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Multilingual education in Sweden – assets and challenges

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Dimensions of time and space in language practices and dispositions

Jasmine Bylund

While language practices in linguistically diverse urban spaces have attracted wide scholarly interest, less is known about the practices and dispositions of young people in these urban spaces. Drawing on data from a PhD project (Bylund, 2022), this presentation focuses on dimensions of time and space in young adolescents' accounts of their linguistic practices and dispositions. Findings demonstrate how time and space formed part in the participants' reported accounts of how they navigate linguistically when moving in and out of situations and contexts. The study explored the language practices and dispositions of young adolescents in contemporary multilingual urban areas in Sweden. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, three different ways of generating data were used (questionnaire, language diaries and interviews). The study was conducted between 2019–2021 with young adolescents (N=92) aged 11–14 at schools located in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. The analysis adopted a Bourdieusian approach in which the notion of habitus and its pillar concepts guided the analysis of the young adolescents' practices and dispositions. The presentation focuses on how aspects pertaining to time and space appeared in participants' interview accounts of their reported linguistic practices and dispositions.

Using the LAIP model: Tracking language assessment identity development among middle-school teachers

Anna-Marie Csöregh

Research on EFL novice teachers' assessment identity development is closely related to the challenges of plurality, from at least two perspectives. One perspective is the personal side of assessment when teachers are accountable for their assessment decisions. Another is from the education system itself where evidence shows persistent differences in assessments nationally. The research presented here aims at making these divergent perspectives converge as far as possible by offering a model of language assessment identity positions, LAIP. The model has been developed based on the analysis of 39 hours of recorded focus-group interviews with novices teaching EFL to young learners (age 10-12) over two years. The presentation will follow up on these results with an additional 28 hours of recordings which means that it is possible to track movements within the model over the first five novice years. Results show that assessment identity as a phenomenon is far from a fixed entity, and that each position has its benefits and drawbacks. Developing a consciousness of personal assessment practices is assumed to be reflected in teacher practice and will hopefully lead to higher assessment quality for all students, as well as a higher degree of work satisfaction for the teachers involved.

Young students' beliefs about languages and language learning

Ingela Finndahl

This presentation focuses on beliefs about languages and language learning that were investigated among 12-year-old students in a Swedish compulsory school. In Sweden, the learning of a second foreign language (after English) normally begins in year 6 (age 12-13). Three language groups (n = 49 students) in one school were followed during the students' first year of learning French, German and Spanish (one group per language). With the aim of investigating attitudes towards different languages, as well as students' perceptions and experiences of language learning, the study used a mixed methods approach including qualitative (classroom observations and interviews) as well as quantitative (questionnaire) methods. Results show an overall positive attitude towards language learning and an interest in foreign languages. However, some languages seem to be more attractive than others. Motivation for learning a second foreign language was high prior to, as well as during and after the students' first year of learning. There seem to be several interrelated contextual parameters influencing students' motivation for learning, as well as attitudes toward languages and language learning. Furthermore, emotions seem to be closely connected to language learning. These emotions can be both motivational and demotivational.

Swedish as a second language as a research field and a school-subject in Sweden: trends and tensions

Christina Hedman

This presentation identifies possible trends in the research field of Swedish as a Second Language (SSL), in a study of Swedish PhD dissertations 2013–2021 (Hedman & Lubinska, 2022). A majority of the dissertations focused on educational perspectives and (disciplinary) literacy, mainly in adolescents and adults. Few of these or other studies have, however, considered the school subject of SSL. Here I present findings from an ethnographic study (for an overview, see Hedman & Magnusson, 2021) in three upper secondary schools where a majority of the students studied SSL rather than the more prestigious subject, Swedish (SWE). SSL is a parallel subject to SWE, and gives the same eligibility to upper secondary and tertiary levels. The SSL teachers have at least 90 ECTS credits in the university subject of SSL at the upper secondary level. Findings show that the students chose and stayed in the school-subject of SSL due to the teachers' effective language scaffolding and the subject's multilingual curricular goals, as well as the design of the subject. Such findings are important, not least since the subject of SSL has repeatedly been criticized despite a lack of research involving those who are directly concerned.

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Responding to the challenges of linguistic and cultural diversity: some lessons from SEMLA and their implications for future research

David Little

I shall begin my presentation by summarizing what SEMLA has taught me about linguistic and cultural diversity in Swedish education. I shall then consider the individual SEMLA projects from the perspectives of collaboration and reciprocity. My central concern will be the role assigned to learners in the classroom and as participants and potential partners in research, which I shall explore from a dialogic-relational perspective. I shall conclude by summarizing the implications of my argument for future research.

Assessment practices of young learners' language(s)

Elisabeth Nilsson

Considering the last decades' increasing use of language assessments, this research aims to create knowledge about assessment practices with young learners in linguistically diverse classrooms. In the Swedish context, the educational authorities have made an assessment material called Hitta språket (Find the language) mandatory for teachers to use in preschool class (six-year-olds). The analyzed material in this study was produced through video observations of the assessment activities suggested in Hitta språket and through interviews with teachers in two preschool classes and group interviews with 13 teachers. The results show that the teachers value their students' knowledge in all their languages but that they carry out the assessment mainly in Swedish. The teachers try to use their own or other students' linguistic resources in order to include all students regardless of their proficiency in Swedish. Therefore, understanding multilingualism as a resource can be described to characterize teachers' assessment practices. However, the possibility to include other languages is highly dependent on a mutual language repertoire between the teachers and their students, since other resources, like mother tongue instructors, are scarce. As a result, the teachers might be limited to assessing the Swedish language instead of each student's whole language repertoire.

Academic Writing – lifelong writing – an intervention study with upper secondary school students in CLIL and non CLIL-context

Elisabeth Ohlsson

In this intervention study, the aim was to investigate if and how explicit teaching, by visualizing text linguistic variables connected to academic writing, might impact the students´ written texts. In contrast to similar international documents, the concept of academic writing is not used in Swedish policy school documents or in compulsory education. At the same time indications are given of the need for specific teaching of writing for upper secondary students, for university students and in teacher education programmes. Initially, all students (N=74) wrote an assignment as a pretest, created to resemble the Swedish National Test Essays which are recurrent in primary and secondary school. After the intervention, the students in both groups were asked to revise their pretest essays as a posttest. The quantitative results show a significant increase for the students in the treatment group (n=28) compared to the students in the control group (n=46). The qualitative results indicate metalinguistic awareness among several of the participating students. However, learning how to write more academically takes time which is observable in some of the students' texts as well as in their reflections. The constructive results indicate possibilities of a useful and purposeful methodology when working with academic writing skills.

Creating breathing spaces and language arenas for a national minority language

Hanna-Máret Outakoski

In the national minority classrooms of Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli pupils, the pedagogies are often focused on creating breathing spaces and sanctuaries for learning and using the minority language. Most pupils and many teachers are more sufficient in the majority language than in their heritage language or mother tongue. Also, most teachers and pupils are already fully integrated into the majority contexts of Nordic countries. The greatest challenge of these classrooms is to find the pedagogies and didactic solutions that always encourage the use of the minority language and that simultaneously also strengthen the understanding of the shared cultural heritage and traditional knowledge. When the pupil groups have very varying skills in the heritage language, the teachers face the challenge of finding ways to promote the heritage language without ignoring the pupil's additional language repertoires but also without creating a space where the majority language takes over. In such a classroom code switching and code mixing occur naturally and are a shared communicative practice between the pupils and the teachers. However, although available language repertoires and resources are often embraced and included, translanguaging as a conscious pedagogical approach is not needed nor preferred for same reasons as in the majority context.

Perceptions and practices of writing among teachers of Swedish as a second language

Clara Palm

In municipal adult education, the instruction of Swedish as a second language is mandated by school laws and steering documents to provide students with essential language skills for effective societal engagement. This study undertakes a comprehensive exploration of writing instruction, a pivotal component of this endeavor, by delving into the perspectives and practices of experienced teachers. The employed methods are questionnaires (N=42) and indepth interviews (N=9). The preliminary findings underscore the prevailing tendency to view writing as a somewhat decontextualized practice, primarily emphasizing language skills such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Additionally, there is a noteworthy emphasis on the importance of knowledge of diverse genres. Contextual local factors also emerge as significant determinants. Notably, factors including time constraints and the local collegium impact instructional approaches. This research illuminates the multifaceted challenges encountered by teachers in their pursuit of effective writing instruction. The study offers valuable insights for both practitioners and policymakers. Furthermore, it accentuates the imperative of adequate teacher training and calls for a comprehensive reevaluation of writing instruction, with a focus on nurturing a broad language competence in adult learners.

Assets and challenges of Multilingualism for Children with DLD (Developmental Language Disorder)

Eva-Kristina Salameh

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is characterised by a slow development, where most language domains are affected. The challenge is to assess in way that does not penalize the bilingual child, for example assessing only in the L2. It is paramount to differ between DLD and insufficient exposure to an L2. DLD affects both languages, which implicates the need for an assessment also of the language spoken at home, even if it is informal, i.e. interviewing parents regarding language development. When working with bilingual children it is important to be aware that the bilingual ability differs from the monolingual, e.g. that their vocabulary is distributed over two or more languages and cannot be compared with monolingual results. Another difference is that the presence of more than one language system actually facilitates language development. Bilingual children have for example a much stronger phonological awareness, and bilingual children with DLD expose much less phonological problems than monolingual children. Another challenge is to provide intervention in both languages. If intervention is only targeting the L1 or the L2, it will provide results, but that it does not provide enough results, since it ignores one language. Monolingualism does not cure any language impairment – since bilingualism does not cause it.

Language experiences of a multilingual migrant teacher

Sara Snoder

My thesis sheds light on minoritized multilingual teachers in the mainstream primary school in Sweden. More specifically, the focus is on multilingual teachers' perspectives on multilingualism and multilingual language use in their classrooms.
This topic is of importance in light of the increasing number of teachers (and pupils) with languages other than Swedish. The overall aim is to contribute knowledge about the possibilities for using languages other than Swedish in mainstream primary schools. A point of departure is that language repertoires include lived experiences of both language acquisition and language use (Busch, 2015), and that identities are negotiated in and through interactions (De Fina, 2013). In a follow-up study, I plan to zoom in on one of the minoritized multilingual teachers, Gloria, and her language experiences made as a migrant as well as in her work as a preschool and primary school teacher. I will analyze unused interview material. A narrative analysis could be a possible tool when analyzing interview talk or fieldnotes. I will elaborate on this at the conference in order to receive feedback on the planned study.

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The challenges of plurality in the teaching of writing in compulsory school in Sweden

Erika Sturk

The teaching of writing is important for pupils' future studies. In their teaching of writing, teachers are guided by, for example, their beliefs about writing, schoolbooks and the nationacurriculum (Smidt, 2010). This presentation concerns the teaching of writing in Swedish as L1 and L2 in grades 4–6, investigating discourses of writing identified among teachers, in schoolbooks, and in the curriculum. Data is collected from four studies based on different empirical data: teachers' interactions in Facebook groups (n = 73), classroom observations (n = 97), schoolbooks (n = 4), and the curriculum. Ivanics (2004, 2017) framework for discourses of writing was employed as an analytical tool. This framework builds on theories of language use in layers, enabling a comprehensive understanding of writing. The analysis was three-fold: a deductive content analysis of the different datasets; a comparative analysis of discourses enacted in Swedish as L1 and as L2; an analysis of the results. The interpretation reveals a stronger focus on the text layer in Swedish as L2, but on writing processes in Swedish as L1, however also a lack of a social understanding of writing. Teachers act in challenging situations while simultaneously aiming for two syllabuses and do what they are asked to do in relation to grading criteria resulting in teaching to measurable outcomes.

References

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English in Sweden - where, what and why

Liss Kerstin Sylvén

Swedes are often claimed to be well versed in English, and in international comparisons of English proficiency, Sweden typically ranks among the best (cf. e.g. EF's EPI index, https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/). In this talk, I will focus on the use of and exposure to English in Sweden, focusing primarily on young learners, aiming at pinpointing some of the factors behind the high L2 competency among individuals in Sweden. First, I will look at where young individuals encounter English (and where it is not). For instance, English abounds in ads of various kinds, both online and in print. English is also very common in social media, and the default language of digital games is often English. Second, I will look into what types of English are used. Looking at ads as, single words or phrases are most commonly used, rather than full messages being conveyed in English. In digital games, however, quite advanced language occurs. My final focus is the question why English is used to such an extent in Sweden. The talk will end with some pedagogical implications of the frequent exposure to and use of English among young learners in Sweden.

Academic vocabulary knowledge in Swedish pre-tertiary education: Unveiling disparities in knowledge despite a shared curriculum

Marcus Warnby

A standard criterion for university admission is possessing English proficiency at the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). One compelling rationale behind this requirement is the increasing prevalence of assigned readings in English across diverse university contexts. An essential attribute of academic texts is the presence of academic vocabulary, with knowledge of academic lexis correlating positively with effective academic reading. Consequently, even novice students must have a robust academic vocabulary to engage successfully with these readings. Nevertheless, scant attention has been paid to assessing the extent to which pre-tertiary education adequately prepares students for the upcoming academic English reading demands. Accordingly, this study explored the academic vocabulary knowledge of 414 Swedish high school students (18-year-olds). All students took the Academic Vocabulary Test in their third year after having passed the final mandatory English course equivalent to CEFR-B2 and providing eligibility to university. Analyses exploring academic vocabulary proficiency regarding gender, study disciplines, and English grades, revealed large variability within and between groups. On average, these students did not attain suggested mastery thresholds, indicating potential reading challenges in university settings. Logistic regression indicated higher probabilities of threshold attainment for male and Arts/Humanities/Science/Technology students as compared to female and Economics/Social Science students. The divergent probabilities and uneven distribution of academic vocabulary knowledge are critically discussed in relation to curriculum goals centered on equity and university preparedness.

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