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Managing Immigrant Multilingualism in Swedish Compulsory Schools¹

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how language policies formulated at the national level are accommodated, challenged and negotiated by school politicians at the local level. Local school politicians are of particular interest here because in Sweden it is the task of the municipal educational committees to ensure that educational activities are conducted in compliance with state regulations and guidelines. The results suggest that there is a large discrepancy between politico-ideological discourses on multilingualism and multiculturalism and the educational discourses on Swedish as the key to school success.

Recent ethnographic research on language policies has shifted attention from studying language policies at the national level for, in terms of laws and regulations, towards a broader understanding of language policies as the totality of language practices, language beliefs (ideologies, societal norms, values and individual perceptions) and language management (rules, laws, regulations and actions undertaken to influence or modify language practices) (Spolsky 2004; Shohamy 2006; Curdt-Christiansen 2009). In this study I utilize the term language management to refer to specific measures undertaken in order to manage linguistic diversity among pupils in municipal schools (Shohamy 2006; Spolsky 2004 & 2009). School language management is seen as one of the most effective means of putting language politics into practice because “the schools are there basically to manage the language of students” (Spolsky 2009: 114). Nevertheless, the decisions about language use in individual schools are taken at many different levels – national, regional, local, individual and several different domains such as societal, institutional and interpersonal. While explicit language policies are easily accessible through language laws, official documents and curricula, overt or implicit language policies can only be studied through looking at de facto practices, strategies and implementations (Shohamy 2006; Schiffman 1996). Apart from studying language practices language policies can also be studied through exploring language ideologies (Spolsky 2004 & 2009) which are the beliefs or values attached to individual languages and/or to phenomena such as bilingualism and multilingualism.

¹ This paper is written within the framework of the research project *Swedish only? Nation, economy and multiculturalism in Swedish communal schools*, financed by the Swedish Research Council.

This study is based on empirical material collected in six Swedish mid-sized cities in which the rate of pupils with immigrant background is steadily growing and at the time of my fieldwork (2009–2010) reached twenty-five per cent. Notably, a number of Swedish medium-sized cities have become multiethnic and multilingual within the past fifty years. Each of the six municipalities that the fieldwork was conducted in are characterized by housing and school segregation, and thus pupils with a foreign background are spread very unevenly in the municipalities' schools. In some schools eighty-ninety per cent of the pupils speak Swedish as a second language while in other schools linguistic diversity is unknown. Thus, the linguistic milieu for pupils of the same age may vary a great deal and so do the challenges that school leaders face in their everyday praxis.

The focus of this paper is on how language policies formulated at the national level are accommodated, challenged and negotiated by school politicians at the municipal level. School politics at the municipal level is of particular interest because since 1991 Sweden has had a decentralized school system² within which it is the task of the municipal educational boards to ensure that the educational activities are conducted in compliance with state regulations and guidelines. The school plan adopted in each municipality can on the one hand be read as a list of measures to be taken by the municipality schools in order to reach the goals assigned in the national curriculum; on the other hand the school plan is also a political document which represents the political values of the municipality in general and the language management incentives taken by local school politicians in particular.

The narratives of language policies

In Sweden as in most Western European countries the issues related to increasing linguistic diversity are closely interrelated with the discourses on nationhood, multiculturalism, integration and assimilation (Shohamy 2006). Thereby the issues related to language policies in general and language management in particular have created an ideological minefield. The two extreme ends of the ideological continuum are linguistic nationalism and linguistic pluralism. Linguistic nationalism is based on the dogma of homogenism according to which the best society is the one without intergroup and linguistic differences. Proponents of linguistic nationalism often see linguistic heterogeneity as a temporary problem that would go away if people would only see the beauty and the practicality of the language policies promoting monolingualism (Schiffman 1996: 5).

On the other hand advocates of linguistic pluralism solicit equal rights to all languages regardless of the number of their speakers. These rights are conceptualized as linguistic minority rights (May 2001) or linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas 2008). Nevertheless, pluralists rarely claim equal treatment for all minority languages spoken in a society. Differences are usually made between the languages of indigenous or national minorities and the languages of immigrants with preference given to languages which are spoken by members of national minorities with historical roots in a given state. Thus, even if the ideology of linguistic pluralism is in principle for equal rights for all minority languages, its effective scope in most cases does not cover immigrant minority languages. Until recently both theoreticians and practitioners assumed that immigrants will not challenge the linguistic status quo in their host country and the "expectation of linguistic integration has been widely shared both by native-born citizens and immigrants themselves" (Patten and Kymlicka 2003: 7). In recent decades this status-quo has become challenged in many Western European nation states and the question of how to manage

² The vast majority of schools in Sweden are municipally-run. In addition, since 1992 there is a possibility to establish so called "free schools" which are usually run by a private company, charity, cooperative or voluntary group, but receive state funding. This study concerns only municipally-run compulsory schools.

linguistic diversity within different domains of society has resulted in increasing awareness about the issues related to language policies in general and language management in particular.

The ideologies attached to different languages and language management measures get articulated in the different narratives of language policies. The two competing and conflicting narratives in most liberal nation states are the assimilationist narrative according to which monolingual language policies ensure linguistic integration of immigrants and thereby national unity, and the pluralist narrative according to which the policies of multilingualism prevent ethnic and linguistic discrimination of minorities (Schmidt 2002; Ricento 2005; Shohamy 2006; Fitzsimmons-Doolan 2009). Nevertheless, depending on which perspective these narratives are attached to and within which domain they are employed in, their content can get modified. For example, while the pluralist narrative can be seen as basically unproblematic within the domain of politics, it poses questions within the domain of education as the number of languages in which pupils can accomplish compulsory education is in most states limited.

Language management in the domain of education

The term language management refers to the explicit efforts of individuals, groups and institutions to modify the practices and beliefs of actors within a certain domain (Spolsky 2009: 4). In this case the domain under scrutiny is the school while the focus is on what beliefs and values local school politicians attach to the language management efforts of schools in their municipalities. Accounts on how linguistic diversity in individual schools is accommodated in everyday practice can be seen both as disseminations of discourses on explicit societal language policies and as proclamations of the principles the school's language management practices are based on. Most states tolerate linguistic minorities even if they insist that members of a minority learn and use the dominant language(s) of the society in public transactions. At the same time the demographically, politically, culturally and economically dominant national languages are usually associated with greater individual and collective advantages than the languages of linguistic minorities (Fishman 1989: 465).

Moreover, by making language a predominant factor in education opportunities, the state necessarily favours individuals who are completely fluent in the state promoted language (Varenes 1996). Thus, language management within the field of education is closely interwoven with two interrelated issues: on the one hand there is the dilemma of how to provide equal access to knowledge to all pupils regardless of their linguistic background. On the other hand, there is the question whether and how the school should accommodate the increasing linguistic diversity represented among pupils (Patten 2009). While national minorities in most cases have the right to education in their mother tongue, most liberal democracies opt for a single language or a limited number of languages as the main medium of instruction as far as the education of children to immigrants is concerned. Special immersion or transitional bilingual programs are usually implemented for children who need to acquire more proficiency in the school language.

As all children are obliged to go to school this institution provides for the most powerful mechanism for promoting language education policies and language ideologies formulated at the societal level (Shohamy 2006: 76–96). This is why it is crucial to get more knowledge about how explicit societal language policies and implicit language educational policies interact. Immigrant multilingualism is a genuinely multidisciplinary topic. Within political theory the concerns of which language(s) immigrant children or children to immigrants ought to be educated in are articulated in terms of whether majority-language education and immersion programs should be seen as assimilatory, nationalistic and oppressive policies or as a means of promoting the social mobility of immigrant

language speakers (Patten & Kymlicka 2003). Applied linguists and sociolinguists often argue that multilingualism ought to be seen as the norm (Pennycook 2010; Blommaert 2010) but rarely offer any practical guidance on how immigrant multilingualism should or could be accommodated in education. Within the field of ethnic studies immigrant languages are often seen as tools of resistance or as the core of ethnic identifications while education in majority languages is generally seen as a means of promoting linguistic and cultural assimilation. Nevertheless, while at the rhetorical level multilingual education is often seen as a goal to strive for, the content of multilingual educational programs assigned for children with a foreign background is rarely specified. As García et al (2006) pointed out multilingual schooling that is able to reflect the linguistic diversity among immigrant children is something that is often imagined but gets rarely materialized (quoted in Spolsky 2009).

Methodological considerations

The methodological point of departure in this paper is that language policies ought to be studied across several layers (Hornberger & Johnson 2007: 509). This study aims at illuminating the connection between language policies formulated at the national level and the appropriation, negotiation and reformulation of these policies in the educational domain at the municipal level. To accomplish this task critical discourse analysis of national policy texts (the Swedish language law and the National School Curriculum) is integrated with discourse analysis of the interview material collected in six different municipalities. The analysis of the interview data focuses on how policy texts are interpreted and appropriated by agents within the educational domain (Johnson 2009: 142).

The study is based on a field research conducted in six medium-sized Swedish cities. I chose to conduct the research in mid-sized cities for two reasons. Firstly, the municipal school system in cities of this size (80,000–130,000 inhabitants) is easily accessible. Secondly, mid-sized cities offer a colourful variation of schools (schools in the city centre, in the outskirts of the city, in segregated areas and in affluent areas). In Sweden the school system is decentralized and most decisions regarding where and how the schools should be organized within the municipality are made at the municipal level. I decided to focus on the decision makers at a very early stage of the research. Local school politicians were invited to a focus group interview. In municipalities where the focus groups turned out to be too small (less than three political parties were represented) I completed the study with individual interviews. The discussion focused on the municipalities' school language policies. Narrative analysis was employed in order to throw light on which narratives of language policies school politicians make use of when talking about the various school management measures taken in their municipalities. The narratives presented here were chosen because they represent the *sine qua non* of the school politicians' statements. My informants do not appear with names in the text. The municipalities are numbered from one to six. In the quotes I use the number of the municipality the interview was conducted in and the party affiliation of the informant: S (Social democratic party); M (Moderate party, with liberal conservative values); FP (Liberal Peoples Party); KD (Christian Democrats); V (Left party).

School language policies at the national level

Since the school is a political organization (Pierre 2007) the work of local school politicians is influenced by the ideological premises established at the political level. The Swedish Language Act "Language for All" is of paramount importance here. The Act is part of a language policy that seeks to secure the position of Swedish as the common

(national) language in Sweden, where the number of languages spoken by the country's residents is over two hundred. The Act was adopted almost unanimously and provoked very little public debate. The objective of the Act – as it is stated in the text – is twofold: “Swedish is to be safeguarded so that it can be our main language in the future. Linguistic diversity in Sweden and individuals’ access to language are also be safeguarded” (Language for All 2008/2009: 1). Thus the Swedish language law provides for toleration-oriented language minority rights (Patten 2009) in the sense that it protects the rights of individuals to use the language of their choice.

The aims of compulsory education that are formulated in the Curriculum for the compulsory school system stipulate that “The school should take responsibility for ensuring that pupils acquire and develop the knowledge that is necessary for each individual and member of society. This will also provide a basis for further education” (National Curriculum Lpo 94). However, according to statistical data almost every fourth student with an immigrant background left compulsory school without basic qualifications, in comparison with every tenth student in compulsory school as a whole (Skolverket 2008a). The difference in statistical data is usually explained by the differences in the pupils’ socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds and several language management measures are employed in order to create greater equality among pupils with different linguistic backgrounds.

The toleration-oriented feature of societal languages policy is, for example, manifested in the Swedish Education Act Chapter 5, Paragraph 4, which regulates who is eligible for mother tongue tuition. The system of mother tongue tuition goes back to the 1970s when it was established with the intention to promote the development of active bilingualism. As Boyd and Huss pinpoint “[t]he decision to provide home language instruction was based on the belief, supported by research, that children who had a firm grounding in their mother tongue were more successful in learning a second language” (Boyd and Huss 2003: 844). A municipality is required to organize immigrant minority language education in any given language if at least five students have the right to and wish to study it and if there is a teacher available. The criterion for the right to instruction is that the pupil uses the given language in communication with family members at home (Boyd 2001: 178). Boyd concludes that several studies indicated “a gradual language shift among most groups of immigrants, with some groups shifting more rapidly than others” (Ibid. 182). The shift process has taken place despite the relatively generous language policy. According to the official report from the Swedish National Agency for Education, in the school year 2009/2010, nineteen per cent of the pupils enrolled in compulsory schools were eligible to enroll in mother tongue tuition. Fifty-three per cent of those who were eligible were actually enrolled in mother tongue tuition (Skolverket 2010). According to a recent Report from the Educational Board, in spite of the fact that mother tongue tuition appears to have possible positive effects for immigrant students’ general knowledge development, the subject has a rather marginalized position in compulsory schools (Skolverket 2008a).

Mother tongue³ is offered as a school subject in its own right at both the compulsory comprehensive and upper-secondary level but its status is undermined by several organizational factors. Mother tongue tuition embraces an average of forty minutes a week, usually offered after school hours. The qualifications of mother tongue teachers varies a great deal and they are generally not seen as teachers in their own right but rather as bridge-builders between cultures, languages, parents and the school. The aim of mother tongue tuition has at the present time become twofold: it “should contribute to enabling students to benefit as much as possible from their school education, while at the same time developing their bilingual identity and proficiency” (Skolverket 2009). This double aim is undermined by the organizational difficulties and the general treatment of the subject in

³ In bigger cities there are a few bilingual schools most of them have Swedish and English as languages of instruction.

individual schools. A supplement to mother tongue education is study guidance in one's mother tongue, which is usually offered to pupils who have difficulties with conducting their studies in subjects that require high competence in Swedish. The decisions on who should be offered study guidance is usually made by the school leaders of individual schools but the guidelines about the scope of study guidance are generally formulated at the municipal level.

Another language management mechanism introduced in compulsory schools in the 1990s is the subject Swedish as a second language that is per definition an equivalent to "ordinary" Swedish, offered as a school subject in its own right parallel to Swedish. Thus, pupils who have a mother tongue other than Swedish have the right to learn Swedish as a second language in addition to receiving mother tongue tuition. In spite of the positive intention to accommodate linguistic difference into school language policies, the effects of the introduction of the subject as a worthy alternative to Swedish are mostly described in negative terms. Swedish as a second language is often seen as a difference-making mechanism between pupils who qualify as Swedes and those who do not (see even Gruber 2008). Thereby the subject has become increasingly seen as a marker of class- and ethnic difference both by teachers, parents and the pupils themselves. Moreover, because the decision on who is offered the subject is decided from above by the school while mother tongue tuition is arranged based on the demands from below, the two subjects are rarely seen as complementary mechanisms towards individual bilingualism.

Multilingualism is here to stay but how should we manage it?

Since many decisions on language management in schools are made at the municipal level, it is crucial to look at how local school politicians relate to the issue of increasing linguistic diversity in their municipalities. The interviews I have conducted with school politicians show that for many school politicians in mid-sized cities the challenges posed by pupil multilingualism are relatively new. This can be exemplified by the following interview quote:

1M: Some time ago we thought that the language development will just work out somehow. That one does not have to deal with it, that the children would learn it (Swedish) anyway. We need to leave this understanding of the question behind us. ... We thought earlier that one can just move to Sweden and after some time here she or he will start speaking Swedish. That it will just work out.

1FP: And this is what we thought too.

1M: But it does not happen. It is life-threatening when one gets second-class Swedish and can't improve it. The school has a gigantic task here.

This quote from a dialogue between two school politicians reflects the current state of affairs in mid-sized Swedish municipalities in which the challenges of increasing linguistic diversity are new phenomena. In Sweden, until recently linguistic integration or assimilation were seen as unproblematic, taken-for-granted processes. Immigrants and their children adopted the Swedish language usually over the course of two generations. Consequently, both politicians and pedagogues assumed that all pupils in Swedish school would learn standard Swedish without any particular language management measures. As the interview quote indicates this assumption can no longer be made as there are schools in Sweden which cannot guarantee that all pupils would learn standard Swedish. The challenges of linguistic integration are many times discussed in connection with housing

and school segregation. Pupils and school personal in mid-sized cities meet completely different linguistic realities depending on which part of the city they live or work in. The compulsory schools in which the majority of children have a Swedish background are by the school leaders usually described as Swedish schools. On the other hand the schools in which eighty-ninety per cent of the pupils are known to have a linguistic background other than Swedish are usually referred to by both school politicians and school leaders as multicultural or multilingual schools. Multicultural schools tend to be described as spaces in which obtaining standard Swedish is difficult or even next to impossible.

At the individual level choosing a school with limited linguistic diversity has been a potent language management strategy for a longer period of time. As it was described by a school politician:

1S: There is an interconnection between the multilingualism in a school and the rate of parents who choose another school for their children than the one in the neighbourhood. It is not only the Swedish parents but the parents with a foreign background who make this choice. Most of the time it is motivated by the language argument: The parents are worried about the children's language development. We have discussed this issue a lot in the board...but we are not in the position to make fundamental changes. For example we cannot break segregated housing.

The efforts of parents with an immigrant background to challenge linguistic segregation by moving their children from one school to another have been described as "striving for the Swedish" (Kallstenius 2010: 77, 79). The freedom of choice policy has been criticized for increasing school segregation at the societal level but even praised for allowing individual pupils to escape the negative consequences of housing and school segregation (Ibid.). Nevertheless, in spite of the emerging public and scholarly debate around the issues of language management, many local school politicians give an evasive answer when they are asked about the role of Swedish as a means of social integration.

During the interviews (focus group and individual) with school politicians it soon became obvious that the issue of linguistic integration is a politically sensitive issue. One politician (2S) argued that "the role of Swedish (for social integration) has been overemphasized." In another municipality school politicians had difficulties with taking a stance on whether Swedish was a prerequisite of social integration or not:

1M: Language is a prerequisite so that we could express our thoughts or solve conflicts. It does not need to be Swedish but we need a common language.

1S: It must, in fact, be Swedish because when there are so many different countries represented it must be the Swedish language that is common. ... I do not know what you (Tünde) want to hear but I can imagine multiculturalism without a common language and without integration, so that different cultures function separately and in parallel to each other but I prefer to talk about integration that requires a common dialogue, common debate, common discussions and then we have to have a common language that should be Swedish.....

1M: But is the language a key to integration or is it so that one can use his or her mother tongue when discussing democracy, gender equality and multiculturalism? ... One can say that Swedish is a prerequisite but one can also talk about these issues in ethnically defined groups ... so it depends on what you (Tünde) mean.

1KD: But Swedish can function as a base so that even immigrants, if I may express it carelessly, can take part in the societal debate and politics. So that (if) they can express their views publicly (then) that helps to improve democracy. In Sweden Swedish is a ground.

The indecisiveness of school politicians is palpable in the efforts to adjust the answers to what the interviewer might possibly want to hear. School politicians struggle with the question how to formulate a narrative that reconciles the tensions between the pluralist and the assimilationist narratives. Linguistic diversity and immigrant languages are tied to democracy and multiculturalism, while Swedish is described as a common ground and a tool for societal integration. Both grand narratives are embraced, even if with certain hesitation, indicating that linguistic integration is a politically sensitive issue. Brubaker et al (2006) state that when certain subjects are considered sensitive they are generally avoided in settings in which different ethnicities are present. However, as Brubaker pinpoints, “the very act of avoidance can, paradoxically, make ethnicity experientially relevant. The self-conscious avoidance of ethnically or nationally sensitive issues implies an identification of participants in ethnic terms” (Brubaker et al 2006: 307). One can argue that the language issue in Swedish compulsory schools has become ethnicized because the acknowledgement of the dominant status of Swedish vis-à-vis immigrant languages has become a sensitive issue. As any emphasis on the importance of acquiring Swedish can be interpreted as an expression of nationalist sentiments, in order to avoid the tension between pluralist and assimilationist narratives school politicians tend to put lots of efforts into emphasizing the role of mother tongue tuition at least at the level of rhetoric. Interestingly those school politicians who have a foreign background themselves – three politicians representing three different political parties in three different municipalities – were less inclined to see the Swedish language as the symbol of ethnocultural Swedishness. These school politicians integrated the pluralist and assimilationist narratives in the sense that they assigned the Swedish language a socio-economic integrative role while attaching a socio-cultural narrative to immigrant languages.

As we could see from the previous examples there is a certain insecurity among local school politicians about which language management tools could and should be deployed in municipal compulsory schools. The dilemmas they try to find answers to concern the clash of different perspectives on immigrant multilingualism. While from a school perspective Swedish is considered as the tool for gaining knowledge; from an ethnicity perspective the majority language is seen as a means of linguistic assimilation. Both these two perspectives are represented in the narratives of school politicians. A paramount example is the issue of introductory classes for pupils who are newcomers in Sweden. The introductory classes are immersion classes for the children who have just arrived in Sweden without any previous knowledge of Swedish. The aim of second language immersion classrooms is to teach immigrant and refugee children who just arrived in Sweden enough Swedish that they could follow the curriculum in a Swedish classroom. Pupils in the ages 7–16 usually spend one, one and a half years in an immersion classroom before they get gradually transferred to a Swedish classroom. On average pupils spend one year in these classes with basic language training in Swedish supplemented by mother tongue tuition and study guidance in mother tongue in a specific school subjects. Initially these classes were established in schools which were close to the neighbourhoods pupils lived in. However, as the majority of newcomers settle in already segregated areas the placement of introductory classes in neighbourhood schools contributed to further school segregation.

The neighbourhood school principle that is often referred to as the single most dominant principle in municipal school politics is underscored in one specific case. To counteract segregation school politicians in five of the six municipalities I studied

introduced specific language management measures for the introductory classes. The decision to place introductory classes in schools with a high percentage of pupils who speak Swedish as their first language is the single most visible language management measure introduced at the municipal level. The reorganization aims to help newly arrived students to have access to contacts with students who speak Swedish as their mother tongue. As two school politicians in two different municipalities explained:

1S: We have reorganized the international classes in the municipality. Earlier these classes were placed in the areas where the kids lived. Now we try to place these kids in schools which do not have a high rate of immigrant children. We hope that these children choose to stay in these schools even after the immersion class. This way we can draw children to other schools than the one nearest to their house.

4S: After a year in the international class these pupils are placed in a regular classroom where they can have friends who speak Swedish as their mother tongue so this way they can learn Swedish in a natural way. ... We have schools in which the rate of children with immigrant origin is already 60–70%. Thus the effect of the surrounding was not positive on the language learning of these newcomers. Therefore, starting from this year, we began to place students from the international classes at schools in catchment areas with a significantly higher proportion of students with Swedish as their mother tongue.

Tünde: Does it mean that they have to take the school bus?

4S: Yes, but it does not mean that they need to travel far. Instead of 500 meters or one kilometer it will be five kilometers, not a long distance.

4V: In this city the schools are situated rather close to each other.

The language management measure described in these quotes is based on the assumption that it is easier to teach and learn Swedish in schools in which the majority of pupils speak Swedish as their mother tongue. Nevertheless, while language immersion is seen as an unproblematic method as far as the education of recently immigrated pupils is concerned, it becomes a “silent issue” when it comes to the linguistic development of pupils who were born in Sweden but whose first language is not Swedish. The development that language management issues challenge the hegemony of the principle according to which children should go to a neighbourhood school, is recent at the institutional level and in all municipalities but one (of the six in my study) it has only been raised in relation to immersion classes. At the time of my fieldwork, one of the six municipalities started with a language management program for the ages 12–15, the aim of which was to actively “mix” the children in the municipality’s schools so that all schools could offer a positive linguistic milieu for its pupils to learn Swedish.

As it was stated earlier, the development that the neighbourhood principle is abandoned in favour of a language management measure is relatively new and so far it only applies to the placement of introductory classes. Municipal politicians motivate their decision adopting a sociolinguistic and integration policy perspective: improving the language environment should contribute to better conditions for learning Swedish, which in turn will facilitate the integration of students. The question is why abandoning the neighbourhood principle in the case of newcomers is not interpreted in terms of linguistic

assimilation while in five out of six municipalities⁴ the same language management measure is unthinkable when it comes to that category of pupils with immigrant background who were born in or migrated to Sweden longer back in time. One way of addressing the question is to look at whether and how linguistic diversity in schools with a high rate of pupils with a foreign background is managed.

Promoting multilingualism?

6M: We have invested both in mother tongue teaching and Swedish as a second language.

6S: There are no major differences in how we think about language education policies in the municipality. Based on what research has shown we think that first language instruction is important for development of other languages. Lot of research has shown that. In this municipality we have invested a lot in mother tongue tuition from kindergarten all the way up to school.

The system of mother-tongue tuition experienced major cutbacks in the beginning of the 1990s when it was seen “as an expensive luxury” (Boyd 2001: 188). However, by the time of my fieldwork (2009–2010) mother tongue tuition has been re-discovered as an integral part of the multicultural or pluralist narrative. The School assignment plan (2009) of municipality 2 provides a representative example of how mother tongue tuition is described in official documents: “Mother tongue tuition is of big importance for the identity development of multilingual children. The status of mother tongue depends to a great extent on attitudes. This is why it is important to treat multilingualism as a resource both for the individual and for the society.” When reading the assignment plan one would expect that multilingualism would be the major goal of language management in this municipality. However, the interviews with school politicians reveal that multilingualism is seen more as a point of departure than a goal.

If one only looked at language policies at the level of political rhetoric one could easily come to the conclusion that the aim of school language policies is to reach additive bilingualism at the individual level and multilingualism in education. This is definitely not the case. In none of the municipalities that the fieldwork was carried out is there a political willingness to establish bilingual schools or bilingual educational programs in which the languages of instruction would be Swedish and an immigrant language. One school politician hinted at “that mother tongue tuition could get a stronger role if pupils with the same mother tongue went to the same municipal school.” However this solution was considered “unrealistic because it would violate the principle according to which children should go to the neighbourhood school.” Municipal schools with bilingual programs are not seen as a goal of language management incentives. Establishing bilingual educational programs are usually not on the agenda of school politicians. In municipality 4 there was a municipal Arabic-Swedish preschool at work for a few years but it was closed because “it did not work out.”⁵

Thus bilingualism is promoted as long as it fits into the language policy framework for what a political consensus has been reached at the national level. The scope

⁴ In municipality four the system of secondary education was under reconstruction at the time of my fieldwork. The last three years of the compulsory school will be concentrated in four schools situated in the city centre so that from the 7th grade on all pupils would move away from segregated areas.

⁵ The number of bilingual schools is limited and most of them are independent publically founded schools not municipal schools.

of mother tongue tuition is limited. An average pupil has over twenty hours of lectures a week of which two-three hours at a maximum (including study guidance) is in the mother tongue. Prior to my field work I expected that there would be a clear-cut difference between left-wing politicians discussing mother tongue tuition in accordance with the pluralist narrative and right-wing politicians who would have given priority to monolingual Swedish education. According to my material there is no such division line. In five out of six municipalities there is political consensus on this particular language management measure. The following focus-group interview quote exemplifies how mother-tongue education fits into a municipalities' language management:

1M: We try to integrate mother tongue tuition in the school curriculum so that it would not become a subject pupils choose to opt out of because the class is outside the school schedule. Mother tongue classes should instead be part of the timetable. Another plan is to offer more tutorial(s) in the mother tongue to students who are in need of it. At the same time we work on extending the role of mother tongue teachers so that they would function as bridge-builders in that sense that she/he can combine teaching mother tongue and tutorials in mother tongue in the language workshops where one can combine science education with mother tongue tutorials. I do not believe that simply increasing the number of mother tongue classes would help but we need to find better ways of making use of our mother tongue teachers.

1FP: When something happens in the school the mother tongue teacher could make a call to the parents and explain the situation. Later on, if it is necessary, the school would contact an official interpreter.

The educational board is in agreement about what kind of language policies they will support in all municipal schools. One of the pillars of the municipal language policy is raising the linguistic awareness of teachers and pupils in the entire community. The strategy is directed towards Swedish as a first and as a second language and mother tongue tuition. The municipality invests in further training of teachers and school leaders so that they can meet the needs of linguistically diverse students by integrating the teaching of Swedish with the content areas of the regular curriculum. Another pillar of the educational boards' language policies is that mother tongue teachers should become better integrated in individual schools. This integration would, according to the members of this educational board, extend or alter the role of mother tongue teachers. Mother tongue teachers are rarely seen as ordinary teachers, but rather as bridge-builders between two (or several) languages and cultures and between the school and the parents of children with another mother tongue. They are usually employed by central units which offer teaching in up to forty different languages. As a recent Quality Report from the Swedish School Inspection (body/agency)observed, mother tongue tuition in most municipalities lives its own life (Skolinspektionen 2010/16: 25). Many school politicians acknowledge that what mother tongue tuition their respective municipality offers is not always adequate, mostly because of organizational reasons. In spite of these critical views mother tongue tuition is seen as an important pillar of the multicultural ideology that celebrates linguistic diversity. Nevertheless, while most politicians acknowledge the importance of mother tongue tuition the majority of them motivate the support with references to research that shows that bilingual children reach better results if they have the possibility to improve both their first and second language. As a school leader (6S) in municipality 6 explained:

We encourage those students who do not study (their) mother tongue to apply for it in those cases when their Swedish language does not work well

and we think that the pupil would gain from having a well-functioning mother tongue. These two things belong together. It happens that one does not have a functioning language: neither in his mother tongue nor in Swedish.

According to the lessons from the interviews with school leaders, it happens most often in cases like the one described above that the pupil has difficulties with his studies and it is assumed that these problems depend on the pupil's meagre skills in Swedish. The general trend is that when(?) mother tongue tuition as a language management measure was discussed in more detail, it was always in relation to how mother tongue tuition in general and study guidance in mother tongue in particular can help students to improve their results especially in subjects like social studies and science. Thus, when school politicians emphasize the importance of mother tongue tuition they refer to a few standardized language management measures, the main goal of which is defined in terms of supporting the development of Swedish language skills. This is an embedded paradox in the narratives on school language policies.

Mother tongue tuition is often mentioned either as a way towards better Swedish skills or as a proof of multicultural and multilingual awareness. Bi- or multilingualism is usually discussed as a "property" of mother-tongue teachers and the pupils involved in mother-tongue education. This belief is widely shared within the educational domain. In its rapport on mother tongue tuition, The Swedish National Agency for Education defines "multilingual" as "children/pupils/teachers/parents with another mother tongue than Swedish" (Skolverket 2002: 11). The following quote illustrates one more time the ideological anchoring of language management devices:

2V: I would like to invest more resources in mother tongue tuition because I think that one has to learn one language first, so that one could build the other languages on that. We ought not to end up with multilinguals who do not speak anything well. I work in a high school and I have met teenagers who should have got better support both as far as mother tongue tuition and as Swedish as a second language is concerned.

The quote is representative for the language beliefs and ideologies which determine the language management measures and outcomes in mid-sized municipalities. At first there is the belief that children with a foreign background need to learn their mother tongue first in order to be able to learn Swedish. Secondly, there is the belief that multilingual pupils are those who do not speak Swedish/mother tongue well. Thirdly, those who are enrolled in mother tongue tuition study Swedish as a second language. This belief system which is common among school politicians precludes that bilingualism or multilingualism would be seen as something to strive for. At the same time it also shows how the pluralist narratives about promoting multilingualism stand on weak grounds.

Swedish as a second language: An ideological or a language management device?

Swedish as a second (foreign) language was established as an individual subject in compulsory schools in 1995. According to a report from the Swedish National Agency for Education the subject has such a low status that the question arises whether the existence of Swedish as a second language as a separate subject is justified (Skolverket 2008b: 16). The negative perception of the subject of Swedish as a second language is attributed to the following factors: 1. It is often seen as remedial tuition; 2. It is often regarded as a temporary measure; 3. It is often assigned to pupils from a lower social background. The problems related to Swedish as a second language many times depend on the subject's

ideological embeddedness and on the categorization practices which are interrelated with this. According to Matlar's (2008?) findings Swedish as a second language, as an independent subject, was established as a result of two interdependent processes. On the one hand there were the politico-ideological which is to a large extent grounded in the support-philosophy according to which immigrant children are in need of compensatory measures in terms of learning Swedish. On the other hand there are the linguistic arguments according to which Swedish should be thought of as a foreign/second language to those who do not speak it as their first language (13–17). As these two perspectives have been intermeshed from the very beginning, Swedish as a second language has become a device for categorization and an ideological tool (Gruber 2008; Bunar 2000). From a linguistic perspective it is a well-established fact that there is a difference between learning a language as one's first language from one's birth and studying/learning a second or additional language. Most importantly, teaching a language as an additional language has different didactics than teaching a language as a mother tongue. However, the issues related to theories of second language acquisition get undermined when the subject itself gets associated with low prestige, otherness and discrimination.

Different schools have different routines for decision making about which pupils should study Swedish as a second language and who should be categorized as a student of "Swedish 2". The great majority of school leaders put a great emphasis on pinpointing that Swedish as a second language is a school subject in its own right. However, when scrutinizing the narratives attached to Swedish as a second language we can observe substantial differences in how the subject is treated. According to my material, school leaders in schools which have a higher percentage of pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish were less inclined to see Swedish as a second language as remedial tuition than school leaders in schools where the rate of children with a foreign background is lower. The differences between how individual schools work with Swedish as a second language can be to a large extent attributed to the enormous differences between schools as far as the linguistic composition of the pupils is concerned. School leaders work towards the same goal but they have very different points of departures. Another finding from my empirical material is that different actors make use of different linguistic ideologies and perspectives when discussing the role of Swedish as a second language. Those who see the subject as a categorizing device often argue that the problems with the subject begin with its name, because it contains the word "second". As it was formulated in several interviews it is very unfortunate that it is called Swedish-two and is considered to be worse (than Swedish 1). There is an opinion that it is second class Swedish education.

School politicians regard the subject very differently. At one end of the continuum is the view according to which Swedish as a second language is a low standard version of Swedish assigned for immigrant pupils. This view has been summarized by a school politician as follows:

2M: That invention, Swedish as a second language, is the worst thing we could do for our immigrant youth. These young people should study Swedish with three gold stars (Swedish of the best quality) ... I think we have destroyed the reputation of these pupils when we made up the subject Swedish as a second language. We should find methods which are suitable for teaching but we should not invent a new subject. These children (immigrant pupils) should have three or four extra hours of Swedish a week instead.

At the other end of the continuum is the view according to which Swedish as a second language is a perspective that all teachers in a given school ought to work with. Another school politician with the same party affiliation but in another municipality argued as follows:

IM: I think we need to increase the competence at a general level... Teachers should speak more complex Swedish and they should speak more in general, they should explain and clarify all the time. That is the only way to higher the overall linguistic competence. ... Children today know fewer words and they do not understand (a complicated language) and have a poorer vocabulary and it is a disadvantage not to have enough words. Understanding texts will be very difficult very fast if one's linguistic competence is low. I think it is crazy to speak of children with immigrant background and children with Swedish background. This perspective (Swedish as a second language) favours all children. I do not think that we should make any difference, instead the Swedish language should be trained in a professional, well-considered and structured way and it should be a part of teaching in all subjects.

Interestingly, even if seemingly these two opinions are very far from each other they are reactions to the same dilemma. Swedish as a second language is a subject assigned to a specific category of pupils, those whose first language is not Swedish. Thereby the subject makes visible a difference that is seen considered problematic because it categorizes pupils into Swedish speakers and non-Swedish speakers. The boundary between speakers of Swedish as a first language and as a second language is far from clear-cut and is difficult to tackle. No one questions whether pupils who are students in the introductory classes should learn Swedish as a second language or not, because it is obvious that their mother tongue is not Swedish. However, when it comes to pupils who were born in Sweden the question becomes a lot more complicated. There are two basic beliefs which come into conflict with one another. The first assumption is that children whose parents have another mother tongue than Swedish acquire their parents' mother tongue as their first language. This assumption seems to be most widespread among monolingual Swedish politicians and school leaders with little experience of multilingualism in their schools. The second assumption is that children who were born in Sweden and who attended Swedish day care would automatically speak Swedish as their first language. This view is usually devoted to parents who have a foreign background but whose children were born in Sweden. As in the earlier school years the boundaries between the two subjects (Swedish – Swedish as a second language) are not salient the two assumptions live side by side without being visible usually until the sixth or seventh grade when students get categorized into “Swedish 1 and Swedish 2 learners.”

Teaching and learning Swedish as a second language has become an ethnicized issue in the sense that it establishes a socio-cultural boundary between pupils who speak standard Swedish and those who do not. The nature of the boundary has important implications for the content of the language policy narratives attached to the subject. The pluralist narrative, that in its policy version celebrates linguistic difference, is in relation to Swedish as a second language reproduced with negative overtones, as a means of linguistic discrimination. There is an embedded paradox here because the language management instrument introduced as a means of recognizing difference turned out to become an ethnicized problem in itself. This development can be explained by at least two factors: Firstly, Swedish as a second language has become the victim of language policies based on avoidance. The strong emphasis on pluralist narratives about multilingualism is not in accordance with the educational practice within which the Swedish language enjoys absolute supremacy. In spite of certain language management measures with the aim to maintain some degree of multilingualism in society, standard Swedish remains the language of education and the language of prestige. This sociolinguistic fact leads to a reinforcement of ethnic difference both interactionally and discursively (Brubaker et al. 2006). Secondly, in spite of the strong enforcement of pluralist narratives on linguistic

difference, multilingualism continues to be seen as “the property” of those who do not speak standard Swedish. Thus, a multilingual pupil is not seen as someone who speaks several languages but someone who is in need of remedial tuition in Swedish.

By way of a conclusion

Swedish is *de facto* and *de jure* the official and dominant language in Sweden. However, as far as school language policies are concerned there is a great insecurity at the political level in how the linguistic diversity among pupils should be tackled. At the level of municipal school politics, the questions related to language are dominated by a rhetoric that emphasizes the importance of multilingualism but strives for monolingualism in education. Multilingualism has become a catchword assigned to pupils with a foreign background while both the society at large and the parents of immigrant children in particular expect that Swedish will come naturally so that their children would reach a linguistic competence in Swedish which equals the linguistic competence of native Swedish speakers.

The Swedish school has become a battleground of the dominant ideology of multiculturalism and multilingualism on the one hand and the *de facto* dominance of the Swedish language at the societal level on the other hand. There is a clash between the multilingual discourse and the school perspective. The multilingual discourse treats mother tongue tuition as the ultimate answer to the question of how to provide all pupils access to Swedish. At the same time the lack of debate on bilingual education indicates that the scope for education in languages other than Swedish is rather limited. Mother tongue tuition combined with teaching Swedish as a second language, one of the recipes often presented as an ultimate solution to all problems related to linguistic diversity among children, is assigned to a specific category of pupils: those who do not qualify as native speakers of Swedish regardless of how long they have lived in Sweden.

Among school politicians and principals there is consensus that mother tongue tuition (for pupils who are expected to have another mother tongue than Swedish) is an important part of the curriculum. However, when further analyzing the motives behind promoting mother tongue tuition we can see that the logic behind this is as follows: a strong first language will help children to improve their second language, and thus bilingual children will speak better Swedish. Nevertheless, as mother tongue tuition is limited to 1–2 hours a week and none of the interviewees raised any political or pedagogical motives to increase the amount of lessons, it is questionable if the goal of “active bilingualism” is realistic. There is a discrepancy between the political rhetoric that has a strong emphasis on multilingual intensions and the praxis that is based on unilingual solutions. Mother-tongue tuition is supported as far as it contributes to improve the ability of students to improve their Swedish. This is motivated by the argument that attractiveness of schools does not depend on whether they promote bilingualism but on whether they can ensure that the children have the opportunity to get socialized into the common, “unifying” language Swedish. The results suggest that there is a discrepancy between politico-ideological discourses on multilingualism and multiculturalism and the educational discourses on the importance of learning standard Swedish. According to my material there is consensus among school politicians on the importance of the Swedish linguistic milieu for the development of the pupils’ Swedish but this insight collides in most cases with the neighbourhood principle.

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