Abstract: One often overlooked aspect in studies of democratization processes is the cultural function of the public sphere - as opposed to legal questions of freedom of speech, ownership, and economic regulations for the media, etc.

The structure of media language can change dramatically during times of social upheaval, both mirroring the social and in itself affecting society. Such discursive changes may have certain implications for how the readership will perceive of social roles in society - and in particular their own roles. This, in turn, may have implications for democracy: to what extent are the readership addressed as competent and active citizens, with the right to information and able to draw their own conclusions, and participate in opinion making and decision-making?

The seminar will focus on certain linguistic dimensions of newspaper language as they are represented in broadly defined news articles and opinion piece commentaries in Pravda, Nezavisimaia gazeta, Komsomol'skaia pravda and Izvestiia, during the critical time period of transition from totalitarianism to democracy: 1978-2003.

The linguistic aspects that shall be dealt with are: pragmatics, style and modality; transparency - as manifested in the presence or absence of explicit agency in texts, and modes of argumentation.

The results appear, against the background of unfavourable societal developments, both unexpected and promising.

Dr Rutger von Seth (42); PhD at the Department of Slavonic Studies (2008), University of Gothenburg. Licentiate thesis: on the problem of continuity and change in the Russian political history from ca 800 - 2000; doctoral dissertation: on developments in the Russian and Soviet public sphere - especially as mirrored in changes in press language in key dailies (Pravda, Komsomolskaia pravda; Nezavisimaia gazeta and Izvestiia), between the years 1978-2003; article: on changes in pragmatic, and modality aspects that have taken place in newspaper discourse, and which have implications for the readership's perceived citizen roles, between the years 1978-2003. To be published in Scandinavia's leading journal on media research - Nordicom.