

Multilingual Development and Teacher Training in a Multicultural Society

- the Swedish example

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Author's Manuscript – Working paper:
Later version published In: Elmar Winters-Ohle, Bettina Seipp, Bernd Ralle
(Hrsg.). 2012. *Lehrer für Schüler mit Migrationsgeschichte*. Münster:
Waxmann. 164-172.

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1. Introduction

During the last 50 to 60 years the demographic structure of the populations in the European countries has for various reasons undergone substantial changes. After the Second World War, when parts of Europe lay in ruins, many people moved to other countries less haunted by the destruction in order to seek opportunities for a better life. People from other parts of the world have moved to European countries in flight from war, persecution and poverty and in the last decades internationalization and globalization has meant that people have moved over national borders like never before. Membership in the European Union also allows free movement of people across national borders.

Although Sweden is a country in the periphery of Europe it has undergone the same demographic changes as the other European countries.

2. Demographic changes in Sweden

Sweden has a population of 9.4 million people (Statistics Sweden, 30 June 2011). Of these about 14.5 % were born in another country (Statistics Sweden, 2011). Migration to Sweden started in the 1950s, when the country, which had not been involved in the war, needed manpower for its factories to provide the war-ravaged European countries with various sorts of goods. Later migration consisted of refugees and asylum seekers and recently in addition also labor migration from the EU-countries. The figure below shows how immigration from different parts of the world has changed in recent decades.

Invandring 1975-2008

(folkbokförda i Sverige)

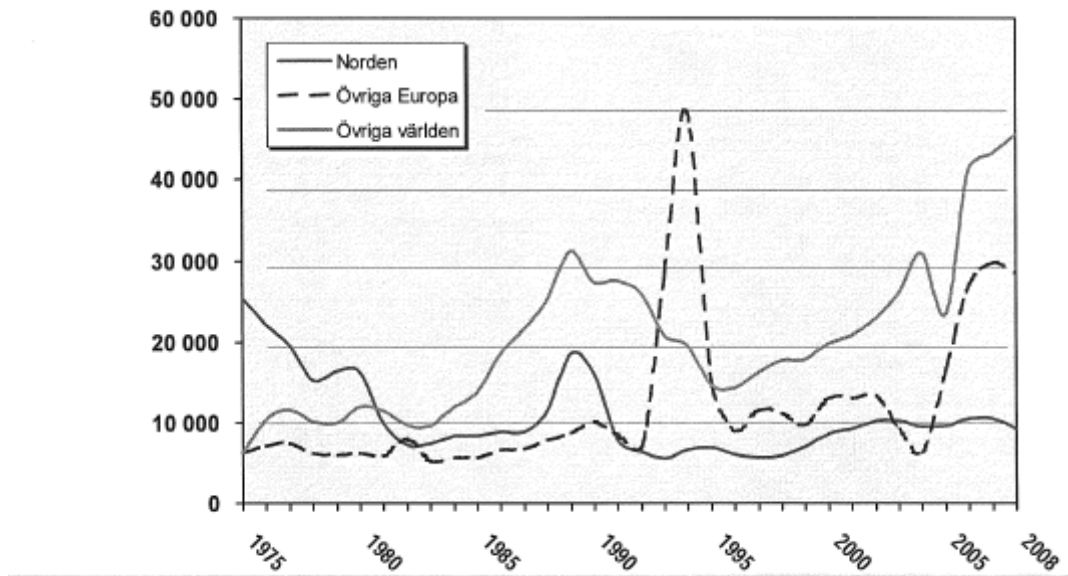


Figure 1. *Migration to Sweden 1975 - 2008.* (Swedish Migration Board, 2009)

In the 1970s the majority of migration to Sweden came from the Nordic countries, like Finland and Denmark and consisted mainly of migrant workers. In the next decade, the 1980s, the majority of immigrants were refugees and asylum seekers from troubled areas outside of Europe, such as Iran and Iraq. The apparent peak of migrants from Europe in the 90s in the above figure shows the large number of refugees who came to Sweden during the civil war in former Yugoslavia. In the last decade and in recent years migration to Sweden continues to be high from countries outside of Europe, such as from Iraq (mainly Kurds), Somalia and Afghanistan, but immigration also continues from parts of Europe, for example from Kosovo, Serbia and Russia. Immigration from Nordic countries, on the other hand, is now relatively small (Swedish Migration Board, 2009).

3. Multilingualism in Sweden

As a result of immigration during several decades Sweden has become one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the industrialized world. As more than 150 different minority languages are spoken in the country in addition to Swedish (Norrby and Håkansson, 2007: 15, The Language Council of Sweden, 2011) it is fair to say that Sweden, which used to be fairly monolingual, now has become a multilingual country.

Besides the large number of different mother tongues spoken in Sweden today, multilingualism manifests itself in a number of other ways. Swedish is the national majority language, now also legally, by the language law adopted by parliament in 2009 (SFS 2009:600). In the year 2000 Sweden ratified the Council of Europe's convention on the protection for national minorities which made Sami, Finnish, Meänkieli/Tornedal-Finnish, Romani and Yiddish official national minority languages (SFS 1999:1175/1176) and gave them special rights and special status among the other minority languages in the country. The Swedish sign language was not recognized as an official minority language in that process but is in effect treated as such. English has in recent decades got a unique position in Sweden as it is about to assume the role of a second language. Most Swedes master English up to a certain level, some even to a high level, and read and write English on a daily basis. And in Swedish schools other foreign languages are studied, such as Spanish, German and French.

4. Bilingual provision for minority students

Immigration to Sweden has of course also had an impact on school and education. In an ever increasing extent there are now students of foreign origin in Swedish schools and today 20.5 % of all students in compulsory school have foreign backgrounds. The Swedish National Agency for Education defines a

student with foreign background as a student born outside of Sweden by foreign parents or whose parents were both born abroad (but the student himself born in Sweden) (Skolverket, 2004). Some special measures have also been taken by the authorities to improve the situation for students with foreign backgrounds in the Swedish school.

4.1 Swedish as a Second Language

Swedish as a Second Language is a subject on its own rights since 1995 throughout the whole Swedish school system with a syllabus of its own, provided by the National Agency for Education. Swedish as a Second Language is an obligatory subject and replaces teaching in Swedish as a native language, if the student needs it and the school decides so (SFS 1994:1194). SSL can be taught either integrated within the ordinary class – but by a Swedish as a Second Language teacher – or in a special group outside of the class.

When SSL was introduced in Swedish schools in the late 1960s it existed for a long time as an isolated and marginalized subject. It was taught as an auxiliary and compensatory subject to support and enhance development in the majority language for bilingual students by teachers who had no special education for the task. The subject therefore had low status and low recognition in schools (Lindberg, 2011). When SSL in 1995 was established as a school subject within the national curriculum, replacing regular Swedish, it was made so with the argument that minority language students would then be given the opportunity to compete on equal terms with students who had Swedish as their first language since SSL also was made equivalent to regular Swedish in terms of eligibility for post-secondary education (Lindberg, 2011). In spite of this being a major policy reform it was not accompanied by any special implementation measures by the school authorities and so school administrators and SSL-teachers were left with hardly any guidance and support when they would introduce the teaching of the new subject. Inspection reports and evaluation studies

(Skolverket, 2003; Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2004) also show that the instruction of Swedish as a second language was not carried out according to the intentions of the regulations in many schools. As an example of this a study carried out by the National Agency for School Improvement (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2004) showed among other adverse things that 50 % of the schools did not offer any SSL instruction at all and that 50 % of the schools employed teachers without any formal training to teach SSL.

4.2 Mother tongue instruction

Mother tongue instruction is a subject in Swedish schools since 1977. It is an optional subject which the schools must offer if 5 pupils with a certain mother tongue, who use the language on a daily basis, ask for it and if the school can find a suitable teacher (SFS 1994:1194). Pupils speaking one of the official Swedish minority languages (see above), Finnish, Tornedal-Finnish, Sami, Romani and Yiddish, cannot be denied mother tongue tuition, even if fewer than five.

There are about 150 different mother tongues represented in Swedish compulsory school today and the ten largest mother tongues are shown in the following table.

Table 1. *The ten largest mother tongues spoken in Swedish compulsory school during the school year 2010/2011.* (The National Agency for Education. Official Statistics of Sweden, 2011).

	Mother tongue	Number of speakers
1	Arabic	33 204
2	Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian	14 579
3	English	11 262
4	Spanish	10 900
5	Somali	10 196

6	Finnish	8 525
7	Albanian	7 052
8	Persian	6 683
9	Turkish	6 012
10	Polish	5 946

Mother tongue is mostly taught in the afternoon, outside the regular timetable. The group size can vary depending on the number of pupils who have chosen the particular language. The aim of this teaching is for the pupils to continue to develop their first language and also to learn about history, literature and culture of the country of origin (Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet, 2011).

Mother tongue instruction in Swedish schools was a result of the so called Home Language Reform from 1977, which aimed at supporting the mother tongue for the personal, cognitive and academic development of bilingual students (Tuomela & Hyltenstam, 1996:30). Mother tongue tuition, just like Swedish as a Second Language, has suffered from serious implementation problems due to weak curricular support and a lack of trained teachers in many languages. A recent report from the National Agency for Education (2008) shows that mother tongue tuition is still a marginalized subject, mother tongue teachers teach mainly outside the regular timetable and have to ambulate between many different schools where they more often than not have to find rooms themselves for their lessons. This report also shows that only 50 % of all eligible students participated in the tuition, more in schools with many minority language students and fewer in schools with less experience with other mother tongues than Swedish.

4.3 Study support in mother tongue

Study support in mother tongue is also defined and regulated in the Education Act (SFS 1994:1194). This extra teaching is offered to pupils with difficulties in school, e.g. insufficient knowledge of Swedish to be able to understand text books and to follow the teaching in a subject. The study support is obligatory if the school decides so (SFS 1994:1194).

Study support in mother tongue usually takes place parallel with the teaching of some special subject. E.g. a Somali mother tongue teacher comes into the classroom to help a Somali pupil understand how magnetism works. With help of the Somali language he can explain and make the student understand but also help the student develop the relevant academic language in Swedish.

5. Teacher training

Teaching Swedish as a Second Language and mother tongues requires extensive and solid knowledge of various kinds and so teacher training in these subjects started relatively early in Sweden.

5.1 Teacher training in Swedish as a Second Language

Teacher training in Swedish as a Second Language started at some Swedish universities already in the early 1970s. It was a result of university teachers and researchers in the subjects Swedish and Linguistics having noticed the need for a different teacher training than the one which had been standard for teachers in modern languages (Tingbjörn, 2004). The same need was also expressed by the language teachers themselves who had been given the task of teaching the immigrants in Swedish. And so the first university course in Swedish as a Second Language started in 1973 at the University of Gothenburg.

Since 1987 Swedish as a Second Language has been a subject in the regular teacher training. To be qualified to teach Swedish as a Second Language in compulsory school 60 ECTS are required and to teach in Secondary school 90 ECTS. SSL can be combined with other subjects in the teacher training, such as Swedish, modern languages, social sciences, or more creative subjects like music or arts. The content which teacher students in SSL have access to are e.g. Swedish grammar and phonetics, Swedish in a cross-linguistic perspective, second language acquisition, multilingualism and language diversity, literacy development in a second language, assessment in second language acquisition and children's literature in a cross-cultural perspective.

5.2 Training of mother tongue teachers

A mother tongue teacher's job is to teach migrant students in their mother tongue, give study support in the mother tongue in all subjects and to take part in contact work between school and homes (Tuomela & Hyltenstam, 1996:50). They are also formally qualified to teach in the preschool, primary and secondary school and in adult education. To be able to do all this in a professional way teacher training should be necessary. Between 1977 and 1988 home language teachers, as they were called then, were trained in a special training for home language teachers during two years. From 1988 the training of mother tongue teachers was included in the ordinary training for compulsory school teachers and combines mother tongue teaching with teaching of other subjects. This construction, however, has not been very successful and today only a few universities in Sweden offer this training, e.g. the Linnaeus University in Växjö. Hence the lack of qualified mother tongue teachers in Sweden today.

6. Conclusions

To conclude one can argue that in spite of the good intentions and relatively early start of the measures taken by Swedish school authorities and politicians for the benefit of bilingual students' language development have not always been carried out in the best possible way, due to lack of knowledge and perhaps also a lack of interest at many levels of decision-makers above the individual student. An OECD review of migrant education in Sweden (Taguma, Kim, Brink & Telteman, 2010) argues that the training of all teachers and school leaders for diversity and the provision for equity in terms of access to language resources in Swedish schools should now be a top priority on migrant education in Sweden.

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