Stina Ericsson

Professor of Swedish with a focus on Sociolinguistics and Interaction, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Stina Ericsson is a sociolinguist with an interest in norms and categorisations, and how they are upheld and challenged through interaction between people and in relation to technologies and the physical environment. She has studied norms and categorisations regarding gender, sexuality, and dis/ability in a variety of settings and materials, including conversations between children and parents, consultations with Arabic-speaking pregnant women and Swedish-speaking midwives, print media texts, and photos submitted by the public as part of a citizen science approach.

Ericsson has a particular interest in transdisciplinary research, and is currently working on The Equality of Syntax project together with several of the authors in this volume, combining Linguistics with Architecture and Design Science. (ORCID: 0000-0002-0011-5030)

Per-Olof Hedvall

Per-Olof Hedvall, associate professor in Rehabilitation engineering and design at the Department of Design Sciences, Lund University, and Professor in Design at the Department of Natural Science, Design and Sustainable Development, Mid Sweden University.

Hedvall conducts research on accessibility, participation, and universal design. His current focus is on the implementation of Universal Design in Sweden, specifically on the subject of norms and categorisation and how categorisations create similarities and differences between people. The goal of his research is to develop new insights into design that does not lead to discrimination, inequality and stigma. (ORCID: 0000-0002-0962-2899)

Situation, Non-Categorisation, and Variation: Conveying Nonclusion Through Text and Image

Stina Ericsson and Per-Olof Hedvall

Abstract

Nonclusion is aligned with Universal Design and involves a critical approach to the categorisation of people. Specifically, nonclusion resists categorisations of bodies/roles and does not come with predefined or presupposed limits in terms of who something is meant for. While UD and nonclusion generally target Design and Architecture, this article explores how nonclusion can be conveyed through text and image in communication. The aim is to identify how the textual and visual presentation itself can make use of nonclusion, irrespective of the content that is to be conveyed. The material used is a video clip produced by the Swedish Agency for Participation. The video clip contains simple animation, subtitles, and a voice-over. The analysis identifies three components of nonclusion as relevant for the communication of nonclusion through text and image: 1) *Situation* encourages focus to be placed on contextual factors rather than individuals and their properties, 2) *Non-Categorisation* encourages a critical approach to categorisations of people, questioning unnecessary, routine, or harmful categorisations, and 3) *Variation* encourages the recognition of human variation, and the necessity of meeting human variation by variation in the designed and built environment. These three nonclusion components are of relevance to

policy development in areas such as Social Sustainability, Disability Rights, Gender Equality, and Age-Friendly Cities and Communities.

Keywords: *Universal Design, Linguistics, Multimodal Analysis, Categorisation, Governmental Agency information*

Introduction and Aim

Nonclusive design is a concept aligned with Universal Design (UD), intended to highlight human variation. We define Nonclusive design as "design that resists categorisations of bodies/roles and that does not come with predefined or presupposed limits in terms of who it is meant for" (Hedvall et al., 2022, p. 91). Hedvall et al. (2022) outline ongoing shifts towards Nonclusive design, and these are further explored by Hedvall and Ericsson (in this volume) in terms of how a shift in categorisation can lead to a shift in conceptualisation.

While UD and Nonclusion generally target Design and Architecture, this article explores how Nonclusion can be conveyed through text and image in communication. The aim is to identify *how the textual and visual presentation itself can make use of Nonclusion*, irrespective of the content that is to be conveyed. As an example, a text or an image may contain a situation where an individual is met by discriminating design, contrary to UD. However, actors and situations can still be *presented* in nonclusive ways. In the article, this is explored in a video clip produced by the Swedish Agency for Participation. Extracts from the video clip are used to identify three components of Nonclusion of specific relevance for texts and images, here called Situation, Non-Categorisation, and Variation. Of these, Non-Categorisation and Variation are among the patterns explored by

Hedvall et al. (2022), whereas Situation is a new component identified in the present article.

The article begins with an outline of the role of language in creating equitable and sustainable societies, followed by a description of the material and method used in the article. The main body of the article then consists of an analysis of the Nonclusion components Situation, Non-Categorisation, and Variation.

Equity Through Language

Research on language use has identified how discrimination and power asymmetries are created and maintained through linguistic means (Fairclough, 2015; Grue, 2015). Conversely, research has also identified attempts at non-discrimination, equality, and equity through language, notably with feminist and anti-sexist linguistic practices at the fore (Abbou, 2023; Wojahn, 2015). For instance, under headings such as *inclusive language*, *écriture inclusive* ('inclusive writing'), and *gender-fair language*, studies have identified such practices as:

- the use of gender-neutral nouns and pronouns ("anyone", "everyone", "someone", "they", "them", "a"/ "that person", "one", etc.) instead of the generic use of "he", "him", or "Man" ,or instead of gendering words like "she", "he", "woman", "man" (Koutchadé & Adanvoessi, 2016; Vinu, 2019);
- the combination of grammatically feminine and masculine forms into one word, e.g., French "la. lechercheur.e" (from "la chercheure" ('the researcher', female) and "le chercheur" ('the researcher', male)) (Burnett & Pozniak, 2021; Elmiger, 2021);

- **alphabetic ordering of words instead of male-first ordering, e.g., Spanish job titles as "Jefa/Jefe" ('boss', -a denoting female, -e denoting male) rather than "Jefe/Jefa" (Medel, 2022);**
- **"you" instead of gendered language (Lind Palicki & Svensson, 2023; Philippopoulos, 2023);**
- **singular "they" in English and the neologistic pronoun "hen" in Swedish, both functioning as e.g., an indefinite pronoun when a specific person's gender is unknown, and as a universal gender-neutral pronoun (Saguy & Williams, 2021; Vergoossen et al., 2020).**

This brief and far from conclusive list shows that strategies used involve both, on the one hand, making gender explicit and rendering the feminine on a par with the masculine, and on the other hand, not using gendered words and expressions at all. Indeed, recommendations highlight the importance of determining whether gendering is relevant in any given setting (Milles, 2012). All of these linguistic practices involve interventions into norms and power structures.

Other language issues in relation to non-discrimination and equity concern which terms to use to refer to groups of people and whether these can be changed through language planning (Vogel, 2019), and if people-first (e.g., *people with disabilities*) or identity-first (e.g., *disabled people*) language is to be used (Dunn & Andrews, 2015). This research shows conflicting views regarding terminology and challenges involved in attempts to change the terminology.

Taking a broader view, linguistic equity is an aspect of, and perhaps even a prerequisite for, a globally sustainable society. For instance,

writing from a multilingualism perspective, Fettes (2023) critiques the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) and their 'language blindness' (Fettes, 2023, p. 22). Fettes writes that "The implication is that the choice of language for various social domains really doesn't matter very much; development is development in whatever language it takes place. But this stance is clearly aligned with an outdated development paradigm – one deeply implicated in creating and perpetuating the problems that the SDGs are intended to solve." (Fettes, 2023, p. 22). Instead, Fettes argues in favour of a much more radical language agenda, focusing on "language solutions for a sustainable world". This is precisely what the present article hopes to contribute to, by investigating Nonclusion in text and image.

Material and Method

The material that we analyse in this paper is the video clip *Universellut formning – så fungerar det* ('Universal Design – This is How It Works'), published by the Swedish Agency for Participation on YouTube in 2018. It is 3 minutes and 44 seconds long. The Agency's description of the video clip on YouTube is as follows (our translation): "The video clip describes what Universal Design is, using animation. It gives different examples from everyday life where Universal Design can be applied."

The video clip begins by examples of people going about their everyday life, starting with three examples of things that do not work well. Next, UD is introduced and explained. The video clip ends by returning to the problematic events at the beginning of the film, now showing how well they work when UD is applied.

We have chosen this video clip because it is not only *about* UD but also an example *of* UD, that is, of how UD is applied in communication. This article analyses how that is achieved.

Methodologically, we have started from the Nonclusion components identified by Hedvall et al. (2022), and we have attempted to identify them in the video clip, by taking note of what both the text (in the form of identical voice-overs and subtitles) and the images (a simple animation) do. Through this process we have identified those Nonclusion components which are of relevance to communication through text and image, and left out those which are more specifically relevant to the designed and built environment (see Hedvall and Ericsson in this volume).

We have translated all texts into English from Swedish.

Developing Situation as a Component of Nonclusion

Models of the relationship between people and their environments and situational contexts have shown how people's actions are the outcome of intricate interdependences between people and their surroundings (Hedvall, 2009; Imrie, 2015; Lid, 2013). Such lines of thought are behind Situation, which is described in this section and proposed as an additional Nonclusion component.

Leason's (2024) work on the concept of 'extreme users' in inclusive and user-centred design in Oral Health is also of importance to Situation. Leason states that "the value in diverging from individual trait-based categorisation and instead identifying individuals or groups based on specific situations, patterns of use, or behaviours was recognised as constructive" (Leason, 2024, p. 51). That is, in

certain settings it may be better to focus on situational factors rather than people and their characteristics.

The video clip *Universellut formning – så fungerar det* ('Universal Design – This is How It Works') starts with three examples of things that do not work well. The first is shown here as Example 1.

Text (voice-over and subtitles)		Images
1	Imagine that you're on your way to work.	**Togetherwithline 1:**
2	You have an important meeting where you're going to give a presentation.	
3	You're a little tense and nervous.	
4	The meeting starts at nine o'clock.	**Togetherwithline 5:**
5	But when you're going to buy a bus ticket there's a problem.	
6	Because the text is small and the instructions are unclear.	
7	It's hard to understand what you're supposed to do.	

Example 1. Bus ticket.

In Example 1, the images show a frowning person looking at their watch, moving straight ahead (to the right in the video clip) and stopping by a ticket machine. The text starts by setting the scene: what the person, i.e., *you*, are doing (*on your way to work*, *to give a presentation* at *an important meeting*), and how you are feeling (*a little tense and nervous*). Then, line 5 states that *when you're going to buy a bus ticket there's a problem*. Lines 6 and 7 continue by

explaining the problem: *the text is small and the instructions are unclear* and *It's hard to understand what you're supposed to do*.

The difficulty of buying a bus ticket is here placed not in the individual but in the environment: the problem is caused by the text being (too) small and the instructions being unclear. The problem is presumably also exacerbated by the stressfulness outlined initially. This way of portraying what is going on is an example of what we propose as the Situation component of Nonclusion. Rather than locating an issue within the individual, Situation encourages focus to be placed on constraints given by the built and designed environment and various contextual factors.
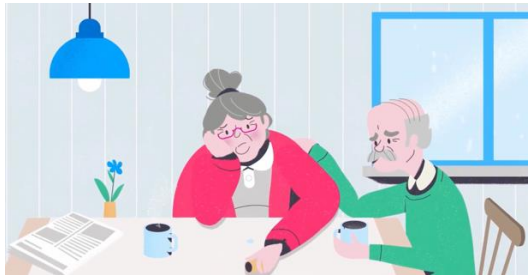
A constructed alternative to line 6 may further help explain *Situation*: a formulation such as Because *you have poor eyesight and cognitive difficulties with understanding instructions* is not an example of Situation and Nonclusion, as it ignores situational factors and locates shortcomings of the environment within the individual.

In Example 2, Lines 1–3 set the scene, thereby giving contextual factors such as where you are (*in school*, *in the assembly hall)*, what day it is *(the first day of term*), how you're feeling *(excited*), and the activity that's taking place (*the headmaster welcomes everyone* and *gives information*). The problem being illustrated is given in lines 4–5 as *but no microphone is being used*. *So, you can't hear what is being said*. Again, this is an example of Situation by locating the issue in the environment, that is, the fact that no microphone is used. By way of contrast, a variant of line 4 that does not use Situation, and is thereby not nonclusive, could be formulated as *but you're hard of hearing*.

Text (voice-over and subtitles)		Images
1	Imagine that you're in school and it's the first day of term.	**Together with line 1:**
2	You're excited and look forward to the new term.	
3	The headmaster welcomes everyone in the assembly hall and gives information about the new year.	**Together with line 4:**
4	But no microphone is being used.	
5	So, you can't hear what is being said.	

Example 2. Welcome.

In Example 3, line 1 gives contextual information regarding what has happened (*your medicine has run out*) and what needs to be done (*you need to see your GP to get a new prescription*). The problem being illustrated here is given by line 2 as *It's slippery outside and your GP is a few kilometers away*. This is an example of Situation as it places the issue in the environment, here in the form of weather conditions and the distant location of the GP. A contrastive formulation, which does not rely on Nonclusion, could be the following alternative to line 2: *You have trouble walking*.

Text (voice-over and subtitles)		Images
1	Or, imagine that your medicine has run out and you need to see your GP to get a new prescription.	**Together with line 2:**
2	It's slippery outside and your GP is a few kilometers away.	

3	You simply don't know what to do.	

Example 3. Medicine.

Summing up, the Situation component of Nonclusion encourages focus to be placed on contextual factors rather than individuals and their properties. By focusing on contextual factors, it becomes evident how the environment constrains or enables people's actions and participation.

Non-Categorisation as a Component of Nonclusion

Categorisation[1], such as dividing people into different groups ("women" and "men", or "normal" and "abnormal"), is an active process (Hornscheidt, 2009), made by someone to someone in a particular setting. Categorisation is carried out by semiotic means (Kress, 2010), such as through language, design, or architecture. It has the effect of " stabiliz[ing] the social world in particular ways" and as such "has far-reaching consequences" by providing "the legitimation of present and future actions, processes, judgements and valuations" (Kress, 2010, p. 122). Consequently, recommendations regarding equity through language highlight the importance of only using categorisation when relevant (Lind Palicki & Svensson, 2023; Milles, 2012). The Nonclusion component Non-Categorisation concerns one specific aspect of this (without proposing that categorisation be avoided altogether).

In the video clip *Universellut formning – så fungerar det* ('Universal Design – This is How It Works'), one way in which non-categorisation

---

[1]*Some authors use the term classification. Categorisation and classification are treated as synonymous in this article.*

is achieved is through the use of the pronoun *you*. This is seen in the text in Examples 1–3 above, as highlighted in Example 4.

a)	*Imagine that you're on your way to work*, etc. (from Example 1)
b)	*Imagine that you're in school and it's the first day of term*, etc. (from Example 2)
c)	*Or, imagine that your medicine has run out and you need to see your GP to get a new prescription*, etc. (from Example 3)

Example 4. You.

This use of *you* is an example of Non-Categorisation. It is the same strategy as the use of *you* in avoiding gendered language (Lind Palicki & Svensson, 2023; Philippopoulos, 2023). It can be contrasted with various ways of categorising: a) *a woman/a black-haired woman with glasses is on her way to work*, b) *a teenager/a male pupil is in school*, c) *a woman's/an elderly woman's medicine*, etc. Note, however, that the images in the video clip categorise in a way that the text does not: we can infer categorisations of the people in the images in Examples 1–3 according to gender, age, etc. This illustrates how categorisation is unavoidable in images such as these, in a way that it is not in text. Perhaps the combination of the text and image in the video clip can be interpreted as categorisation being seen as both relevant and not relevant, or that the overall intention is to show human variation (see further the Variation component of Nonclusion below).

Another illustration of Non-Categorisation in the video clip is given by the bus ticket example. As can be seen in Example 1, the troublesome situation of buying a bus ticket in lines 1–7 is accompanied by images showing the upper body of *you*. This upper body view enables facial expressions and arm movements, illustrating the events in lines 1–7. Following this, the screen view zooms out to show the whole person,

while the voice-over and subtitles state that after many attempts you finally get your ticket. Next, the events in Example 5 occur.

Text (voice-over and subtitles)	Images
1 But then you still can't get on the bus.	 Men då kommer du ändå inte på bussen.

Example 5. The bus.

The fact that *you* use a wheelchair is relevant in relation to *you* not getting on the bus in Example 5, but irrelevant in relation to the same person buying a bus ticket in Example 1. The video clip conveys this by zooming in (Example 1) and out (Example 5).

Summing up, the Non-Categorisation component of Nonclusion encourages a critical approach to categorisations of people, questioning unnecessary, routine, or harmful categorisations.

Variation as a Component of Nonclusion

In contrast with the idea of people being categorisable as either belonging to a norm or deviating from it, which is a social construction (Davis, 2017), Rose (2015) reveals how the average human body does not exist. Similarly, critical approaches to norms such as compulsory able-bodiedness and heteronormativity (L.Hornscheidt, 2015; McRuer, 2017) have shown how seemingly natural ideas of people as either "normal" or "abnormal" are in fact constructed and function as ways of maintaining power asymmetries between people. The

Variation component of Nonclusion is about this, and resists norm/deviation ways of thinking by instead recognising and valuing human variation.

Following upon the three cases in the video clip of things that do not work well, the video continues as depicted in Example 6.

Text (voice-over and subtitles)		Images
1	We're all different, with different needs, conditions and abilities.	Vi är alla olika; med olika behov, förutsättningar och funktionsförmågor.
2	Society must therefore be designed so that everyone can be included[2] and be enabled to participate.	Samhället måste därför utformas, så att alla kan inkluderas och få möjligheter att vara delaktiga i det.
3	Universal Design is about taking people's different needs and conditions into account.	TORGE Universell utformning handlar om att ta hänsyn till människors olika behov och förutsättningar.

Example 6. Universal Design.

---

[2] *See Hedvall and Ericsson (in this volume) for a critique of 'inclusion'.*

In Example 6, human variation is conveyed in line 1 through *We're all different, with different needs, conditions and abilities*. Human variation is also conveyed visually (see all three images in Example 6), through people of different ages, hair colour, skin colour, carrying suitcases, walking prams, using a cane or a walker or a guide dog, etc. Rather than conveying that some people conform to a norm, for which the environment is built and designed, while other people do not, the images instead convey that all people vary in relation to each other. This human variation is met by certain variation in the environment as depicted in the images: a level ground, a ramp, and a set of steps.

Summing up, the Variation component of Nonclusion encourages the recognition of human variation, and the necessity of meeting human variation by variation in the designed and built environment, and highlights the importance of conveying this variation through text and image. Variation involves both temporary and more permanent variation, in both people and the environment, and opens up for new ways of being in the world and interacting with each other.

Conclusion

Nonclusion highlights human variation and resists unnecessary categorisations of bodies and roles, thereby creating new possibilities for how people relate to each other and to the environment. Using a video clip about Universal Design this article has identified three ways in which Nonclusion can be conveyed through text and image. These are Situation, Non-Categorisation, and Variation, of which Situation is proposed as a new Nonclusion component in this article, adding to our previous work (Hedvall et al., 2022). The three components can be briefly explained as follows:

- **Situation encourages focus to be placed on contextual factors rather than individuals and their properties.**
- **Non-Categorisation encourages a critical approach to categorisations of people, questioning unnecessary, routine, or harmful categorisations.**
- **Variation encourages the recognition of human variation, and the necessity of meeting human variation by variation in the designed and built environment, and highlights the importance of conveying this variation through text and image.**

All three components are of importance to anyone communicating about people in relation to the built and designed environment. Specifically, policy development in areas such as Social Sustainability, Disability Rights, Gender Equality, and Age-Friendly Cities and Communities will benefit from incorporating these nonclusive components.

References

Abbou, J. (2023). Inclusive writing: Tracing the transnational history of a French controversy. Gender and Language, 17(2), 148–173. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.20021

Burnett, H., & Pozniak, C. (2021). Political dimensions of gender inclusive writing in Parisian universities. Journal of Sociolinguistics, 25(5), 808–831. https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12489

Davis, L. J. (2017). Introduction: Disability, normality, and power. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), The Disability Studies Reader (5th edition, pp. 1–14). Routledge.

Dunn, D. S., & Andrews, E. E. (2015). Person-first and identity-first language: Developing psychologists' cultural competence using disability language. American Psychologist, 70(3), 255–264. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038636

Elmiger, D. (2021). Y a-t-il un guide dans la rédaction ? GLAD!. Revue sur le langage, le genre, les sexualités, 10, Article 10. https://doi.org/10.4000/glad.2800

Fairclough, N. (2015). Language and power (3., [updated] ed.). Routledge.

Fettes, M. (2023). Language and the Sustainable Development Goals: Challenges to Language Policy and Planning. In L. J. McEntee-Atalianis & H. Tonkin (Eds.), Language and Sustainable Development (Vol. 32, pp. 11–26). Springer.

Grue, J. (2015). Disability and discourse analysis. Ashgate.

Hedvall, P.-O. (2009). Aktivitetsdiamanten: Modellering av en vidareutvecklad tillgänglighet. Certec - Institutionen för designvetenskaper, LTH, Lunds universitet.

Hedvall, P.-O., Price, M., Keller, J., & Ericsson, S. (2022). Towards 3rd Generation Universal Design: Exploring Nonclusive Design. In Transforming our World through Universal Design for Human Development, Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Universal Design, 7-9 September 2022, Brescia, Italy (pp. 85–92). IOS Press. https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI220824

Hornscheidt, A. (2009). Intersectional challenges to gender studies: Gender studies as a challenge to intersectionality. In C. Åsberg (Ed.), Gender Delight: Science, Knowledge, Culture, and Writing ... For Nina Lykke (pp. 33–46). Linkoping University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Tema Genus.

Hornscheidt, L. (2015). Trans_x_ing linguistic actions and linguistics. In J. Magnusson, K. Milles, & Z. Nikolaidou (Eds.), Gender constructions and language changes: Report from the eighth Nordic conference on language and gender (pp. 29–46). Sodertorn University.

Imrie, R. (2015). Space. In R. Adams, B. Reiss, & D. Serlin (Eds.), Keywords for Disability Studies (pp. 170–172). New York University Press.

Koutchadé, I. S., & Adanvoessi, F. (2016). Gender-inclusive Language and Female Assertive Idiolects in Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6(10), 1917–1922. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0610.04

Kress, G. R. (2010). Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication. Routledge.

Leason, I. (2024). Identifying 'Extremes' in Complex Systems; Critical and Systemic Perspectives on the Concept of Extreme Users from a Study in Oral Health. Design for All Institute of India, 19(1), 38–63.

Lid, I. M. (2013). Developing the theoretical content in Universal Design. Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 15(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2012.724445

Lind Palicki, L., & Svensson, A. (2023). Viktig svenska: Alla dom där språkfrågorna. Norstedts.

McRuer, R. (2017). Compulsory able-bodiedness and queer/disabled existence. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), The Disability Studies Reader (5th edition, pp. 396–405). Routledge.

Medel, M. L. (2022). Non-sexist Language in Vacancy Titles: A Proposal for Drafting and Translation in International Organisations. Journal of International Women's Studies, 23(5), 63–77.

Milles, K. (2012). Jämställt språk: En handbok i att skriva och tala jämställt (2. uppl.). Norstedt.

Philippopoulos, E. (2023). More than just pronouns -- gender-neutral and inclusive language in patient education materials: Suggestions for patient education librarians. Journal of the Medical Library Association, 111(3), 734–739. https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2023.1723

Rose, Todd. (2015). The end of average: How we succeed in a world that values sameness (First Edition.). HarperOne.

Saguy, A. C., & Williams, J. A. (2021). A Little Word That Means A Lot: A Reassessment of Singular They in a New Era of Gender Politics. Gender & Society, 36(1), 5–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243221105792

United Nations. (2015). Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20 Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf

Vergoossen, H. P., Renström, E. A., Lindqvist, A., & Gustafsson Sendén, M. (2020). Four Dimensions of Criticism Against Gender-Fair Language. Sex Roles, 83(5), 328–337. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01108-x

Vinu, T. (2019). An Inquisition into the Stratagem for Employing Gender Neutral Lexicons in Corporate Communication. Language in India, 19(6), 444–448.

Vogel, A. (2019). To evaluate corpus planning. A case of a Swedish language policy action concerning terms for disability. Current Issues in Language Planning, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2019.1601471

Wojahn, D. (2015). Språkaktivism: Diskussioner om feministiska språkförändringar i Sverige från 1960-talet till 2015. Uppsala University. https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-251351

Material

The video clip *Universellut formning – så fungerar det* ('Universal Design – This is How It Works') published by the Swedish Agency for Participation, <Accessed on April 3, 2024>.