



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

This is the published version of a paper published in *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal (C·E·P·S Journal)*.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Gheitasi, P., Lindgren, E., Enever, J. (2022)

The Dynamics of Foreign Language Values in Sweden: A Social History: [Dinamika vrednot tujih jezikov na Švedskem: socialna zgodovina]

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal (C·E·P·S Journal), 12(1): 125-146

<https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.758>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Published under a CC BY 4.0 license.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-194352>

doi: 10.26529/cepsj.758

The Dynamics of Foreign Language Values in Sweden: A Social History

PARVIN GHEITASI^{*1}, EVA LINDGREN² AND JANET ENEVER³

∞ This paper gives an account of the history of foreign language values in Sweden from the seventeenth century to the present. The paper is informed by sociocultural standpoints on language and language learning according to which language is a dynamic tool that is appropriated by individuals to achieve particular purposes, and that dialogically creates and renews our social world(s). Since the sixteenth century, three languages (German, French and English) have been taught in Sweden as foreign languages during particular eras. In this paper, we explore how language value can be understood as a system that evolves over time as a result of triggers such as power, trade and personal benefits. The impact of these variables on Swedish society's efforts to invest in learning a particular language during specific eras is critically examined from the perspectives of nested systems.

Keywords: dynamic system, foreign language learning, foreign language values

1 ^{*}Corresponding Author. Dalarna University, Sweden; pgh@du.se.

2 Department of Language Studies, Umeå University, Sweden.

3 Professor emerita, Umeå University, Sweden.

Dinamika vrednot tujih jezikov na Švedskem: socialna zgodovina

PARVIN GHEITASI, EVA LINDGREN IN JANET ENEVER

☞ Članek predstavlja zgodovino vrednot glede tujih jezikov na Švedskem od sedemnajstega stoletja do danes, pri čemer izhaja iz sociokulturnih stališč o jeziku in učenju jezikov, skladno s katerimi je jezik dinamično orodje, ki si ga posamezniki prisvojijo za doseganje določenih namenov in ki dialoško ustvarja pa tudi obnavlja naš(e) družbeni(e) svet(ove). Od šestnajstega stoletja naprej so se na Švedskem v določenih obdobjih učili tri tuje jezike (nemškega, francoskega in angleškega). V članku preučujemo, kako je mogoče jezikovne vrednote razumeti kot sistem, ki se razvija skozi čas kot posledica sprožilcev, kot so: moč, trgovanje in osebne koristi. Z vidika ukoreninjenih sistemov kritično preučujemo vpliv navedenih spremenljivk na prizadevanja švedske družbe za vlaganje v učenje določenega jezika v specifičnih obdobjih.

Ključne besede: dinamični sistem, učenje tujih jezikov, vrednote tujih jezikov

Introduction

Since the start of the twenty-first century, the English language has become the most important global lingua franca. Trade, tourism and social contact use English for communication across countries and continents. Sweden is no exception. English is used by most people on a daily basis and Swedish 15-year-olds surpass their European peers in English language competencies (ESLC, SurveyLang, 2012). At the same time, their competence in foreign languages other than English is considerably lower than that of many other European 15-year-olds (special Eurobarometer 386, 2012). However, the remarkably strong position of English as a foreign language in Sweden is a recent phenomenon, and is preceded by a complex and dynamic history of German and French dominance.

When chaos theory was introduced in the 1960s it was a way of explaining how complex phenomena like weather are actually systems that interact over time and space (Oestreicher, 2007). Seemingly random events in one part of the world can severely affect other places. The explanation is that these phenomena are organised systems that can be pushed into chaos by diverse occurrences, but will always strive to reorganise themselves as systems. The idea of complex systems has since been applied to a number of other areas, including language, language use and language learning. Ellis (2008, p. 233) explains that “Language learning and language use are dynamic processes in which regularities and systems arise from the interaction of people, brains, selves, societies, and cultures using languages in the world”.

In this paper we argue that the dominance of one or more foreign languages in a society is interrelated with the values that are connected with the language(s). Language is a sort of human capital (Breton, 2000) and the dynamics of the spread and decline of a language depend on its utility and communication potential to individual users (De Swaan, 2001), that is, the position of a language is determined by its communicative value (*ibid.*). Languages serve speakers’ purposes, and the value of a language depends on the benefits it brings to the user. The value of a language is subjective and dynamic, changing according to time and place, and to the speakers’ needs. Thus, the higher the value, the more likely it is that a language will be promoted, learnt and used. The value of a language can be related to the benefits derived from the potential of broader exchange and communication. In addition, according to Church and King (1993), the ‘external network effect’ can increase language value. Thus, the more people join the language network, the more valuable it becomes. As De Swaan (2001) proposes, “All human groups on the globe engage in relations of power, trade, migration and cultural exchange. These relations all involve

verbal transactions; they are necessarily embedded in language” (p. 177). In the present paper we explore how language value can be understood as a system that evolves over time as a result of triggers such as power, trade and personal benefits. Our case is Sweden and the Swedish system of language values during four periods from the seventeenth century to the present. The dynamics of this system, its development and change, are discussed from the perspectives of nested systems, e.g., from the macro (state) to the micro (individual); time-scales, e.g., an event at one point in time may trigger the language system at another point in time (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008); or space, e.g., an event in one geographic position may affect the language system in another place. Aspects of policy, trade, economy, culture, ideology, technology, social context and investment in both the domestic and international arenas are included as parts of the dynamics of the language value system in Sweden, in view of how they act as triggers for particular influence. In this paper we focus on foreign languages in Sweden. We acknowledge that the official national minority languages – Sámi languages, Meänkieli, Finnish, Romani and Yiddish – have been and still are present in Sweden. We also acknowledge the historical assimilation policies towards the Sámi people, which have resulted in severe language loss (see Hornberger & Outakoski, 2015).

Theoretical framework

In this study we understand foreign language (FL) value predominantly as a sociocultural phenomenon in which a range of contextual factors interact to trigger change. Foreign language is defined as any language other than Swedish that is officially used or promoted by the state or other official organisations. In our analysis we firstly draw on dynamic systems theory to acknowledge the complexity of FL values. We acknowledge the fact that at any given moment a number of languages will be used in a society such as Sweden. However, not all will carry the same value. Secondly, we discuss FL values in Swedish society from an investment theory perspective, identifying cultural capital as a key driver of FL values and consequently of language choices made by states and individuals. Our main assumption is that high FL values in a society are reflected in which foreign languages are promoted by the authorities of that society for official communication or education and/or used by a majority of the population.

Towards a dynamic systems rationale

Language use in society can be described as the means of communication between people in a society. When communicating, people use one or

more ‘named’ languages, such as Swedish, English, Arabic, etc., in a mix that is suitable for the particular situation. As a result, different combinations of named languages will be used in different societies and these will fluctuate over time. Language in society is interrelated and can be viewed as nested within the languages of other societies, creating a complex system where change on one level may lead to change on other levels. In order to understand these dynamics, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 202) suggest that “Instead of investigating single variables, we study modes of system change that include self-organization and emergence. Emergent properties or phenomena occur when change on one level of social grouping or on the timescale of a system leads to a new mode on another level or timescale”.

Changes in language value and use can be attributed to changes in society. Such change may be brought about by shifts in the economy, trade, language contact or social prestige, for example. New social situations induce people to communicate in new ways and as a result their language changes (Crowley & Bower, 2010). These processes have been described as complex and dynamic changes to systems of languages (Elman, 1995). Similarly, individual language users’ learning and development of language has been described as a dynamic system. Ellis (2008) explains that processes of usage, change, perception and learning are integral parts of the dynamics of second language learning.

Looking at the dynamics of FL values in society across a particular time span – i.e., how foreign languages have been and are used as a result of societal, individual and other variables – inevitably becomes a complex process in which a number of factors interact. Indeed, as Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008, p. 203) suggest, “If we think in terms of reality as a web [...] [t]he independence of any individual variable then becomes questionable, as does the idea of a single cause giving rise to a complex event. Rather, it is likely that there are multiple and interconnected causes underlying any shift or outcome”.

Language as investment and cultural capital

In the social process of learning, we view an individual as situated within a specific context (with its own particular culture and history) engaging in activities that are culturally valued, that is, the individual is required to develop certain behaviours using cultural tools, and during this process the activities and the tools might also change. In this sense, language skills can be regarded as a form of capital that provides access to specific rewards (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Bourdieu (1977, p. 488) introduces the notion of cultural capital, defining it as “instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed”. Bourdieu (1991) refers to

the knowledge, qualifications, modes of thought and language that differentiate various classes, stressing the often unequal relationships between interlocutors and the significance of power in structuring speech. He argues that cultural capital has different values in different social contexts. Accordingly, the notion of culture as a capital suggests that it can be saved, invested and used to obtain other resources (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

Drawing on Bourdieu's work on cultural capital and language and the role of identity, Norton (2000) introduced the construct of investment, with an emphasis on the socially and historically constructed relationship between a language learner and the target language. The investment theory of language learning positions language learners as *investing* in a second language at particular times and in particular settings, in the interest of gaining a broader scope of symbolic resources (such as language and education) and material resources (such as property and economic wealth), which will, in turn, strengthen the value of their cultural capital and social power. Extending this construct further, we suggest that it may be significant to investigate how a particular language becomes popular for investment in the sense of having highly sought-after symbolic value that leads to social prestige. According to Norton, the notion of investment recognises that language learners have complex social histories and variable desires. By using the target language, learners organise and reorganise their identities during a process of constant change across time and space. Thus, it can be concluded that the relationship between the learners and the target language is socially and historically constructed.

Grin (2002) argues that the economic imperative may also be an influential factor in the dynamics of language choice, both at individual and societal levels, with regard to the potential rewards and drawbacks that specific choices may offer. For Grin (2002), one of the influential factors in the analysis of language policy is economics, since it helps to look at different choices about language in terms of benefits and drawbacks, both at individual and societal levels. Other contributing factors could be social, cultural and political signals that indicate how the knowledge of a particular language provides credentials for social inclusion and exclusion. Some scholars also claim that the literacy rate of a society has a positive influence on learning a foreign language (Church & King, 1993; Ginsburgh et al., 2017). According to this argument, higher literacy rates should make learning easier by lowering the cost of learning and thereby promoting the learning of foreign languages.

These perspectives demand the contextualisation of FL values, FL use and FL learning within a specific socio-historical period. Thus, our aim in this paper is to present an account of FL values, language shift and change reflecting

how and why communities select languages for specific purposes at particular moments in time. Acknowledging that language permeates every facet of life at the individual and social levels, we argue that knowledge of a foreign language, particularly one that is widely spoken in other communities (*lingua franca*), can make a difference to people's lives in many ways. It may grant access to other speech communities, it may empower both individuals and societies by serving as a resource to establish and transform social and personal identities and relationships, and it may provide access to important socioeconomic and political markets.

Analytical approach

In the following sections we critically examine the language value system of Sweden at four different points in time in order to explore the reasons behind the strong influence of English in current Swedish society. We adopt a qualitative approach arguing that language value in society is a dynamic performance in time in response to complex patterns of events. This country case study interrogates socio-historical evidence to tease out the complexities of language values in society over time. We understand the system of language value as a system that is nested with other systems in time as well as in space (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). For example, we acknowledge that global events outside Sweden may trigger changes in the language value system in Sweden. Similarly, events that occur at one point in time may prompt changes in the system at another point in time. Other causes for the development of the Swedish language value system that we include in the analysis are policy, trade, the economy, culture, ideology, technology, social context and investment, both on macro (state) and micro (individual) levels.

The history of foreign language values in Sweden

As a small country, Sweden has always needed to pay particular attention to languages for the purposes of trading, both regionally and internationally. The establishment of a national basic education system (mid-nineteenth century) led to both German (standard variety) and French being introduced as foreign languages in schools, with English being introduced from the mid-twentieth century and Spanish in the early twenty-first century.

The construct of Sweden as a nation state can be dated back to the early sixteenth century, when Gustav Vasa was elected king by the Swedish council in Stockholm (Scott, 1988, p. 121). Prior to this, different regions were engaged

in trade across northern Europe during the dominant period of the Hanseatic League (13th–15th century), often operating through the lingua franca of low German (Plattdeutsch/Niederdeutsch, spoken today mainly in the Saxony region).

In the following section we include an outline of the presence of languages in the region prior to the eighteenth century. This is followed by three further sections that explore the dynamic role of language in Swedish society across the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively.

Formation of the nation state, 14th–17th century

From the fourteenth century, regional varieties of German (often described as *Low German*) were positioned as the most powerful European language(s), becoming a lingua franca across the Nordic region. From the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, German was widely used among the nobility and the Swedish court (Phillipson, 2000). Germany was a destination for young Scandinavian noblemen for education, and hence they had to learn the German language. The invention of the printing press facilitated large-scale book production, contributing to greater literacy, not only in Latin but also other languages (Oakes, 2001). Alongside this, the Swedish vernacular became increasingly dominant as the country severed ties from Denmark and from the influences of Rome and thus the Latin language. In this period, the Swedish language became fairly standardised in its usage (Oakes, 2001).

During the sixteenth century, there was increasing social stratification in Sweden as the aristocracy sought to distinguish itself from the peasantry (Oredsson, 2000). Education was mainly accessible to the elite of Swedish society. Their higher literacy skills gave access to written literature, including Latin and German texts. This access resulted in features of Latin and High German appearing in the language of Swedish noblemen (Oredsson, 2000). In parallel, the translation of the Bible into Swedish in 1540–41 “had a great influence on the Swedish language, acting as a standard for Swedish grammar, vocabulary and orthography” (Oakes, 2001, p. 75).

In the early seventeenth century, Sweden adopted the German university model and German became the language of academic study (Cabau-Lampa, 2005). Subsequently, the first printed resources for teaching and learning German in Sweden were produced (Gluck, 2014). In 1686, the Church introduced a literacy campaign that emphasised religious and Sunday-life reading for everyone. Increasingly, the Swedish government became aware that trade and diplomacy demanded that both the education system and the administration of the country be developed (Oredsson, 2000). During this period, scientific developments in France attracted many young Swedish noblemen to study at French universities.

In summary, during the formation of the nation state and the following century, Sweden could be characterised as a stratified society in which the need to invest in foreign languages for individuals as well as for the state was both varied and subject to change in response to new circumstances. Technology, such as the invention of the printing press, and religious ideologies promoted literacy among all classes, while social context defined the level of individual investment in languages. Those involved in trade and members of elite groups in society were most inclined to view language as capital and as something in which to invest. The Swedish state, nested within an international community, was strongly influenced in terms of policy, culture and trade. Thus, geographical space had an influence on language in society, with Germany being the main international power and collaborator at the onset of the period, but with a gradual shift in international power towards France by the end of the period.

The eighteenth century

During the eighteenth century, France gained political and military influence, becoming the dominant continental economic power and a major European cultural centre (Wright, 2006). French was increasingly viewed as a 'refined' language (Olsson, 2005). French language and culture became influential among the higher social classes in Sweden, being used as a *lingua franca* at court and in diplomacy among the intellectual, aristocratic and upper middle-class groups (Cabau-Lampa, 1999). In parallel with many European courts, Sweden adopted the prestige *lingua franca* of French as the language of diplomacy, the court and scholarly writing.

For much of the eighteenth century, the influence of the Swedish nobility was central to the national political system, which was deeply affected by the period of the French Enlightenment (Wolff, 2005). Contact with France was not only a matter of economic and political influence, it also involved the introduction to new literature, ideas and philosophies (Wolff, 2005). Reportedly, one significant influence of French culture in Sweden during this period was the growth of a letter-writing culture (mainly in French) among the upper classes. According to Olsson (2005), the use of the French language signalled the higher status and education of the writer. Thus, during this period, French was perceived as valuable cultural capital by Swedish society, with the main investors being amongst the societal elite. Through investment in their children's education, this elite was able to secure the family's social status, leading to both economic benefits and to gaining prestige in society.

However, although the influences of this period of French Enlightenment were evident among the upper classes, no similar pattern can be traced

through the lower social classes. Education in the French language was neither accessible nor a perceived advantage for the majority of Swedish society. Cabau-Lampa (1999) suggests that this may be one explanation for French education never becoming dominant in the Swedish school context. Cabau (2014) also suggests that French may have been seen as a difficult language to learn, while German, with its closer proximity to Swedish, may have been perceived as easier. Throughout this period, the poorer, rural classes maintained communication through vernacular Swedish (Oakes, 2001).

Through much of the eighteenth century, Sweden was characterised by rapid cultural development, partly as a result of its close ties with France. Towards the end of the century, however, Sweden experienced a period of great social and ideological change, in which international trade declined as a result of the Napoleonic Wars, the nobility became less exclusive and social mobility increased. Ordinary people obtained the right to purchase land and were admitted to high government posts previously held only by the elite (Olsson, 2005). According to Schroder (2018, p. 34), referring to the German context, the French Revolution (1789) “marked the beginning of the end of French as an international language”. No doubt much the same could be said of the influence of French in Sweden as the country entered the nineteenth century.

To sum up, through the eighteenth century, Sweden became consolidated as a nation state, establishing a parliament (Riksdag) and council that introduced a new constitution placing power in the hands of parliament. Thus, national and regional policy was determined by an elected body rather than the monarchy. The international focus shifted away from the educational and technological advances of Germany, with the elite increasingly engaging in cultural activities related to the rising influences of France and French literature, culture and style. The provision of foreign languages in secondary schools was limited, with Latin still taught in the *trivialskolor* (lower secondary school) and *gymnasier* (upper secondary school), but not in apologist schools. No foreign languages were taught in these public schools, but the complex dynamics of social context were again operating as a key determinant in refocusing the interest of the elite, together with a rising middle class. With a move away from the appeal of German universities and technical expertise, the Swedish upper classes turned to the French language, attracted by the sense of culture, refinement and literature associated with both the language and a country positioned as a powerful nation in Europe during the eighteenth century. Thus, we can identify a shift in the balance of power, with the Swedish elite moving away from the influences of Germany, attracted by images of high culture and prestige symbolised by the French nation. At the end of the century, however, the ideological

shift that had precipitated the French Revolution was again to have a major impact on the European economic, technological and educational space, precipitating further restratification throughout Swedish society.

The nineteenth century

The early nineteenth century was marked by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which affected Sweden dramatically. Napoleon's treaty with Russia led to a war between Sweden and Russia (1808–1809), resulting in the loss of Finnish territory to the Russian Empire (becoming the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland). From the late eighteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century, the Romanticist movement swept through Europe, bringing an artistic, literary, musical, cultural and intellectual period that influenced Swedish language and identity. According to Oakes (2001, p. 77), "Swedish was transformed from the language of the state to the language of a nation", with Swedish becoming a regular school subject from 1807.

From the early 1850s, a campaign for popular education developed, emphasising that everyone should be able to read and write from new books and texts printed or written in modern type. This resulted in the introduction of four-year compulsory basic schooling for all, leading to a dramatic improvement in literacy rates. With shifting perceptions related to foreign languages, the 1859 Swedish school ordinance criticised French as a difficult language to learn, pointing also to the association of French with elitism. This was very much in line with a parallel shift in Swedish society towards some forms of Swedish linguistic purism, together with an increased interest in Swedish culture, handicrafts and folk dance, which had emerged by the end of the century (Oakes, 2001). The gradual impact of the 1859 ordinance was further consolidated as one outcome of Germany's victory over France in the Franco-Prussian war in 1872. From this time, according to Cabau (2014), Swedish scholars were more attracted to Germany, German scholarship and the German language.

It should be noted that prior to 1871, German could not be described as a national language, since Germany as a nation state did not exist. Before the early 1800s, a mix of regional low-status varieties were spoken and learning German did not seem to be a priority for other Europeans (Schröder, 2018, p. 28). After 1871, however, the unification of Germany and the rise of the German Empire as a dominant nation restructured the European balance of power. Technical schools provided Germany with an educated and skilled population who could contribute to the industrial growth and development that led to Germany's industrial boom (Henderson, 2013). New innovations and technology turned Germany into the largest economy in Europe.

Following the Prussian defeat of France and the subsequent unification of Germany under Bismarck, French was no longer perceived as a profitable tool in which to invest; instead, Swedes were more interested in learning German and establishing stronger links with Germany, both for economic purposes and for education.

The attractiveness of both Germany's political and economic strength during the nineteenth century is reflected by the view that Germany was considered as the "motherland of pedagogy" and Sweden as "Germany's pedagogical province" according to Cabau-Lampa (2005, p. 103). Germany increasingly became a destination for Swedish scholars for education and consequently the need to learn German increased. During this period, Germany was associated with modernisation and civilisation. Its success attracted many European countries in the German sphere of influence (including Sweden) to aim at strengthening their own nations by following Germany as their role model (Bottenburg, 2001). Moreover, the economic link was crucial for Sweden, since Germany served as one of the main destinations for its high-grade iron ore exports.

German was the first foreign language taught at public schools in Sweden, and by 1895 it had become a compulsory subject for all students in all secondary school classes. The Swedish elite in particular were inspired by German universities, conservatories and art centres. The German language, as a powerful European *lingua franca*, provided a valuable tool for Sweden with which the country could enhance its education system through modelling it on the German system and its economy through import and export. The value of the German language was acknowledged both at the individual and societal level. Social stratification in Sweden was decreasing during this period and more people were gaining the opportunity to climb the social ladder. However, it should be mentioned that despite the social change, education at secondary schools was still not accessible to everyone in society. Compulsory school (*folkskola*) was for children aged 7–13 years and those students who wished to continue to secondary school (*realskola* and *gymnasier*) had to pay for their education. Therefore, although German language could provide valuable social and cultural capital for Swedish society, language education was not easily accessible for everyone in society to invest in.

Sweden was a poor country during the late nineteenth century, with a large proportion of the population relying on agricultural work. Extensive famine during this period led to large-scale emigration from Sweden to the United States. From 1850 to 1930, more than 1.2 million people (around 25 percent of the total population) emigrated to the United States in the hope of opportunities for economic advancement. Linked to this demographic shift, during the

late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the new cultural artefact of silent movies, followed by the talkies, was widely available from the United States. These cultural imports signalled the start of a period during which Sweden opened its arms to American cultural imports to a large extent (Oredsson, 2000).

In summary, during the nineteenth century, a combination of events both at the domestic and international levels influenced language choices in Swedish society, leading to a change from French to German as the most widely used foreign language. Trade, science, industry and power shifts at the international level were among the significant motivating factors for Sweden's preference for German as a foreign language in which to invest. The rate of literacy increased dramatically in Sweden due to the establishment of a four-year compulsory schooling programme. Increasing changes in the sociopolitical structure led to criticism of elitism. Consequently, French language lost its status as a sign of elitism. Meanwhile, power structures in Europe leant more towards Germany, not only due to its political power after victory over France but also because of its economic strength. Germany's great economic and political power in Europe was one of the motivating factors for Sweden to invest in German language education, particularly given Sweden's extensive economic interest in trade with Germany. The period 1880–1945 marked Germany's rapid industrial development, and Sweden maintained close contact with Germany in areas such as trade, the scientific community and student exchange. With its powerful economy and industry, Germany was the main customer for Sweden's high-grade iron ore. Knowledge of the customer's language (i.e., German) could provide a tool for enhanced participation in trade with Germany. Thus, the benefits of trade can be seen as a key motivator for investment in the German language, reflecting the profitable market value attached to the language.

The twentieth and early twenty-first century

From the early 1900s, concerns regarding emigration from Sweden rose. It was understood that the United States was a more developed country than Sweden and Sweden needed to reduce this development gap to be able to survive as a nation (Alm, 2003). Hence, the United States became a role model for expanding agriculture, industry and efficient construction of inexpensive houses. According to Alm (2003), the United States was viewed as a pioneer of technology and efficient working methods, which Sweden could aim to imitate.

At the same time, the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed increasing interest in the ideas of National Socialism in Germany, while Sweden experienced a major political shift as a result of the decline in the power of the

elite. By the 1920s, a social democratic government was established in Sweden, upholding the values of the working class by promoting a vision of the party as community, safety, and welfare for all.

In Sweden, early industry – mainly based on mining, electrical power and timber – grew rapidly throughout the rural areas rather than in the cities (Esping-Andersson, 1985). This decentralised industrial revolution allowed the rural poor to find work. The industries were export-oriented and were in significant demand at an international level, particularly during wartime. The end of the Second World War (WWII) represented a paradigm shift in Swedish cultural and political life as a result of the defeat of Nazi Germany. During the post-war period, the social democratic party in Sweden experienced a golden age (Esping-Andersen, 1985).

The rise in the popularity of social democracy in Sweden during the 1930s and 1940s led to the establishment of a social democratic administration, which positioned Sweden as an officially neutral country with regard to foreign policy throughout the period of WWII. This position enabled Sweden to benefit from economic growth during a period when the economies of many other European countries were being devastated by war. In parallel with this, the establishment of a welfare state model of governance (known as *folkhemmet*) consolidated Sweden's image as a neutral, socially equal society (Milani, 2007), reflecting a substantial shift from the early twentieth-century influences of the Romantic Movement that had previously contributed to Sweden's sense of national identity. In this sense, the growth of social democracy in Sweden, together with the negative view of a defeated Germany and the rejection of Nazi ideologies, led to the discrediting of the constructs of nationalism and national identity in Sweden. Oakes (2005, p. 159) goes so far as to suggest that a “negative or inverted nationalism developed into a popular myth” during this period. This so-called myth contributed to enhancing Sweden's position in the international community: at least in the late-twentieth century, it was renowned for both its neutrality and its comprehensive welfare policy. Alongside this, Swedish policy towards the indigenous Sámi population of northern Sweden cannot not be ignored. As a minority group, “the Sámi have since the 17th century been in the role of political and economic underdog” (Hornberger & Outakoski, 2015, p. 6). Even today, “[i]n Sweden, school children only have the right to receive their education through the medium of Sámi up to school year 6” (Lindgren et al., 2016, p. 5).

With the end of WWII, Germany's defeat and the empowerment of Britain and the United States, Sweden's language policy changed again; this time, English replaced German (Oredsson, 2000). Due to various sociopolitical and

economic factors, Sweden identified English as a commodity representing a 'profitable' investment.

A combination of different events – such as political changes in Sweden and the declining power of the Swedish elite, together with the loss of prestige that Germany experienced after WWII – led to a major shift in language planning. In 1952, English replaced German as a compulsory language subject for Swedish students. Here again, trade and the economy played an influential role in Sweden's language policy; however, we should also acknowledge the effect of Sweden's increasing familiarity with English language and culture as a result of Swedish immigration to the United States and access to American cultural artefacts. Following WWII, Sweden's economy and industry developed rapidly and its industrial resources were in high demand at an international level. As a nation economically reliant on export, Sweden realised the immense symbolic value of a lingua franca (English) and hence developed a rather progressive multilingual policy. Knowledge of English allowed contacts with two of the greatest economic forces, the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as with international partners across Europe and beyond, in trading relationships.

In contrast to earlier periods, when French and German were learnt mainly by the elite, English language education was favoured by an expanding middle class, who realised the economic returns associated with learning English for trade and industry (Cabau-Lampa, 2005). As mentioned above, Sweden's industry mainly developed in the rural areas (particularly through the growth of the timber industry). Consequently, the middle and working classes, who were engaged in the industry and subsequent export, 'invested' in learning English with the understanding that they would acquire vital knowledge for their social and professional promotion. Family connections with earlier emigrants also enabled Swedish residents to gain knowledge about both the language and culture through visits and contact with their relatives.

Extensive exposure to American cultural artefacts such as films and TV shows also played a significant role in introducing English language and culture to Sweden, particularly given the general practice in Sweden of providing subtitles rather than dubbing or voice-over. Danan (1991, p. 613) suggests that "Subtitling corresponds to a weaker system open to foreign influences. Dubbing results from a dominant nationalistic system in which a nationalistic film rhetoric and language policy are promoted equally. Suppressing or accepting the foreign nature of imported films is a key to understanding how a country perceives itself in relation to others, and how it views the importance of its own culture and language".

Ricento (2015) refers to the visible relationship between the economic, cultural and political influences of the United States and the growth in the

popularity of English in many countries around the world. Relating this argument to Sweden, Oakes (2005) explains that English has longstanding links to the Swedish self-image as modern and international. Since the early 1950s, Sweden has envisioned English as part and parcel of a modernising project with historical ties both to the United Kingdom and the United States.

Alongside the historically negative positioning of the indigenous population, the symbolic function of Swedish at national levels was reduced as internationalism became a social democratic priority during the 1970s. English served as a symbol of internationalisation in Sweden during this period (Milani, 2007), offering Swedes a tool with which to engage more widely in international trade. Through this process of sociocultural transformation, Swedish national identity has been shaped by the principles of neutrality, social equality and the welfare state, moving away from traditional understandings of nation-building as language and nationhood (Milani, 2007). Linguistically, for Sweden, being modern and international during this period meant speaking English (Oakes, 2005).

The twentieth century brought dynamic social, political and economic change to Sweden. The post-war decades meant increasing development for Swedish industries and increasing export at the international level. The globalised market demanded proficiency in a lingua franca. The increasing economic and political growth of the United States and the United Kingdom contributed to the spread of English as a lingua franca. Alongside this, English developed as a highly influential language in Swedish society, although political and economic factors were of significant importance for language shift in Sweden.

To sum up, the language value system in twentieth-century Sweden can be characterised by the dominance of English. This was triggered by global events (the end of WWII) that shifted global power to the Anglo-American space; by events in time, with the great famine in 1860 leading to massive emigration to the USA, leaving relatives in Sweden with strong connections to American language and culture; by a shift in political ideology, including compulsory education and more equal opportunities for all; and by economics and trade, which allowed the country to gain economically and increase the living standards for everyone, thereby allowing for the consumption of culture as well as technology. More recently, the emergence of a view of globalisation that emphasises the important role of English as a lingua franca has served to consolidate the dominant global role of English (Jenkins, 2015; O'Regan, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2010). On both macro (state) and micro (individual) levels, there have been strong incitements to invest in the English language in order to develop the economy and maintain participation in the international community.

The influences of languages: Past, present and future

In this paper, we have illustrated how historical patterns of events in and around Sweden have contributed to a process of constant negotiation and renegotiation in the forms of communication, a process that is inevitably provisional and subject to change over time. During the period in focus, stretching from the fourteenth to the early twenty-first century, we have seen how the pre-eminence of forms of low German, high German and French, in addition to Swedish, performed a significant communicative role related to specific domains of use in Swedish society. With reference to each historical period, we have indicated how language values and preferences were selected as a response to a complex range of societal needs related to economic, political and cultural priorities at particular points in time.

The contemporary twenty-first century period, with the pre-eminence of English, can be identified as unique in the history of languages in Sweden. It is a period during which the everyday use of English has been normalised across almost all domains of use, within all speech communities. The current National Curriculum positioning of English as a core subject from the start of compulsory schooling can be seen as a statement of political will, a signal of Sweden's engagement in the so-called 'global marketplace', or simply as a societal acknowledgement of bilingualism as a necessary attribute for a relatively small, northern European population. This last point, however, ignores the fact that Sweden is, and always has been, a multilingual country, with five official minority languages and more than 200 languages brought to Sweden by various waves of immigration. The enshrinement of English in the National Curriculum as a *core subject* rather than a *foreign language* implies the emergence of new patterns of language use in Sweden, whereby English has gained the status of a second language and, in some instances, *almost* of being a joint first language alongside Swedish.

In addition to the prioritisation of English in the school curriculum, the popularity of Spanish as a foreign language (in preference to German and French) can be seen as a further illustration of how complexity "gives rise to unpredictable patterns of emergence" (Baicchi, 2015, p. 9). While, on the one hand, the recent popularity of Spanish might be accounted for as a response to the availability of low-cost European air travel in recent years, together with an increased 'cool' factor that has emerged in many parts of Europe in response to the popularity of Latino culture promoted via music, film and TV, the low exam results achieved by Swedish school students studying Spanish (ESLC, SurveyLang, 2012) suggest that a more complex combination of both internal and external factors may be operating here (Letica Krevelj & Medved Krajnovic, 2015, p. 192). In our attempts

to understand the complexity of the language value system in Sweden we must acknowledge that “[b]ecause the systems are open, what arises may be in nonlinear relation to its cause” (Larsen-Freeman, 2012, p. 205).

Turning to the question of how the future language value system in Sweden might dynamically evolve, we assume that its complex nature will be creative, operating within a system that is itself nested within other complex systems. Walsh (2006) emphasises the significance of the relationship between language and the economy, arguing that the success and failure of language planning and policy activities is closely connected to economic outcomes: if language policy and planning activities lead to desirable economic outcomes, they will succeed. In the historical account presented here, however, we have shown how the rise and fall in the popularity of both German and French as foreign languages in Sweden occurred “through multiple routes (...) mediated in different ways” (Larsen-Freeman, 2012, p. 205). We therefore suggest that dynamic evolution in response to the interaction of elements within the system, operating within other complex systems, is a more likely future pathway.

Linguistic diversity in Sweden has substantially increased during the twenty-first century as a result of a policy to support immigration. Provision for the maintenance of home languages in schools has been widespread, albeit with some difficulties in ensuring adequate provision for the variety of different languages, which now exceeds 200 languages (Språkrådet, 2012). Still, as illustrated in our analysis, the current language value system in Sweden positions English as more or less alone as the non-Swedish language with a high value. We might hypothesise, however, that given the new multilingual context, the next Swedish generation will demand an increased acknowledgement of their multilingual expertise, requiring more extensive schooling provision, including formal recognition of proficiency through a final school examinations system. Alternatively, with the shifting balance of economic power towards Asian countries, we might anticipate an increased demand for Mandarin Chinese in schools of the future. If this shift were to occur it would reflect an economic bias in line with Walsh’s (2006) claim. A third alternative might be that English will continue to play a significant global role for the foreseeable future. With the ever-increasing global interconnectivity made possible via digital technologies, Swedish society, with its expertise in English, is already in a strong position to adapt and fully participate in any spontaneous new system that may emerge. Clearly, the scenarios outlined here are little more than speculative. In the spirit of dynamic systems theory, we therefore close with this final speculation on the nature of language (Larsen-Freeman, 2012, p. 207): “We give a language a name as if its borders were defined and it existed as a separate entity”.

Acknowledgement

This study was conducted as part of the larger project *What Doors Can Languages Open* funded by the Swedish Research Council (VR 2013-2384).

References

- Alm, M. (2003). America and the future of Sweden: Americanization as controlled modernization. *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 35(2), 64–71.
- Baicchi, A. (2015). *Construction learning as a complex adaptive system. Psycholinguistic evidence from L2 learners of English*. Springer.
- Bottenburg, M. (2001). *Global games*. University of Illinois Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power* (J. B. Thompson, ed.; G. Raymond & M. Adamson, trans.). Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487–511). Oxford University Press.
- Breton, A., 2000, The cultural yield on languages and linguistic assimilation. In A. Breton (Ed.), *Exploring the economics of language*. Official Languages Support Program, Canadian Heritage.
- Cabau, B. (2014). Minority language education policy and planning in Sweden. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 15(4), 409–425.
- Cabau-Lampa, B. (2005). Foreign language education in Sweden from a historical perspective: Status, role and organization. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 37(1), 91–111.
- Cabau-Lampa, B. (1999). Decisive factors for language teaching in Sweden. *Educational Studies*, 25(2), 175–186.
- Church, J., & King, I. (1993). Bilingualism and network externalities. *The Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue Canadienne D'Economique*, 26(2), 337–345.
- Crowley, T., & Bowern, C. (2010). *An introduction to historical linguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Danan, M. (1991). Dubbing as an expression of nationalism. *Meta*, 36(4), 606–614. <https://doi.org/10.7202/002446ar>
- Darvin, R. & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36–56.
- De Swaan, A. (2001). *Words of the world: The global language system*. Polity Press.
- Elman, J. L. (1995). Language as a dynamic system. In R. F. Port, & T. van Gelder (Eds.), *Mind as motion: Explorations in the dynamics of cognition* (195–223). MIT Press.
- Ellis, N. (2008). The dynamics of second language emergence: Cycles of language use, language change, and language acquisition. *Modern Language Journal*, 92(2), 232–249.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1985). *Politics against markets: The social democratic road to power*. Princeton University Press.

- ESLC, SurveyLang. (2012). *First European survey on language competences: Final report*. European Commission.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2017). *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Publications>
- European Commission. (2012). Europeans and their languages. Special Eurobarometer 386. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf
- Ginsburgh, V., Melitz, J., & Toubal, F. (2017). Foreign language learning and trade. *Review of International Economics*, 25(2), 320–361.
- Grin, F. (2002). *Using language economics and education economics in language education policy*. Report to Language Policy Division. Council of Europe
- Glück, H. (2014). The history of German as a foreign language in Europe. *Language and History*, 57(1), 44–58.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Outakoski, H. (2015). Sámi time, space and place: Exploring teachers' metapragmatic statements on Sámi language use, teaching and revitalization in Sápmi. *Confero: Essays On Education, Philosophy And Politics*, 3(1), 1–46.
- Jenkins, J. (2015). Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a lingua franca. *Englishes in Practice*, 2(3), 49–85. <https://doi.org/10.1515/eip-2015-0003>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2012). Complex, dynamic systems: A new transdisciplinary theme for applied linguistics? *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 202–214.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex systems and applied linguistics*. Oxford Applied Linguistics. Oxford University Press.
- Letica Krevelj, S., & Medved Krajnovic, M. (2015). Early EFL development from a dynamic systems perspective. In J. Mihaljevic, & M. Medved Krajnovic (Eds.), *Early learning and teaching of English*. (pp. 191–213). Multilingual Matters.
- Lindgren, E., Sullivan K. P. H., Outakoski, H., & Westum, A. (2016). Researching literacy development in the globalised north: Studying tri-lingual children's English writing in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish Sápmi. In D. Cole, & C. Woodrow (Eds.), *Super dimensions in globalisation and education. Cultural studies and transdisciplinarity in education* (vol 5). Springer.
- Milani, T. M. (2007). *Debating Swedish – language politics and ideology in contemporary Sweden*. (Doctoral dissertation). Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Pearson Education, Longman.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2011). Identity, language learning, and social change. *Language Teaching*, 44(4), 412–446.
- Oakes, L. (2001). *Language and national identity: Comparing France and Sweden*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Oakes, L. (2005). From internationalisation to globalisation: Language and the nationalist revival in Sweden. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 29(2), 151–176.

- Oestreicher, C. (2007). A history of chaos theory. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience* 9(3), 279–289.
- Olsson, B. (2005). Historical and sociocultural preconditions of language in Scandinavia from the 16th to the end of the 18th century. In O. Bandle, K. Braunmüller, L. Elmevik, & G. Widmark (Eds.), *The Nordic languages: An international handbook of the history of the North Germanic languages* (Vol. 2, pp. 1238–1243). De Gruyter.
- Oredsson, S. (2000). Utländsk påverkan. Sverige mellan tyskt och amerikanskt [Foreign influence. Sweden between the German and the American]. In S. Båge, O. Karlsson, & P. Aléx (Eds.), *Sverige under 1900-talet* [Sweden during the 20th century] (pp. 100–105). Bra böcker [Good Books].
- O'Regan, J. P. (2014). English as a lingua franca: An immanent critique. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(5), 533–552.
- Phillipson, R., (Ed.) (2000). *Rights to language: Equity, power, and education. Celebrating the 60th birthday of Tove Skutnabb-Kangas*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ricento, T. (2015). *Language policy and political economy: English in a global context*. Oxford University Press.
- Schröder, K. (2018). Eight hundred years of modern language learning and teaching in the German-speaking countries of central Europe: A social history. *The Language Learning Journal*, 46(1), 28–39.
- Scott, F. D. (1988). *Sweden, the nation's history*. Southern Illinois University Press. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Qv8zxie3A18C&pg=PA118&dpq=PA118&dq=Sweden:+the+emergence+of+the+nation+state&source=bl&ots=dSXvYloOlj&sig=vawoPflJXpD_sIXVhgYEVnRXSU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiljOC7MjZAhVJsxQKHcd_AmYQ6AEITjAF#v=onepage&q=Sweden%3A%20the%20emergence%20of%20the%20nation%20state&f=false
- Seidlhofer, B. (2010). Lingua franca English: The European context. A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.). *The Routledge handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 355–371). Routledge.
- Språkrådet. (2012). *Det finns flera modersmål i Sverige* [There are several mother tongues in Sweden]. Språkrådet [Language Council]. <http://www.sprakradet.se/7097>
- Walsh, J. (2006). Language and socio-economic development: Towards a theoretical framework. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 30(2), 127–148.
- Wolff, C. (2005). The Swedish aristocracy and the French enlightenment circa 1740–1780. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 30(3–4), 259–270.
- Wright, J. (2006). *The regionalist movement in France 1890–1914: Jean Charles-Brun and French political thought*. Oxford University Press.

Biographical note

PARVIN GHEITASI, PhD, is an assistant professor in the field of language teaching and learning at the department of language studies at Dalarna University, Sweden. Her main research interests include early foreign language learning, formulaicity, and sociolinguistics.

EVA LINDGREN, PhD, is a Professor of Language Teaching and Learning at the Department of Language Studies at Umeå University, Sweden. Her research interests include multilingualism, young learners, curriculum, and literacy with a particular focus on writing, democracy, and writing development across languages.

JANET ENEVER, EdD, is professor emerita, Umeå University, Sweden and visiting professor King's College London. Her research focuses on primary foreign language learning, language teacher education, global forces and the politics of language policy. Recent projects have included a study of equity in the provision of primary foreign languages (AILA Review, 2019); an investigation of the political nature of primary foreign language policy construction in Hungary, Vietnam and Uruguay (LTYL, 2020), together with consultancy roles in the development of the first national foreign languages framework for Uruguay (2017-19) and the development of background questionnaires for the first PISA tests in foreign languages, planned for 2025.