

Descriptions of cloud services affect our reality

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Cloud services are now quite taken for granted in many people's everyday lives. What most people probably do not realise is that how we talk about these services is related to how they are actually perceived and taken for granted. Maria Lindh, new doctor at the University of Borås, has analysed these relationships.

"The language we use in the description of cloud services, and IT in general, legitimises them," says Maria Lindh. "Through words choice and expressions, a common understanding of cloud services is created, which legitimises the introduction of the new technology and makes us habituated to it. We do not question it because that may be perceived as being hostile to technology or backwards. It also makes us a little naive about technology; we do not always take things such as privacy issues seriously. As IT is so integrated into our lives, it is important to highlight these issues, so that awareness of them increases."

Her starting point in the thesis *Cloudy talks - Exploring accounts about [cloud computing](#)* is that language shapes our perception of reality and, for example, creates a picture of what we perceive a [cloud service](#) to be and how it can be used.

"I think that many cloud services are good and use them myself."

Maria Lindh's thesis is based on four articles; three of them are co-authored by one or two supervisors. Together, the articles create a whole. In the first, she has studied and analysed how IT is described in writings

and reports from the 1950s to the present. In the 1950s and 1960s, when computers were in their infancy, it was very much about expressing ideas about what IT could be used in terms that show how accessible and obvious they would be in everyone's daily life. A frequently-used word was "utility," something easily accessible and useful, much like water in the tap or electricity lines. Even then, there were also thoughts that IT would be used for everyday tasks such as shopping or paying the bills. This way of explaining and perceiving IT as a neutral tool is discussed in her thesis.

"In the second article, documentation about schools in a Swedish school organisation with thirty schools that was very early to implement Google Apps for Education was studied how they talked about the introduction and why they chose to use that particular service. One aspect of the use of this service in the school was privacy issues."

Contradictory confidentiality

The issue of privacy is, in the third article, further highlighted as Maria Lindh examined Google's privacy practices.

"They are contradictory," she says. "Google claims that they are not interested in the user's data without telling us what they mean by the term, while they collect all the information and make algorithmic profiles of all users and create a coherent picture of the user's search habits in all different media. Because students in the above-mentioned schools have their own search habits, it is not difficult to identify them."

In the fourth article, YouTube clips have been studied, among other things, in which leaders of the largest providers of cloud services describe their visions and their products. IT as a neutral tool is hardly discussed, but here the focus is on how services will change the lives of users. It is spoken tacitly or openly about the risk of falling behind and

not keeping pace with change if you do not use the services.

"These films are very stylish, with great music and other effects. Although they may have been made at an event for the industry, they are available to anyone on YouTube and given wide distribution. I see that the language used, with terms that the technology is revolutionary and life-changing, makes it more difficult to be critical and question the technology. In addition, we teach our children to use these services, in that they are self-evident in the school and in the home. The more data the services gather about us, the more knowledge is created about us to develop new services that developers deem to fit our future needs."

More information: Cloudy talks: Exploring accounts about cloud computing: [hb.diva-portal.org/smash/recor ... sf?pid=diva2:1050182](https://hb.diva-portal.org/smash/recor...sf?pid=diva2:1050182)

Provided by University of Borås

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