

Multilingual Education: a Swedish Perspective

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This chapter focuses on language policy issues related to education in multilingual Sweden. The linguistic ecology of present-day Sweden is characterised by the interaction of Swedish, the majority language, English, the global *lingua franca*, five officially recognised indigenous minority languages and almost 200 ‘immigrant’ minority languages with no official status. The prevalent use of English in certain domains, such as education, the business world, culture and entertainment, and an increasing number of speakers of Swedish as a second language have called for a more overt language policy to guide future political decisions in Sweden. Apart from regulating the roles of Swedish and English in the public domain and ensuring a high proficiency of Swedish among the population, such a policy should aim at promoting a balanced multilingualism vis-à-vis the minority languages in the country. In this context, educational strategies play a crucial role.

Multilingualism in Sweden

Multilingualism characterises multicultural societies all over the world, and Sweden is no exception. The Sami and Finnish-speaking minorities have inhabited Swedish territory for a long time, in the Sami case even before the Swedish-speaking majority. Nevertheless, the idea of Sweden as culturally homogeneous and monolingual prevails in the majority group. Hence, the status of the Swedish language has never really been contested, and Swedish has had a strong position as the national language of the country since the 16th century. Consequently, there has been no need for any legislation as far as the majority language is concerned, and in contrast to other European countries, such as France, the status of the national language has not been confirmed by law. In the European Union, the status of Swedish is nevertheless legally confirmed as one of the 20 official languages.

The status of the indigenous minority languages in Sweden is, however, officially recognised by law. In 1999, Sweden ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe 1995) and the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages

(Council of Europe 1992), by which Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli (Tornedal-Finnish), the variety of Finnish spoken at the border with Finland in the north of Sweden, are ensured status as minority languages. In addition, Romany Chib and Yiddish were given the status of official minority languages in Sweden within the same minority-language convention. As for the first three languages, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli, two Acts of Parliament have also guaranteed minority-language citizens the right to use their languages in their contacts with the administrative authorities and the courts in some of the northern communities of Sweden.

Apart from the officially recognised indigenous minority languages, there are almost 200 'immigrant' minority languages spoken among the Swedish population. Except for Finnish – the largest minority language, with approximately 250,000 speakers – these languages are not officially recognised as minority languages. Some widely spoken 'immigrant' languages with more than 100,000 speakers in Sweden are Arabic, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Farsi and Turkish, all of which far outnumber the indigenous minority languages (except Finnish) in terms of numbers of speakers.

There is also a considerable degree of bilingualism among the majority population. The knowledge of English is generally good, compared with most non-English-speaking countries in Europe. According to some estimates, 75 per cent of the population can read an English newspaper and manage an ordinary conversation in English (Josephson 2003). Many Swedes also have some knowledge of another European language taught in school, such as German, French or Spanish.

Language issues on the political agenda

The position of English in the Swedish speech community has actually become comparable to that of a *second language* rather than a *foreign language*, since many people in Sweden today use English on a daily basis in different contexts. This increasing use of English includes its substantial use for educational purposes, both in higher education and in secondary schools where instruction through the medium of English is becoming increasingly common.

Also in other domains such as banking, engineering, transportation, the use of English is increasing and in many Sweden-based international companies the language of internal communication is English. According to many linguists (see, for example, Telemann 1992, Hyltenstam 1999), there is a risk that an asymmetrical relationship, with a prominence of English in high-status domains, might threaten the position of Swedish as the national language to be used for all purposes and in all domains. This could result in a situation of diglossia with Swedish relegated to a low-status variety, used only in unofficial and private domains and deprived of its role as a complete language serving and uniting the whole of society. According to Hyltenstam (1999), such a development embodies the risk of increasing social inequity between groups with high English proficiency and access to prestigious positions and those with limited or no English proficiency, who will be excluded from important and powerful arenas in society.

The concern over the position and role of Swedish in today's multilingual Sweden resulted in a language policy bill that went before Parliament in December 2005 (Prop. 2005/06: 2). The rationale behind this proposal was the dramatic change in the language situation in Sweden in the following respects:

- English has won an increasingly strong position internationally, thereby also becoming an ever more important language in Sweden.
- Sweden has become an increasingly multilingual country, primarily because of immigration but also as a result of the elevation of five languages to the status of national minority languages.
- There are increasing demands in society at large for an ability to use language both orally and in writing.

With regard to the first issue, the increasingly strong position of English is, as already mentioned, considered to be a potential threat to the Swedish language. A switch to the exclusive use of English in certain contexts will, according to many critical voices, affect the development of Swedish in these areas. In the long run, this will give rise to domain losses; Swedish terms and concepts will no longer be produced, and the position of Swedish will weaken. At the same time, it is obvious that it is necessary to employ English in many contexts within and outside Swedish society, and an increasing proficiency in English is therefore needed in the Swedish population as a whole. The question of how the use and development of Swedish as an all-round language can be ensured while, at the same time, the employment of English is supported in all required contexts, is a delicate one. How can we make sure that everyone acquires the knowledge of English required, without negative effects on the proficiency of Swedish in the population at large?

As for the second point, an increasing proportion of the population in Sweden today speaks Swedish as a second language. This poses a serious challenge to the educational system, as it is essential for everyone to have an equally good opportunity to acquire the Swedish language in order to be able to fulfil linguistic needs for their private and working life in Sweden and to take an active part in democratic society. It also has an impact on language matters more broadly, for example on the view of new non-standard varieties of Swedish that are spoken on a multilingual basis or with a foreign accent.

As for the third point, questions like what a good command of spoken and written Swedish entails in a multilingual and multicultural society are of great importance. As a result of the increasing demands for an ability to use the language well both orally and in writing, it is becoming important that everyone – irrespective of linguistic or social background – is given the opportunity to acquire a rich, practical language. Changes in working life, the increasing length of education, and the emergence of a society in which information technology plays an important role call for more advanced language skills. Individuals lacking a good command of the written language will face serious problems in both working and private life, and the demands for good oral skills are increasing. At the same time, the disparities between social groups in terms of reading habits and the consumption of various media have widened over the past decade. These disparities affect the individual's opportunities to acquire the written language. Although the Swedish school system as a whole achieves

good results by international comparison, a not insignificant proportion of pupils leave school without adequate reading and writing skills. Questions related to what measures can be taken to ensure that *everyone* is able to develop a rich, practical language need to be addressed.

The four objectives of the new language policy, *Best language – a concerted language policy for Sweden* (Prop. 2005/06: 2), adopted by the Swedish Parliament in December 2005, are the following:

- Swedish is to be the main language in Sweden.
- Swedish is to be a complete language, serving and uniting society.
- Public Swedish is to be cultivated, simple and comprehensible.
- Everyone is to have a right to language: to develop and learn Swedish, to develop and use their own mother tongue and national minority language, and to have the opportunity to learn foreign languages.

According to the policymakers, the need to strengthen the Swedish language, the national minority languages, and Swedish sign language and to accommodate other general language policy issues calls for reinforced and coordinated organisation of language planning.¹ On the whole, the role of language in the Swedish educational system should be strengthened, and initiatives should be taken to develop language teaching in both Swedish and the various mother tongues. Other important language planning measures to be taken are related to actions encouraging reading and promoting dialects and language variation. Moreover, in research and postgraduate education, the parallel use of Swedish and English and other languages should be promoted to meet the demands of increased internationalisation in higher education.

In conclusion, the new language policy stresses the need to strengthen Swedish while, at the same time, the importance of English and other languages is acknowledged. Apart from the need for *both* English and Swedish in today's Sweden, a language policy fostering the climate for a balanced multilingualism vis-à-vis all the minority languages in the country today is advocated.

Majority versus minority language

One of the most delicate issues, when it comes to the implementation of this policy, concerns the two roles of Swedish in this context – as a *minority* language vis-à-vis English, the powerful world language, and as a *majority* language vis-à-vis the indigenous and immigrant minority languages in Sweden. However, according to the policymakers, there is not necessarily a contradiction between a strong unifying principal language and the celebrating of linguistic diversity.

This is a stance in line with the language policy of the European Union – a strong advocate of multilingualism, as far as the indigenous languages of so-called 'national' minorities are concerned. In Europe about 40 million people speak a language other than the dominant language of the country where they reside, as their mother tongue. But with regard to non-European 'immigrant'

¹ A new authority for language planning, *Språkrådet* (The Language Council), was established on 1 July 2006.

languages in Europe, the EU has shown little interest. Since there is no sharp border between new and old minorities, the status of immigrant minority languages in the Union will inevitably have to be included in the common language policy agenda in the near future.

Although the EU has been a strong opponent of the dominance of English, the status of English as a *lingua franca* in the EU is generally acknowledged. Nevertheless, France, Germany and the Nordic countries have taken measures to strengthen their national languages. This reflects a general trend in language policy at the beginning of the 21st century, with the forces of localisation counterbalancing the forces of globalisation in order to ensure the vitality and viability of local cultures and languages. Globalisation manifested in the increasingly worldwide use of English is a result of the strong dominance of the United States in technological, media-cultural and scientific domains. Outside Europe, nations in Asia, Latin America and Africa are involved in the same defensive movement locally (Alexander 2004).

Such policies are sometimes considered nationalistic, expressing language chauvinism or sheer paranoia. But, to quote Neville Alexander, a well-known South African linguist, it could be a question of survival. Contesting the dominant role of the former colonial languages vis-à-vis the indigenous languages in many countries in Africa, Alexander (2004: 5) reminds us of the fact that

...this question does not derive from some narrow-minded national or ethnic chauvinist imperative. It is based firmly on the ground of (linguistic) human rights in a world where cultural diversity is slowly beginning to be seen as just as important for the survival of the human species as are biological and political diversity respectively...

In African countries south of the Sahara, no government can claim that the population in general has a sufficient command of the so-called 'official' language, i.e. the former colonial language, to be able to carry out daily transactions in it. Still, these languages are used in many cases as the main medium of instruction in most educational contexts from primary school through university. Even though there are a number of factors contributing to the negative educational results in many developing countries, one can hardly disregard the fact that students in such contexts often have no, or very limited, understanding of the language of instruction. After all, it is a well-known and seldom-contested fact that learning is more successful in a language that one can understand.

Multilingualism – a challenge to the educational system

The multilingualism that Sweden and many Western European countries face today as a result of the considerable influx of immigrants during the last fifty years, offers a gigantic challenge to the educational system at all levels. As an example, the number of students in compulsory schools in Sweden with a mother tongue other than Swedish increased by 30 per cent from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. At a national level, 14.5 per cent of the students in compulsory school today have what in official statistics is referred to as a

‘foreign background’. This implies either that (i) the students themselves were born abroad of foreign parents or that (ii) both their parents were born abroad. In urban settings with high proportions of people with foreign backgrounds, bilingual students with mother tongues other than Swedish make up between 80 and 95 per cent of the students in many classes. In Table 1 the ten largest mother tongues represented in Swedish compulsory schools according to official statistics from 2004 are listed (Skolverket 2005a).

Table 1. Minority language students in Swedish compulsory school 2003/04

Language	Number of students	% of all students
1. Albanian	7 634	0.7
2. Arabic	24 053	2.3
3. Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian	14 950	1.4
4. English	7 250	0.7
5. Farsi	6 537	0.6
6. Finnish	9 992	1.0
7. Kurdish	5 181	0.5
8. Somali	4 396	0.4
9. Spanish	10 074	1.0
10. Turkish	5 183	0.5
11. Other languages (122)	48 065	4.6
12. Unspecified languages	350	0.03

As shown in Table 1, multilingualism is extensive in Swedish schools; more than 140 mother tongues are spoken by students with backgrounds from all over the world. But the school situation of these students is extremely varied. Many students are balanced bilingual or even multilingual with a high proficiency in Swedish already when they start school, while other students’ proficiency in their mother tongue and Swedish varies. Some are born in Sweden, others have recently arrived, some live in areas with a large proportion of ethnic Swedes, while others live in socio-economically and ethnically segregated areas having little contact with the Swedish language in their daily lives. Some have acquired literacy skills in their mother tongue before arriving in Sweden, while others have to deal with an abrupt language switch and an interrupted development of their mother tongue and need to build literacy skills and subject knowledge in a new language. To support the language and academic development of the students in this extremely heterogeneous group, several measures have been taken in terms of educational accommodation.

Fostering bilingual development at school

Mother tongue development

Under the so-called home language reform, which came into force in 1977, school authorities were obliged to grant mother tongue provision at least two hours weekly for those students who wanted it (Municio 1987, Tuomela and Hyltenstam 1996, Winsa 1999, Narrowe 1998). Supporting the mother tongue for the personal, cognitive and academic development of the students and

preserving the cultural identity of students belonging to other ethnic groups then became an important educational goal. Also, in pre-school education, children with a mother tongue other than Swedish were given the opportunity to develop mastery in their home language. Today, mother tongue studies is a school subject in its own right at both compulsory comprehensive and upper secondary levels. In addition, minority-language students should be offered mother tongue study guidance to have the content of the classes explained.

Since the regulations for home-language instruction were first introduced, there have been some changes. According to the current regulations, such tuition – currently called mother tongue instruction – is only offered for groups of a minimum of five students and to students whose language is used on a daily basis in their homes. These restrictions do not, however, apply to students belonging to the indigenous minority groups. Another change concerns the scheduling of the mother tongue tuition, which used to take place as part of the regular school day. Nowadays, this instruction is offered almost exclusively outside the regular curriculum, at the close of the ordinary school day. As a consequence of this change, mother tongue teachers, ambulating between different schools, are often marginalised and isolated, due to limited social contact with other teachers. This impedes the integration of mother tongue instruction with other subjects. On the whole, the value of this instruction, which in many schools has a low status, is often questioned in the public debate. Mother tongue education has also suffered from a lack of trained teachers in many languages and serious implementation problems due to weak curricular support. These circumstances, and a general cutback in the school sector, have resulted in a considerable decrease in mother tongue education during the 1990s.

To diminish the obvious gap between the intentions behind the reform and the way it was implemented, the government in 2001 commissioned the National Agency for Education to investigate what changes in the rules and regulations needed to be made to improve the situation. A nationwide survey of the scope and organisation of mother tongue assistance and instruction in Swedish municipalities was carried out, alongside an investigation regarding the attitudes towards mother tongue education and its integration, diversity and multilingualism in Swedish schools. In addition, a survey of current research on mother tongue instruction in Sweden and of the development of mother tongue assistance in pre-school education from 1970 to 2000 was undertaken.

In 2002, the National Agency for Education presented its report *More Languages – More Opportunities* (National Agency for Education 2002) in which several proposals for the improvement of mother tongue support were put forward. These included measures for the integration of mother tongue instruction into the daily school schedule by providing instruction in different school subjects in the students' mother tongues. To bring about a necessary change in attitudes, the Agency proposed measures for the dissemination of knowledge about the value of mother tongue education to civil servants and decision-makers. Moreover, the need for new techniques and teaching methods and continued work in support of the development and production of teaching aids in different languages was emphasised. Other prerequisites for successful

mother tongue education, according to the National Agency, were increased actions for the training and integration of multilingual teachers. The proposals focused on mother tongue instruction and its important role in the fulfilment of educational goals in multicultural and multilingual Sweden's knowledge development. Whether actions taken as a result of this renewed concern for mother tongue instruction will result in any change in the priorities and attitudes towards bilingual education in Swedish schools remains to be seen.

Second language development

As for the need of second language support, there was an early demand for special Swedish tuition for students with other mother tongues. Thus, Swedish as a Second Language was introduced as an auxiliary subject to support and enhance development in the majority language for bilingual students already in the late 1960s. This effort has not, however, been altogether successful, due to lack of official guidelines and to a shortage of trained teachers and negligence on the part of the municipalities in terms of securing quality. Knowledge in the field of second language acquisition and bilingual development is still limited among teachers, school administrators and principals who fail to satisfy the specific needs of bilingual students, many of whom are put in mainstream instruction without any support or professional guidance from specially trained teachers.

After years of reported malpractice in many schools, Swedish as a Second Language was established in 1995 as a school subject in its own right in the regular curriculum. The intention was that this new subject should replace that of Swedish as a mother tongue for those bilingual students who needed it, offering them an opportunity to develop the Swedish language on a long-term basis and on their own terms under the guidance of specially trained teachers.

In spite of the formal status that this new subject was awarded in 1995, the implementation and status problems still persist, and bilingual students continue to perform at a significantly lower level than their monolingual peers. As an example, more than one in five students with a mother tongue other than Swedish in grade nine fails to qualify to enter a national programme in upper secondary school. This is more than twice as many as among majority-language students (Skolverket 2005a: 6, 2005b: 50). The same tendency is clear in upper secondary school where 77.2 per cent of students with ethnic Swedish backgrounds pass their exams within the required time period. For students with minority backgrounds the corresponding figure is 62.8 (Skolverket 2005b: 86).

To interpret the performance gap between native and foreign background students, a number of factors must be taken into account. One important factor is socio-economic background, the effect of which in this context is measured in terms of (1) the parents' level of education, (2) the parents' employment status and (3) the family situation (lone versus married/cohabiting parents). In all three respects, there are important distributional differences between the groups, with an overrepresentation of low-educated, unemployed and lone parents among students with a foreign background. Thus, according to the

National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2005b: 10), a substantial part of the performance gap between native and foreign background students can be explained by differences in socio-economic factors rather than in the foreign background as such. For students who have arrived in Sweden during their school years, however, the differences in performance vis-à-vis native background students remain even after factors related to socio-economic background have been taken into account.

In official school statistics, problems associated with comparisons between groups of different national origin are seldom highlighted. As pointed out by the sociolinguist Sally Boyd (1993) the simple fact that immigrants are immigrants makes it difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to decide their position in a hierarchy of social stratification based on occupation, education or income before or after immigration. The fact that the comparisons involve groups from different parts of the world makes them even more risky. Moreover, the comparability between native-born parents and foreign-born parents with respect to employment in the host country is problematic, since discrimination in the labour market makes unemployment rates much higher among immigrants compared with native-born citizens in many countries.

The North American sociologist Cynthia Feliciano (2006a, b) has drawn attention to problems related to measures concerning educational background when dealing with the disparities in educational outcomes by national origin in the US. In the following quotation, she points to the fact that the absolute level of educational attainment of immigrants will not tell us where they were situated in the class distributions in their respective countries of origin.

In fact, by only considering absolute levels of educational attainment, researchers inadvertently assume the same level of schooling in one country is equivalent to that level in another country. However, educational opportunities and distributions vary widely across countries. For example, the meaning of a high school degree in a country where only 20 percent of the population earns one is likely to be much different than in a country where over half the population not only earns a high school degree, but also goes on to college (Feliciano 2006a: 2).

As pointed out by Feliciano, children tend to do well in school if the group they belong to was of relatively high status prior to migration. Consequently groups which are not well educated by Swedish standards² could very well be considered highly educated in their home countries and therefore be expected to do well in school also in Sweden. Analyses based on absolute comparisons of socio-economic status, between students with an ethnic Swedish background and those with a foreign background measured in terms of parents' educational level, therefore tend to underestimate the potentials of foreign-background students, and consequently underrate the negative effects of a foreign background such as language problems. In fact, nobody knows what these students could achieve if they had complete mastery of the language of instruction.

² In Sweden, 75 per cent of the population between 16 and 65 years of age has some kind of post-secondary schooling (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2005).

But language issues are not the only difficulties facing minority students at school. Evaluations and surveys carried out by the National Agency for Education as well as recent educational research (Lahdenperä 1997, Parszyk 1999, Haglund 2005) point to other persistent problems related to the school situation of minority-language students. Several studies indicate that the experiences and resources of this group of students are not generally acknowledged and valued in Swedish schools, and that bilingualism is not generally considered an asset (cf. Haglund 2005, Otterup 2005). Moreover, many bilingual students have to face negative attitudes towards varieties of Swedish, typical of multilingual urban communities, which are often associated with ‘poor’ and ‘bad’ Swedish. According to recent research, the message sent to many minority students seems to be that they should leave their ethnicity behind and become ‘Swedish’ as quickly as possible.

In an ethnographic study, Charlotte Haglund (2005), in her field work among adolescents in a Swedish multilingual suburb, uncovers links between the microlevel of everyday verbal interaction between students and teachers and the macrolevel of traditional institutional order. Haglund also shows how stereotypes related to language and culture manifested inside and outside school are often contested in counter-discourses by the adolescents. This takes place in peer group interactions in which they can legitimise themselves and escape marginalisation. In individual accounts, however, there is evidence of more submissive responses providing evidence of ambivalence and compliance. Structures of domination and discrimination are displayed in many different ways, as shown in the following extracts from teacher-student interaction involving Turkish-speaking adolescents (Haglund 2005: 96):

a) One (Turkish-speaking) adolescent sits in the middle of the classroom. He seems bored. He throws crumbs from an eraser at his peers’ backs.

Vera [T]: Sluta kasta, fattar du inte svenska? Måste jag prata med dig på kinesiska eller?

Stop throwing, don’t you understand Swedish? Do I have to talk to you in Chinese or what?

b) On one occasion at gym class it takes quite some time for some of the adolescents to get started. The teacher tells one (Turkish-speaking) adolescent to hurry up.

John [T]: Mañana? [spanska] Har du problem att förstå svenska eller vad är det? Jag tror vi måste påminna om några saker här, ni är inte i Turkiet nu, vet ni. Det här är inte Konya, så rör på benen.

Mañana? [Spanish] Do you have trouble understanding Swedish or what’s the matter? I think we need to remedy a few things here. You’re not in Turkey now, you know. This is not Konya, so move your legs.

c) Leah complains during a students’ council meeting about the general rule at school that students cannot wear jackets in class. The dispute breaks out again a few days later at gym class.

Leah: Kan vi inte få ha på oss våra jackor?

We can’t wear jackets?

John: Inte ens i Turkiet får du ha på dig jacka.

Not even in Turkey can you wear jackets.

The way in which everyday verbal interaction between students and teachers is related to the macro level of institutional order is also demonstrated in a study carried out by Sunier (2004). Here the attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue among Turkish pupils in schools in London, Berlin, Rotterdam and Paris are explored. Sunier found that the Turkish pupils in the London and Berlin schools switched between Turkish and the national language on a regular basis both inside and outside school. In the Rotterdam school, however, the use of Turkish was less common, especially in the classroom, where almost no Turkish was used. In the Paris school, most Turkish pupils refrained from speaking Turkish altogether during school hours. In spite of differences in terms of the legitimate use of Turkish within the school domain, there was a strong emphasis on the dominant role of the national language in all four schools. As two teachers from the German and Dutch schools respectively put it:

We have pupils at this school from a variety of cultural backgrounds. They have their particularities, which we should acknowledge, but it is our policy that since this is a Dutch school, Dutch is the language with which we communicate with each other. Only by learning Dutch can you be successful and participate in our society (Sunier 2004: 156).

Their speaking Turkish gets on my nerves: in my lessons they are not allowed to do so. They should adapt themselves more (Sunier 2004: 154).

In France, attention to the mother tongue is considered incongruent with the French republican model and counterproductive in terms of integration. School is the public arena where republican principles should be enforced, and learning French as quickly as possible is the key to civil competence and the only way to integration. This can explain the fact that the most consistent and explicit assimilationist policy was implemented in the Paris school. The dominant position of French was largely unchallenged, and was also internalised by minority pupils who did not wish to be considered as outsiders.

Enriching versus compensatory educational programmes

In bilingual research, the issue of the academic success of minority-language students is often discussed in relation to the concepts of additive and subtractive bilingualism (Lambert 1977). Additive bilingualism refers to situations where a second language is added and used parallel to the first in ways that enrich personal and cognitive development. Subtractive bilingualism, on the other hand, refers to situations in which an additional language is acquired at the expense of the language already acquired, with negative effects on cognitive growth and personal development.

This distinction is related to two different types of educational programmes for bilingual students, referred to as enrichment and compensatory programmes (Genesee 1987). Enrichment programmes have an additive approach aimed at developing and building on the students' language resources in both their languages in a long-term perspective. Compensatory programmes, on the other hand, aim at a quick transition to the mainstream. This often implies short-term supportive instruction in the students' first language and so-called 'pull-out' instruction in the majority language as a second language before the students are transferred into mainstream classes.

According to bilingual researchers Thomas and Collier (1997) (Collier and Thomas 2002), who have carried out the most comprehensive longitudinal study of bilingual students' academic success to date in the US, it is only in enrichment programmes that bilingual students stand a chance of achieving at the level of majority students. In some of these programmes, in which the minority-language students have the possibility of learning in both their languages from primary through upper secondary school and where all teachers have second language competence, they actually perform above the level of the average native English-speaking pupils after eleven years of schooling. According to Thomas and Collier, subject instruction in the minority students' mother tongues, at least through grade five or six, is the most important factor for academic success for students with limited proficiency in the majority language. In view of the fact that it takes between five and ten years to develop school-related skills in a second language up to the level of a native-speaker student (Collier and Thomas 2002), this is not surprising.

Built on long-term investments in mother tongue and second language tuition, the Swedish model, at least at the curricular level, can be regarded as an enrichment model. Nevertheless, there are, as we have seen, after thirty years of bilingual instructional practice, severe implementation problems in connection with this model. The failure to provide for the linguistic needs of bilingual students is partly explained by the low status associated with the two school subjects introduced to support this group of students, subjects which are poorly integrated into the mainstream curriculum. As for other school subjects, no curricular or methodological accommodations have been made. School leaders, like the rest of the teaching staff, often regard the educational needs of bilingual students as a concern for mother tongue and Swedish as second language teachers only. In the rest of the classrooms, where students spend most of their school time and where most of the learning should take place, things have not changed.

A truly responsive educational vision, in terms of the integration of language and content learning in a multilingual and multicultural education for all students, is lacking. This is true not only of Sweden but of many industrialised Western societies with a large-scale presence of immigrants. As pointed out by Mohan et al. (2004: 2) in their account of the situation in Australia, Canada and England, the increasing number of English (or any other majority language) learners in school is part of 'a global, large-scale, long-term change'. Still, in many contexts this development is seen 'as an accidental peripheral happening, a temporary local inconvenience or an interruption in the normal course of affairs' (ibid.). According to Mohan et al., the fact that many educational systems in highly developed countries fail to serve the needs of large groups of minority-language students is explained by a number of prevailing myths about the education of language minorities. These myths are widespread and also seem to contribute to the maintenance of the linguistic hegemony of the majority in different ways. As examples of such myths they mention the following (ibid.):

- Language minorities will acquire an education and a second language easily and quickly simply by exposure.

- All that language minorities need is a basic course in the second language.
- The education of language minorities can safely be isolated from the mainstream of education.
- Educational changes for the benefit of the language minority students will happen automatically or by the efforts of second language teachers or bilingual teachers acting without curricular change, institutional support or professional development.

How to cater for bilingual students' specific needs of language training in Swedish schools in the most appropriate way has recently become a question of political and ideological debate, with voices raised *against* the provision of Swedish as a second language. The rationale behind such views is a striving for universalism and equal educational opportunities for all students. But, as pointed out by critical multiculturalists (Lewis 2001), equalisation of educational opportunity is not achieved by difference blindness, neglecting important differences in students in terms of culture, language, class, race, gender and ethnicity, and treating all students as if they were the same. Such implementations of equal treatment will inevitably produce inequalities instead.

According to the well-known multicultural educator Sonia Nieto (2000: 29), approaches in favour of equalisation should 'accept and affirm the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect'. When accommodations to linguistically diverse students are dismissed with reference to equalisation of educational opportunity, universalism is used as an instrument for normalisation. For large groups of students, this will result in native-language loss and social and economic subordination. One example of such striving for normalisation in the Swedish context is when the home-language programme is criticised for emphasising different cultures and languages and called into question as part of a policy contributing to the process of 'othering' (Narrowe 1998). As pointed out by Jenelle Reeves (2004), referring to the school situation for linguistically diverse students in the US, there is a need for rethinking the traditional approaches for equalising educational opportunities in multicultural and multilingual settings. Schools have to find multiple pathways to represent their multiplicity in their educational opportunities instead of pretending that differences do not matter. Quoting Young (1990: 134), Reeves calls for a participatory educational opportunity, which would 'denormalise the way institutions formulate their rules by revealing the plural circumstances and needs that exist, or ought to exist, within them'.

Everyday versus school-related language use

As long as issues related to the language development of bilingual students are not considered a responsibility of all teachers, there is little hope for improvement as far as academic success for this group of students is concerned. Since each new school subject entails a meeting with particular subject-specific language patterns, these are aspects of fundamental importance for all teachers. Thus, an essential part of becoming a history, physics or geography teacher, in particular, is to become aware of the linguistic dimensions and demands of different school subjects. Learning how to provide

for an inclusive learning environment, in which content is made available to all students irrespective of social, cultural and language background, is consequently imperative for all teachers. In spite of the important role of language in learning, issues concerning language across the curriculum are to a large extent still neglected in teacher education in Sweden today. This has a negative effect on the school situation for minority-language students as well as for many unprivileged majority-language pupils who have little previous contact with the language patterns valued at school.

For students growing up in monolingual Swedish environments, the language used at home and in pre-school contexts constitutes a solid and homogeneous foundation for language development at school. In other words, the language used in the daily social practices and activities of the pre-school monolingual child forms a relatively uniform point of departure for the building of school-related language skills. As for bilingual children, their language experiences are more diverse and their linguistic competence is compound and heterogeneous. Furthermore, they often have cultural experiences and frames of reference which are different from those of majority students and not always taken into account at school. All the same, they are expected to keep up with their monolingual peers.

As pointed out by the Australian educational linguist Claire Painter (1999), school-related language differs from the language used in the social practices of small children in many respects. Children's pre-school learning experiences are based on participation in concrete everyday activities in which language accompanies action and learning. In school, however, learning is mostly taking place *through* language in teacher presentations, schoolbook texts and other written sources. As a consequence, learning is distanced from the concrete reality in time and space, making school knowledge more abstract and less accessible than the contextualised knowledge of the everyday lives of pre-school children. This entails a special challenge for students with limited proficiency in the language of instruction, since this shift from a mainly accompanying to a constituting function gives language a principal role in school learning processes. To claim that language is a key to school success is therefore no exaggeration.

Critical perspectives

Apart from the specialised and subject-specific languages of different subjects and disciplines, children also encounter a more general school language with many features in common with formal written language. This language – in many English-speaking contexts often referred to as an academic language (cf. Schleppegrell 2004) – is nobody's mother tongue. Nevertheless, it is a language to which children from different socio-cultural backgrounds have to a varying degree been exposed before school (Rothery 1996). Students growing up with patterns of language use corresponding to those valued at school might be able to integrate features of the academic school language without any mediation in terms of explicit formal instruction. Other students, however, especially those who have grown up with limited contact with the

standard majority language, find it much more difficult to read between the lines and find out what is expected of them.

The mismatch between the linguistic experiences of children from certain backgrounds and the language of educational contexts was initially addressed by the late sociolinguist Basil Bernstein in the early 1970s. Since then, a number of studies have pointed to the incongruent patterns of language use and interaction between home and school that face many children from different ethnic, social and linguistic backgrounds (Heath 1983, Nauc ler 2004, Crago 1992). To provide for the needs of children who are not socialised into ‘ways with words’ (cf. Heath 1983) equivalent to those valued at school, Bernstein (1990) pleaded for a visible and explicit pedagogy and for systematic language training based on the linguistic demands of the language practices linked to different school subjects. According to Bernstein, students from unprivileged homes run the risk of being restricted to language patterns of everyday life if they do not have access to explicit models of the expected language use in different school genres. This will reduce their opportunities for knowledge development and educational success at the more advanced school levels. Moreover, it will negatively affect their access to higher education, professional choices and active participation in the democratic processes of society.

An awareness of the way language works in the construction of knowledge in different disciplines also includes issues related to the value-laden nature of knowledge. An important aspect of school knowledge is to challenge dominant discourses by asking questions about what pictures of the world different texts paint, and whose interests they represent. As pointed out by Rothery (1996), language issues are of crucial importance not only for school learning but for the fostering of democratic participation:

If we want our students to develop high levels of literacy and a critical orientation, we must engage them, at all levels, in an explicit focus on language. Not just language, but explicitness about how language works to mean, is at the heart of educational linguistics (ibid. 120).

Multilingualism in the public debate

The increasing multilingualism in Sweden concerns educators at all levels, and has put language at the top of the agenda of educational policies and democratic rights. Recently, language policy issues have become increasingly controversial also in the political debate in Sweden, starting with a demand for language tests for the granting of citizenship put forward by the Swedish Liberal Party (*Folkpartiet Liberalerna*) in 2002. This was apparently a successful political move, partly contributing to a substantial gain in the party’s popularity, which increased its share of the votes in the succeeding election by 8 per cent to a total of 13.4 per cent (Statistiska Centralbyr n 2005). Critical voices have accused the Liberal Party of conducting a nationalistic and even racist policy, depicting multiculturalism and multilingualism as a threat to national integrity. One of the cornerstones of such a policy is defending monolingual hegemony and glorification of the national language, which has its roots in an ideology equating nation with language. As pointed out by Stevenson (2006) in relation to the German and Austrian contexts, building

integration on proficiency in one single national language is hardly compatible with a European policy promoting multilingualism, diversity and mobility. Another contradiction resides in the fact that proficiency in Swedish is considered an uncontested requirement in the Swedish labour market for non-European immigrants but not for EU citizens.

In the prestigious culture section of Sweden's largest daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, an interesting language debate reflecting dominant language ideologies took place in the spring of 2006. The debate started with a plea for the strengthening of the Swedish language and literature in Swedish schools. In this context, references were made to 'contradicting the research results' on mother tongue instruction and its alleged detrimental effects upon the development of Swedish among young immigrants. In a subsequent contribution, a prominent scholar of bilingualism was accused of running political errands for the Social Democratic government, when dismissing the idea of a disagreement among bilingual researchers on the role of mother tongue instruction.

Support for mother tongue instruction among Swedes in general has been weak over the years, and the idea that an investment in mother tongue development has a negative effect on the acquisition of Swedish is strongly rooted. In spite of the fact that bilingual research in Sweden and internationally shows positive effects of mother tongue support on general cognitive development, academic success and second language development (Tuomela and Hyltenstam 1996, Thomas and Collier 1997, Collier and Thomas 2002), negative attitudes towards mother tongue tuition reflecting a monolingual norm are prevalent among the majority.

As for attitudes towards multilingualism, immigrant languages are often regarded with suspicion and as a threat to the Swedish language in a way that English is not, outside a limited circle of language professionals. Negative attitudes towards efforts in favour of bilingual development are, however, selective and do not usually comprise bilingualism involving prestigious languages like English or French. In Sweden, school programmes in which English is used as a medium of instruction in one or several school subjects are increasingly popular in secondary education. Still, few voices are raised in fear of negative effects on the students' proficiency in Swedish in this context. Apparently, certain forms of bilingualism are considered more valuable than others in the eyes of the majority. Contrary to the fears of domain losses of the Swedish language due to the expansion of English expressed in the language policy proposal referred to earlier, Swedes in general tend to regard immigrant minority languages rather than English as the big threat to the Swedish language.

Another reflection of a monolingual norm and linguistic xenophobia can be found in negative attitudes towards the youth slang typical of multilingual urban areas. Whereas few people seem to worry about the constant influx of English vocabulary into standard Swedish, the fear of a negative effect on the Swedish language as a result of the influence of other 'foreign' elements appears to be considerable. One of the issues which caused disapproving remarks about unwelcome foreign influence in the debate was the inclusion of

two words of Turkish origin, *guss* (girl) and *keff* (bad), in the new edition of the Swedish Academy's Wordlist. These words are commonly used among young people in multilingual settings and are closely associated with multiethnic youth slang.

The phenomenon of multiethnic youth varieties was dismissed as sheer bluff and as a way of covering up for 'bad' and 'distorted' learner Swedish. Such negative attitudes towards the emergence of multiethnic hybrid language varieties reflect a tendency to meet manifestations of new multiethnic identities with suspicion and rejection on the part of the majority – a reaction consistent with a hegemonic ideology of nationalism. According to conservative perceptions of a 'proper' national language as a static, monolithic phenomenon, the national language should be kept free from certain (but obviously not all) 'foreign' influence. As pointed out by Milani (2005), the increasing emphasis put on Swedish 'as a symbol of national identity' starting in the 1990s can be interpreted as a way of counteracting the increasing pressure of globalisation partly connected with Sweden's joining the EU.

Imperfect and broken Swedish and the use of language varieties typical of multilingual urban areas are frequently taken as unwillingness to learn proper Swedish, and interpreted as a lack of loyalty and commitment to the Swedish nation. One of the basic arguments behind the call for a language test for citizenship was an alleged need for clear 'signals' of what is expected of 'new' Swedes for them to be regarded as worthy members of the Swedish community. Hence, legitimate ways of being Swedish are intimately linked to a full mastery of the national language, which excludes substantial segments of the population, especially among adult immigrants who did not acquire the national language in their early years.

Conclusion

Language policy issues related to multilingualism are at the heart of many modern societies in the 21st century, where immigration and globalisation have changed the linguistic ecology in many different ways. In Sweden, a new language policy aimed at securing the status of the national language in a linguistic landscape where English is becoming more and more powerful, and finding strategies for a balanced multilingualism in which minority languages are respected and valued, was recently adopted by Parliament. What role this policy will play as guidance for future decisions concerning language issues remains to be seen. Language ideologies do not change over night. Attitudes towards different languages as well as to legitimate ways of being Swedish and of 'treating' the Swedish language are deeply rooted, and play an important part in the implementation of language policies in a country in search of its national identity in a globalised world.

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