

Our goal is to conduct free and creative research that meet different needs, and where we seek to go beyond traditional boundaries. We are a university that attracts eminent scholars and seeks partnerships that develop the quality of our research.

## UTBILDNING



” Vi har som mål att skapa förutsättningar för bildning och utbildning som bidrar till utveckling och förnyelse inom ett brett spektrum av samhällets områden.”

Figure 1 The vision for education in Vision 2016 with a typical emphasis on space

## FORSKNING



” Vi har som mål att bedriva fri och kreativ forskning, som möter olika behov, och där vi eftersträvar ett gränsöverskridande angreppssätt. Vi är ett universitet som attraherar framstående forskare och söker samarbeten som utvecklar kvaliteten i forskningen.”

Figure 2 Vision for research showing low modality, cropping and use of color

As we see, this is a marketized discourse. Teaching must contribute to “development” in society and research must meet “different” needs. It must be applicable in a tangible way and can therefore not be about the less specifically user-focused ‘knowledge’ or

‘exploration’, nor about more abstract matters such as ‘citizenship’ or ‘humanitarianism’. We find the generic empty management speak discussed by Chiapello and Fairclough (2002), in “create opportunities”, “free and creative research”, “seek to go beyond”, “quality” etc..

Characteristic of all of the documents in our corpus is that it is not clear who is the agent of activities, i.e. what social actors actually do. It is not clear who specifically will meet goals. This ambiguity starts in the vision document itself. To begin with the use of “we” is broad. For example:

Our goal is to conduct free and creative ...

In this case the possessive form “our” could include everyone at the university. And possibly also in this case:

We are a university that attracts eminent scholars ...

“Our” and “we” are metonymically made synonymous with the university. But there is a constant ambivalence in the reference these first person pronouns. Possibly the staff is included in the “we” that attracts eminent scholars, and the interpretation of “our” is open – an employee could interpret it as an management speak from above or feel part of a vision of creativity. What this means practically, as we will show in the subsequent analyses, is that there is a “we” that sometimes gravitates towards doings that might involve the staff but always includes the management.

In CDA it has been shown that pronouns are one of the best grammatical categories for the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power (van Dijk 1998: 203). Johnson (1987) showed how pronouns create shifting concentric circles of inclusion and exclusion around the speaker. The ambiguous “we” in the university documents has this effect of sometimes inviting staff as agents, but often clearly as objects, as having the participant role of beneficiary or goal. This is what van Leeuwen (2008: 47) calls ‘over-determination’, which is the result of actors being represented as taking part in several social practices. In this way the management discourse can subtly involve everyone, so that it not actually becomes a question of obeying.

As regards who are the actual agents of the processes laid out in the vision statements these are realized by the use of nominalizations. There are five for *education*: “opportunities”, “education”, “training”, “development”, “self-cultivation”. Nominalizations delete agents, temporality and causalities. So *who* needs to be trained or *what* needs to be developed is not specified nor to what outcome. Importantly at this point teachers and students are not an explicit part of the language. This suppression continues into later documents.

For *research* we find three nominalizations: “research” (twice) and “collaborations”, plus one participle, “boundary crossing”, where actors are deleted. We also find a lot of finite verbs: “meet”, “pursue”, “is”, “attracting”, “searching” and “develop” – also agentless and goalless but communicates sense of constant movement and activity. These nominalizations also help to conceal other important micro details such as what is meant by “conduct free and creative research”. What “different needs” will be met? Why should the goal be to “look for partnerships”? Nor is it clear who should do these. Again these problems echo across the chain of documents.

Finally in this document we do find personalization through nomination (van Leeuwen 2008: 41), in the success stories of prominent professors. For example, in one of the success stories we find the headline "New medical school is being built on experience and best practice" where professor Ulf Tidefelt is interviewed. Across these success stories we find both honorifics and formalisation. This personalization brings a sense of inclusion of real and individual members of the staff. These also play an important role in the steering discourse as they represent cases where the vision is realised. There is a connotation that these represent success stories that can be followed. But at no point is it stated how this can work for individual teachers and researchers.

In sum, in the vision statements which start the steering process, we find the university acting as agent, over and above the academic staff, although this tends to be presented in an inclusive way. Beyond this it is not clear exactly who will carry out the processes that are represented in a number of nominalized process that clearly point to a marketized agenda. Importantly the numbers required by the management, the higher levels of research output, higher levels of student recruitment, more courses with links to the jobs market, are not openly mentioned.

#### **4.2. *Vision, targets and strategies***

It is in this document that the vision statements are written in a form that can be delivered to the rest of the university as targets and strategies. It is here that the professional administrators take control of authorship. In this document four targets are stated and each is then broken down into three, four or five strategies. Before these we find a single page which lists the characteristics that distinguish the university. This is the core steering document of the university. Its paragraphs are the law of the university and are often pasted onto documents which then report back up from subject areas to management in order to demonstrate that activities have met targets and strategies.

The high status of the document is signaled by its design. Unlike other university documents that are A4 this is produced in A5. The administrators who guided production of the document told us that it needed to look accessible and usable, to provide a practical consultable reference for practice in the university. The overall design is typical of a promotional brochure and uses highly spacious layout, and the cover has engraved wavy lines, a feature that recurs in the graphic profile of the university and communicates a sense of being 'on the move' (see Fig. 3) rhyming with the infinitives seen previously. Text is minimal on each page. Each target and its strategies sit on its own page in large font surrounded by large borders. What we show is that this over-determination of space (cf. van Leeuwen 2005), along with a number of linguistic and grammatical features, communicates ideationally and interpersonally the logic, thorough, precise and expert nature of this steering document.

In the document we also find pages comprised entirely of photographs of airy modernist spaces in the university. Across these documents these tend to be communal spaces, with lots of glass and staircases rather than smaller private spaces, often using motion blurring to create a sense of speed and lightness (see Fig. 4). Here it appears that steering is part of a wider modernist discourse, pointing to rapid, certain, deliberate activities. But this discourse is not about individual scholars working away slowly and

thoroughly in research, nor about dealing with large groups of students. These are absent both linguistically and visually across the documents.



Figure 3 Cover of strategy document with spacious layout and engraved wavy lines



Figure 4 Inside images of strategy document with motion blurring and staircase



#### 4.2.1. Vision

The vision comes early in the strategy document:

##### VISION 2016

Örebro University is a prominent university with subject breadth and the courage to rethink and ability to develop.

We are distinguished by

- vocationally oriented programs belonging to the country's best
- internationally successful research
- active students and staff with high expectations
- creative knowledge development between teachers and students
- dynamic relationship with the social, business and cultural life

That the vision is presented as a bullet point list signals that it consists of separate components of equal importance. It also suggests that there is some kind of sequence. What is important, we argue, is two-fold. First we have the connotational value of presenting information through abstract modality, as bare details and technical information. But bullet points also have the advantage that here is no need to make explicit how the different points are connected. For example, how does “internationally successful research” work alongside the need to have more “vocationally oriented programs”?

The lexical choices in the list for the visions here bring positive connotations of being successful, and, once again, 'on the move', evident in buzz words like "dynamic", "best", "successful", "creative". But we find more interesting things when we look a little deeper.

In this particular list each bullet point is a noun phrase with an initial modifier to the head noun (in italics): "vocationally-oriented *programs*", "internationally-successful *research*", "active *students and staff*", "creative *knowledge*", "dynamic *interaction*". And we find many postponed modifiers, so that we get a quite long noun phrase, for example (with the modifiers indented and the head noun in italics):

- vocationally oriented  
*programs*  
belonging to the country's best
- dynamic  
*relationship*  
with social, business and cultural life

What we find are two things. First, co-ordination and parallelism runs through the presentation. The bullet points entail co-ordination in the global structure and each bullet deploys a similar noun phrase, so the local structure is parallel. In this sense everything becomes the same, even though the process and concepts they contain are of vastly different and of a concrete or abstract nature. Second, we find that the long noun

phrases, where the head nouns have modifiers before and after, is part and parcel of the dense language.

The vagueness and density is partly achieved by the fact that each bullet point includes a nominalization ("training", "research", "expectations", "knowledge development", "collaboration"), which are used instead of verb processes, which would have been impossible given the need to be condensed, and the complexity of issues at play here. Therefore agents are unclear. So we find things like "creative knowledge development between teachers and students" which gives little away in terms of real targets, strategy, or about who should precisely do what.

Finally, it is important in many of the university documents that we analyzed in our corpus that the co-ordinations of nouns with 'and' gives rise to a style that continually fuses very different, often conflicting things together as one unit, for example: "teachers and students", "students and employees", "social, business and cultural life". This would be highly problematic in any set of instructions that were to be followed by people. The effects of such dense language, nominalizations and co-ordinations would be disastrous say if presented as a strategy in a military operation to take a particular landmark.

These dense noun phrases are important in the realization of the management discourse. We can ask where else we might find such language - certainly not in a general corpus of Swedish. We would have to look to some highly specialized technical field, but here the technical language would involve terms with more or less agreed upon meanings, used often and for specific purposes. The use of such language in this document connotes such technical expertise but through abstractions. The same kind of dense language, it has been observed, arise in educational curricula writing.

Hellberg (2008) studied the language of school curricula in Swedish from 1960 until 2008. In the earlier documents he found that many competing voices, and therefore points of view, were present. Grammatically this was found in conjunctions (including adverbs), modal auxiliaries and negations. By these linguistic means different positions/perspectives/ideologies are coded. Thus, in the early curricula we find linguistic features like 'although', 'but', 'hence', 'we must', 'it is of outmost importance', plus negations, presupposing another voice, 'it is not the case that ...' etc. So different and sometimes conflicting positions are articulated in this way. But in a more recent sample language was more akin to the dense language style we find in the university strategy document. Hellberg argues that this is connected to the need to suppress conflicting views and the need to audit things like teaching objectives and learning outcomes in a concrete fashion. Such steering must therefore suppress complexity and competing perspectives even if the nature of research across a whole university and pedagogical theory itself is not like this. The dense and abstract language that we find in these documents, therefore, fulfils a clear purpose.

#### 4.2.2. *Targets and strategies*

The actual targets and strategies follow. Four targets are given, each with its own individual page, of which we show the ones for teaching (*utbildning*) and research (*forskning*) in Fig. 5 and 6.

## MÅL 1.

### UTBILDNING

Vi har som mål att skapa förutsättningar för bildning och utbildning som bidrar till utveckling och förnyelse inom ett brett spektrum av samhällets områden.

### STRATEGIER

*Vi ska...*

- 1.1 erbjuda konkurrenskraftig professionsinriktad utbildning som är förankrad i miljöer där forskning och utbildning ömsesidigt berikar varandra.
- 1.2 ha lärare med hög vetenskaplig/konstnärlig och pedagogisk kompetens som tar ansvar för att samtliga utbildningar har relevans och bedrivs med en hög grad av forskningsanknytning.
- 1.3 utveckla en pedagogisk grundsyn som dels understödjer studenternas möjligheter att ta ansvar för sitt eget lärande och dels ger förutsättningar för personlig utveckling och kritiskt förhållningssätt.

Figure 5 The strategies for the target teaching (*utbildning*)

Below we give a translation of the target teaching:

## TARGET 1.

### TEACHING

Our goal is to create conditions for education and training that contribute to development and innovation in a wide range of areas of society.

### STRATEGIES

We will...

- 1.1 offer competitive vocationally oriented education that is rooted in settings where research and education are mutually augmenting.
- 1.2 have teachers with high academic, artistic and pedagogical skills that will take responsibility for ensuring that all training programs are relevant and involves a high degree of research links.
- 1.3 develop a teaching philosophy that partly supports the students' opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and also provide opportunities for personal development and critical approach.

## MÅL 2.

### FORSKNING

Vi har som mål att bedriva fri och kreativ forskning, som möter olika behov, och där vi eftersträvar ett gränsöverskridande angreppssätt. Vi är ett universitet som attraherar framstående forskare och söker samarbeten som utvecklar kvaliteten i forskningen.

### STRATEGIER

*Vi ska...*

- 2.1 kvalitetspröva våra forskningsresultat genom ökad internationell vetenskaplig publicering.
- 2.2 utveckla våra internationella forskningssamarbeten.
- 2.3 stimulera aktiviteter för att kraftigt öka våra externa forskningsmedel.
- 2.4 uppmärksamma forskningsaktiviteter, forskningsresultat och konstnärligt utvecklingsarbete som bidrar till att uppfylla universitetets övergripande mål.

Figure 6 The strategies for the target research (*forskning*)

Below we give a translation of the target research:

## TARGET 2

### RESEARCH

Our goal is to conduct free and creative research that meets different needs, and where we seek a transnational approach. We are a university that attracts eminent scholars and looks for partnerships that develop the quality of the research.

### STRATEGIES

We will...

- 2.1 test out the quality of our research in established international scholarly publications.
- 2.2 develop our international research collaboration.
- 2.3 stimulate activities to significantly increase our external research.
- 2.4 pay attention to research activities that contribute to the fulfilment of the university's main goals.

Multimodally, we want to stress that this document is comprised of bullet points throughout. We get the core details of the university business, in what Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) would call abstract or scientific modality. This is different to naturalistic modality where the details of actual happenings with individuals located in time and space are represented. But this would not be useful or practical in this management discourse.

Underneath the numbered targets we find a bulleted list that is also numbered, which suggests both order and prominence. Given that they are 1.1., 1.2, 1.3, they strategies are presented as logically derived subcomponents of the target. So all the different target areas are numbered and irrespective of their nature given a similar and numbered amount of strategies that fit the requirements of a single page and allowing a spacious layout. Evidently, there is no logical reason for why something is numbered as 1, 2 and 3, even with decimals, it just connotes 'logic' and 'data'.

In the language of these strategies, the shifting, over-determined use of "we" is obvious:

We will have teachers with high academic, artistic and pedagogical skills ...  
We will develop a teaching philosophy ...

In the first case this is not something that teachers do as they are the syntactic object, having the participant role of 'goal'. In the second case teachers could be included in the verb "develop" and in this interpretation gets some agency, even if it is unclear to what extent this participant role of 'agent' is should be viewed as controlled by the management. We find the same over-determination for research:

We will pay attention to research activities that contribute to the fulfillment of the university's main goals.  
We will develop our international research collaboration.

Again the first is more a concern for management whereas the second seems to include actual researchers. As we have seen, the institutional "we" in the documents is sometimes acting upon the staff, i.e. part a management practice, sometimes involved in the actual work, i.e. part of the practices of teaching and research.

In the strategies we find extensive omission of social actors through nominalization to a level that is highly striking, "education", "training", "development", "innovation", "competitive". In this case we have to ask why so many verb processes are 'buried' in noun forms that obscure, agency, times places and causalities and links. Drawing on Halliday (1978) we can think of this as a shift from encoding as 'process' to encoding as 'product'. One reason for productization is to allow the kinds of multiple modification that we have been finding in these lists. These nominalizations are placed in long compounds, sometimes in heavy nominal groups, resulting in a very dense style such as: "competitive vocationally oriented education", "research-collaborations", "research-activities". A revealing expression is "research and education mutually enrich each other". Such a productization here allows the omission of exactly how these two will "enrich" each other.

One quality of nominalizations is that unlike verbs they can then be described, quantified and themselves become actors. Nominalized verbs such as "research and

education” can be connected in unspecified ways. These can then become grammatically animate when combined with other verbs as in the behavioural verb ”enrich” (*berika*) and the reciprocal pronoun ”one another” (*varandra*). Here they become abstract metonymies, standing for interaction in and between the complex social practices in which actual persons do their work. All of this is one way that the management is able to fragment and abstract the complex process that constitute teaching and research and create a one-size-fits-all system of targeting and measurement, about which professionals have little input.

We also find social actors represented by ‘assimilation’ and ‘collectivization’ (where groups are joined by parataxis, van Leeuwen 2008: 37): ”active students and employees”, ”teachers and students”. These too can become metonymies for actual relationships. This is problematic of course as all these details of actual interrelationships and actual social actors involved are crucial for actual teaching and research. It is here that we begin to see more clearly how language plays a role in the processes of new public management and governmentality.

We also find the same kind of repeating sentence structures, or linguistic parallelism. Syntactically, the bullet points depart from the main verb, an infinitive. The subject/actor is the “we” that precedes the points, and the finite verb is “will”. The object/goal of the verbs are once again very long noun phrases – thus, it is in principle the same syntax as in the vision starting with “We are distinguished by” preceding the bullet points, but this time even more elaborated. The head nouns are, with their modifiers intended and the head noun in italics:

competitive  
*teaching*  
 which is anchored in environments  
 where research and education mutually enrich each other

an educational  
*philosophy*  
 which partly supports the students’ ability to take responsibility for their own learning  
 and also provide opportunities for personal development and critical approach

This is an extremely complex syntax, with all sorts of modifiers being attached to the head noun. So what the “we” is acting upon becomes highly complex and unclear. And as before we find a lot of nominalizations, and the same linking of nouns as before. Much of the world is thrown together by bringing together different nouns: ”research and education”, ”scientific / artistic and pedagogical skills”, ”personal development and critical attitudes”. The effect is that these nouns become part of a stew of issues divorced from real world relationships.

Co-ordination is clearly one of the main principles for semiosis in these documents. For example, in the target for teaching we find the co-ordination “training and education”. In fact there is a history of conflict between the two in Sweden. “Education” (*Bildung*) relates more to liberal education, wisdom and the humanities. “Training” (*utbildning*) is directed towards employability and professionally linked education. Thus, the notions are in conflict in many contexts, but not in this document, which aligns with the way educational curricula suppress different perspectives and conflicts of interest in Hellberg’s (2008) analysis.

So throughout these documents single nouns/nominalizations are coordinated. Long noun phrases are coordinated. Things are coordinated by bullet points, they are coded as equal components in different lists and tables.

So far in these two documents, typical of many like them in our corpus, a recurring observation is the generic, general, dense and vague character of the language, the overall lack of micro details, context, causality and agents best able to carry things out. But it is from the ‘building blocks’ of the strategy document that the Operational Plan for the actual teachers and researchers is to be made, which we move onto in the next document.

### 4.3. Targets areas and activities in the Operational Plan

From the lists of strategies which have been identified a more detailed document is then generated, the Operational Plan. The actual document is a formal, bureaucratic document with no photographs or spacious layout, which has to be written every autumn. A core feature is the so called activity plan. What happens is that the central administrators, departing from the strategies, send out a template for this plan to faculties and departments with target areas listed in a left column of a table, as shown in the translation in Fig. 6. In 2014, the Operational Plan from a department we studied in detail comprised 32 pages with mostly different tables.

Target areas in Örebro university strategy	Activity	Who is responsible	Completed by
<i>Priority target areas</i>			
UKÄ's quality assessment			
External resources			
Attractiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of first-hand student applications</li> <li>• Increase the number of qualified applicants for teaching positions</li> </ul>			
<i>Other target areas</i>			
<i>Education</i>			
Establishment on the labor market			

Number of teachers with Ph.D./merited in applied Arts			
Particularly qualified teachers			
Arriving and departing students			
<i>Research</i>			
Field normalised citation index			
Level of publications, Norwegian model			
Number of applications approved			
Total volume of research			

Figure 7 Activity plan to be filled out as part of the Operational Plan to show how strategies are being responded to

The column for target areas is followed by a second column in which the head of the departments must state activities which show how they are engaging with the targets. In column three the person responsible for the activity and in column four the date the activity will be completed are noted. So, for example, a course director or a head of a subject will list an activity that says what they will do by a specific date to increase quantity of publications, or to have well trained teachers, or to create links between teaching and labour markets. In fact the actual processes and persons required to address all of these issues are complex, usually overlap and are based in structural issues regarding things like staff time, teaching loads, the fact that over half university staff have temporary contracts. But there is no room for this on the table and those required to complete the table may have no expertise or experience to allow them to do so. And in fact the column which is provided to state who is responsible requires only a choice between a list of several codes which include "director of studies", "head of school", or "other staff". At every level agency is unclear. In fact what gets written in the activity column is mostly "seminars", "meetings" and "workshops". These events will be very unlikely to be able to address actual structural issues as they are designed only to show that individual strategies are being followed and produce the minutes to prove that.

What is important is that the table is tightly scripted and must be obeyed. The empty cells must eventually be filled in by the head of the department on the basis of data delivered from the subject areas. The table ensures accountability by demanding reactions in the form of concrete activities. It also carries out a highly important semiotic role in the legitimation of the discourse as it is able to connote causality, logic and agency where there is in fact none, as it has been largely deleted in the documents that lie earlier in the chain. In terms of the work of Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) tables can be thought of as conceptual processes that are spatially structured. This means that elements are set into relation with one another not by narrative where clear causality,



agents and outcomes are stated but by the use of graphical and spatial features. Conceptual processes suggest hierarchies of order and relations between elements through spatial arrangement. The use of the activity table serves just such a purpose.

But this is an odd table; it can even be argued that it is a 'false' use of a table (authors). And this is important as tables like this dominate the steering documents at this level and are extremely useful tools for transforming language and for create a sense of agency and temporally based processes.

Tables, when used properly, are powerful because they make detailed and systematic comparisons possible. If we want to compare the diet or the food expenses each month for all the staff in one faculty a table would be the perfect semiotic tool. We would decide on the given classification systems, or paradigms. we would want to use in the columns: such as calories, the amount of sugar, carbohydrates or proteins, the costs, the choice of grocery store etc. Paradigmatic relations simply concern which language elements can be substituted for one another, what are the possible choices in any one context. The paradigms chosen for a table are transparent in the sense that there are given facts about this that can be expressed in an exact way. A member of staff spends a certain amount of money, eats so many calories. The realization of the paradigms is predictable: they will be written as numbers. So everything is transparent in the sense that it is possible to understand what is included in a certain paradigm. Linguistically a paradigm has a congruent realization: names for the members of staff, numbers for calories, etc. In a table it is then possible to look across the rows at the syntagmatic relationship set up between the columns. So we can look the name of member of staff and see how much sugar and how much money they spend compared to other members of staff.

In the activity table, however, it is not the case that columns contain easily understandable paradigms. The list of targets and strategies in the left hand column is an odd mix of things and does not constitute a paradigm in itself. We cannot compare research output with attracting first time student applicants And the activity column once completed will contain complex social and cultural processes, which the logic of the table suggests can be easily and economically represented in a way that is fragmented from other activities. Clearly the table here, with its technical modality and classificatory structure, allows the management, as with the use of bullet points, to connote breaking things down into interrelated components and systematized processes, where they are not in fact so.

We can also use the terms 'given' and 'new' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) drawing on Hallidays concepts of theme and rheme, to bring out more of what is problematic in the table and why it is difficult to challenge. These concepts can be used to characterise what is represented as given or established knowledge and information in a text or image, and what is represented as the new, or the contestable, the possible. We can think of the targets in the left column as the given. For example, we need to increase publications. These are represented therefore as taken for granted and established, rather than themselves being contestable. And the given can be that there is one standard way of calibrating this, of course based on a natural science model. We might argue that raising publication levels is related to recruitment, staffing and teaching hours in a university where the majority of its staff are full-time teachers. Yet here such targets are presented as technical information for practical purposes through the modality of the table. And this is presented as a grammar of getting things done with a set of limited

choices in some cases (the paradigmatic choices). And even though the thematic or given paradigm may be contradictory this is suppressed by placing it within the syntagm.

But what happens to the language we analyzed in the strategy document? Do targets and strategies become any more clearly connected to verb processes and agents? In fact something slightly different happens. We still find extensive reliance on nominal groups. But something else is added to connote concrete verb processes in the left column. First we find extensive use of the unspecific verb "increase" (*öka*). Second the components are given a numerical meaning, evident in the recurring use of "number" (*antal*). For example (and note the bullet points):

- Increase the number of first-hand student applicants
- Increase the number of qualified applicants

The logic is clear (but not explicitly expressed). There should be more of the things mentioned in the table: more students, more publications, more establishment on the labor market etc. This shows the market logic of this management discourse: profits should rise every year. In this particular context professional practices must be converted into numbers, and the numbers must get larger every year. But since in the chain of documents there has been no explanation of the micro details processes, of how they are actually interrelated of how things can and should be changed, of who reasonably can bring things about, the person who needs to fill in the table has no choice but to write "seminar", "discussion group", "get invited speakers", or clutter up post-graduate training with more obligatory courses to demonstrate that we will "improve quality of post graduate students", without identifying what is needed and how this could be best done.

Below we give an example of what on one occasion, at the department we studied in detail, was filled in (again with bullet points) for the research target areas. As we see this could apply to any subject area.

- Seminar and discussion on publication strategy.
- Encourage article writing in English for PhD students and researchers by facilitating translations and proofreading
- Guide classification of journals and publishers

Linguistically, we find a dominance of nominalizations, such as "discussion" and "article writing". and a use of infinitive verbs such as "guide" and "encourage". All tend to be absent of agency or clear outcomes. But, placed in the syntagm of the table and in the given/new structure they can be transformed into something that connotes a temporal sequence that has actions and agents. The activities were deadlined in the fourth column, so that they could be monitored, which, we argue, gives them an ad hoc-character and places them outside the happenings in the actual research practices.

## 5. Conclusion

What lies behind this process is the reality of government funding and the need for universities to compete in a kind of pretend market in a time of deregulation in education in Sweden. Management and professional administrators, now given mandate to steer public institutions, take the kinds of actions that they believe will increase productivity. This management discourse relies on a language apt for monitoring that is set in motion in documents having regulated trajectories up and down the organization. It is a language, as we have seen, that deploys numerous semiotic resources to claim authority, expertise, logic, but also connotes dynamic meanings, such as ‘on the move’, ‘getting things done’.

This kind of management discourse and market logic has been criticised for fragmentation and bureaucratization of professional, academic practices (e.g. Hall 2012; Ivarsson Westerberg & Jacobsson 2013). What our own analysis reveals is the role that language and multimodal semiotic resources play in this fragmentation. Processes, agency and relationships between persons are separated and rendered as ‘things’ and then placed in bullet points and tables which further fragment and obscure using highly dense language laden with co-ordinations on both a local and a global level. In the end this prevents the steering language from reaching or coming into contact with the actual work which teachers and researchers carry out and also suppress conflicts of interest. In Powers (1997: 97) words, audit systems that become wide-spread presuppose a ‘decoupling’ from actual work processes and give rise to a new accountability, which inevitably forces the employees to do more reporting but also give rise to “new mentalities, new incentives and perceptions of significance”. Thus, there is a risk that this bureaucratisation has created a language that threatens or undermines professional expertise. And further in the vague and fragmented world projected in the documents it will be administrators who have the ultimate power as teachers and researchers will be evaluated at this level of performance that is uncontestable due to its density and fragmentation. It simply cannot be attacked on a logical level.

Of course we can hypothesize that the vagueness and vacuity of these documents is itself functional, since it guarantees at least two things: a. a freedom to maneuvering, an openness that gives room for all sorts of decisions and allocations of resources b. a protection of the central administration and management system itself – it ensures a never-ending bureaucratic processing of teaching and research.

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