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### Bilingual education for Finnish Minority Students in Sweden<sup>i</sup>

Bilingual Education

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Finns in Sweden consist of two groups: small autochthonous minority in the Torne Valley which remained on the Swedish side of the border when (the rest of) Finland, after some 650 years of colonisation by Sweden, became a Grand Duchy under Russia in 1807 (to become independent in 1917), and the largest labour immigrant minority group in the Nordic countries (probably some 5-600.000, of a population somewhat under 9 million). There are thus similarities between Finns in Sweden and Spanish-speakers in the USA.

Language, both historically and at present one of the most important cultural core values for Finns, is the main feature differentiating Finns from Swedes - the cultural and even 'racial' features are similar. Swedish is, like English, Russian, Hindi, Spanish, etc, an Indo-European language, Finnish is completely unrelated, Finno-Ugric (related to Hungarian, Estonian, Sámi and several small languages in northern Russia). The Swedish negative ideologies towards people from the former colony therefore crystallized from very early on in an opposition to any rights for the Finnish language. A struggle against this linguistically (as opposed to biologically) argued racism, **linguicism**, has been central in shaping bilingual education for Finnish minority students in Sweden.

Linguicism can be defined as

ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and (both material and non-material) resources between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988, 13).

### Early Developments

The development of education for the indigenous Sámi and for minorities (hereafter: minority education) in Sweden followed a similar line to minority education in many other western countries. It started with **indifference** (minorities were not formally educated or, if they were, no concessions were made in relation to language or culture), **romantic-racist segregation** ('Lapp skall vara Lapp' = 'the Lapp must remain Lapp' - the Noble Savage idea) and **pragmatism** (ad hoc-solutions). Some early missionaries knew (some of) the languages of the minorities and literacy in the mother tongue was attempted - the way to the soul was through the mother tongue. With the spread of the nationalist-romantic nation state ideology and the growing need for some formal education, a concomitant to early industrialisation, demands for educational and linguistic homogenisation rapidly changed the medium of education, starting from the early 1860s and continuing for more than a century. In both Norway and Sweden there were also (completely ungrounded) fears that Russia might demand border justifications along the Russian/Norwegian and Russian/Swedish border and want to include Finnish- or Sámi-speaking areas in Sweden and

Norway. The defence argument provided an additional legitimation for Sweden and Norway to **assimilate** the northern minorities (see e.g. Eriksen & Niemi 1981, Kemiläinen 1964, Lind Meløy 1980). It was officially forbidden in Swedish state schools to use Finnish (and Sámi) between 1888 and 1957, not only as a medium of education but also during the breaks (see e.g. Hansegård 1968, Jaakkola 1973, Lundemark 1980, Muncio 1987, 1996, Slunga 1965, Tenerz 1966). Autobiographical fiction from both Sweden - e.g. Kieri 1976 - and Norway - e.g. Gustavsén & Sandvik (eds.) 19xx - describes the punishments, both physical and psychological. By the time immigrant minorities started arriving in large numbers, Swedish had been firmly established as the only medium of education and the only language allowed (for the development in Sweden, see Hansegård 1968, 1990, Jaakkola 1973, Lundemark 1980, Muncio 1996, Wingstedt 1996). The **'people's home'** (folkhemmet) **ideology** of the nation state as a linguistically, culturally and socially homogenous community of integrated equals was to become a reality through social engineering, meaning state-initiated reforms, based on knowledge through research. The nationalistic, classist and racist tendencies in this ideology were directed towards all those who had to be forcefully 'uplifted' from their 'otherness' - linguistic minorities, the working class, women, users of alcohol, the unemployed, etc (see Muncio 1996 and references in it).

The bulk of the labour migrants started arriving in Sweden after 1954, with the free Nordic labour market where no passports, work permits or residence permits were (and still are not) required. Swedish companies recruited labour to factories, first from Finland and in the 1960s and early 70s also from Southern European countries. Initially young able-bodied single men arrived, but soon Finns started coming as families and fairly soon single women also made the move. Most of the women also worked full-time, in factories or in cleaning jobs. Middle class migration from Finland started much later and has never been large.

Formal education has always been highly appreciated in Finland, regardless of class background. There has been 100 percent literacy for more than a century. Finns read, buy and borrow more books than most people in the world. In international reading comparisons, Finnish children have consistently been among the top scorers in the world in all age groups. Finland is one of the most literate countries in the world.

Still, most Finnish parents could not help their children in the Swedish school. Many had only 6-8 years of formal education themselves. Often both parents had long working hours in the factories. Initially many did not know or have opportunities to learn Swedish well. There are (true) stories about Yugoslavs learning Finnish but no Swedish in Volvo factories in Sweden. The development of (immigrant) minority education after the second World War in Sweden has, except for a short decade of accepting the importance of the mother tongue from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, been assimilationist. Initially Finnish children were taught completely through the medium of Swedish, by Swedish-speaking teachers with no knowledge of Finnish, in regular submersion programmes (so called 'regular Swedish classes'). The children soon learned, like Antti Jalava that 'writing compositions in Finnish was prohibited' (1988, 163), 'it was despicable to be a Finn' (ibid., 164) and

my mother tongue was worthless [...] it made me the butt of abuse and ridicule. So down with the Finnish language! I spat on myself, gradually committed internal suicide.' (ibid., 164).

Finnish children often reacted with silence (extreme shyness, mutism - Takač 1974) or physical violence or playing truant (Toukomaa 1973), and were highly overrepresented in special classes

(Kuusela 1973, Aurelius 1975). The parents started worrying, and acted, and the second phase started.

## Major Contributions

In 1970 the first Finnish-medium transitional classes started in an elementary school in Gothenburg, as a common sense-based parent-teacher cooperation initiative (without any research backing) and against fierce opposition from many (but not all) representatives of the Swedish authorities. In social democratic Sweden, private schools for any working class groups were unthinkable (elites of course had theirs) and equality was strictly interpreted as 'the same education for all, in integrated classes'.

At the same time the first research results started coming. Pertti Toukomaa's pioneering studies in Olofström in 1971-72 showed that Finnish children in Sweden did worse than Finnish children in Finland in the Finnish language and worse than Swedish children in Sweden in the Swedish language. Some of the results were eventually published in English (Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa 1976, Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas 1977). Together with Jim Cummins (1976, 1979) Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas developed early versions of the threshold and interdependence hypotheses.

Nils Erik Hansegård's book **Tvåspråkighet eller halvspråkighet** (Bilingualism or semilingualism) about the Tornedalen autochthonous Finnish minority and the Sámi appeared in 1968 and caused discussion and debate, some politically motivated (conservative) and/or misrepresenting what Hansegård and others had said (Ekstrand, Öhman, Romaine & Martin-Jones), some serious (e.g. Loman (ed.) 1974; Brent-Palmer 1979 and Toukomaa & Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins' replies 1979 in **Working Papers on Bilingualism**; the final discussion in Skutnabb-Kangas (ed.) 1977, where Nils Erik Hansegård, Pertti Toukomaa and Bengt Loman debated semilingualism in a panel chaired by Skutnabb-Kangas). Hansegård (who, just like Toukomaa, was severely victimised in the debate and marginalised as a researcher by the Swedish establishment), now emeritus professor of Sámi, wrote after his retirement a new book describing his methods and answering much of the criticism about semilingualism (1990). In the early 1970s, several Finnish-Swedish conferences were organised to discuss the issues and to try to convince Swedish school authorities that Finnish-medium education, with good teaching of Swedish as a second language, given by bilingual well-trained teachers, was a necessity (Skutnabb-Kangas (ed.) 1975, 1977). Training courses for teachers were also started, first summer courses, then ordinary university courses.

The discussions resulted in 1975 in the law on 'home language' teaching, one of the most well known Swedish contributions to minority education. The law (in force since 1977) made it possible to organise 1-2 weekly hours of teaching in different minority mother tongues as a subject to children in comprehensive school (i.e. grades 1-9, age 7-15), with state support. Already in the spring 1975, 29.5% of all 62,778 children registered by the schools as 'immigrant children' participated in this 'home language teaching'. The percentage in the autumn 1980 had grown to 61% of the 86,596 'immigrant children' (with 3.800 'home language teachers') and continued to be over 60% during the following decade (the highest percentage, being 68% of the 85,236 'immigrant children' in 1986). After the very serious financial cuts in 1991/92 the percentage went down but still in 1994, 55% (61,306) of the 111,720 'immigrant children' participated (and had 2,200 teachers) (sources: different reports from the Central Statistical

Bureau, and Hyltenstam & Tuomela 1996).

The 1975 law was never formulated as granting any child the **right** to instruction in or of the **mother tongue** (even if some researchers wrongly claim this, e.g. Linde & Löfgren 1988), only as a conditional **duty** for local authorities to organise it, with many 'if's. No teaching relating to the mother tongue has ever been obligatory in Sweden - except for Swedish-speaking children. What was obligatory was the auxiliary teaching of **Swedish** to minority children, if teachers deemed it necessary. Muncio 1987 is the most thorough treatise of the 'home language reform', the discussions leading to it and its implementation.

Most of the students (80-90%) who participated in the 'home language teaching' (1-2 hours per week), were in Swedish-medium classes. The rest were either in mother-tongue medium classes (mostly Finns, but there were also classes in several other languages, e.g. Arabic, Assyrian, English, Greek, Serbocroat, Spanish, Turkish) or in 'combined' classes ('sammansatta klasser'), with minority students from one group only, together with Swedish children, where the minority students had some teaching through the medium of their own language initially while the rest of the teaching was in Swedish for the whole class. Both types of class were transitional, and usually all the teaching, except the teaching in the mother tongue as a subject (in most cases only 1 or 2 lessons per week) was in Swedish already from grade 4.

The number of Finnish-medium elementary classes grew rapidly, in many cases despite opposition by Swedish politicians and school authorities: there were 88 of them in 1975, 85% of all the 104 mother tongue medium classes in Sweden; 414 in 1980 (76% of the total of 542 classes) and 468 in 1981 (out of 600). In many local authorities there were serious conflicts, with school strikes, organised by parents (see Honkala et al. 1988) and sometimes teachers. Often the continuation of mother tongue-medium classes was a result of a struggle every single year, but some local authorities also supported mother-tongue medium education and got good results (see e.g. Hagman & Lahdenperä 1988).

Government-commissioned research was used against the parents at several different levels (just as lack of research results had been used earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s, together with a refusal to grant money for research, despite many well-founded requests and despite research results being claimed to be the backbone of the Swedish social engineering - see Muncio 1996). The Swedish National Board of Education initiated a large study of combined classes in Malmö, with Swedish taught already in preschool. Despite the massive efforts, with extra teachers and extra time for planning, and despite the fact that in some cases tests meant for younger children were used, the results showed that the Finnish children in these classes did not do as well as Swedish children in Swedish language tests. Still, the results were presented as showing that the combined class model gave Finnish children enhanced possibilities (Löfgren & Ouvinen-Birgerstam 1980). Likewise, the Board commissioned an overview of immigrant minority education in Sweden from Christina Bratt Paulston (1983). It concluded that the Swedes had been fooled into believing in the mother tongue hypothesis; that immigrant children, given the chance, would like to assimilate and become good Swedes; and that within two generations all the others would be assimilated except, maybe, the Finns and the Finnish 'Gypsies' (i.e. Roma). Both these studies have been severely criticized in relation to the methods, the data and the conclusions (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1980, 1996b, Jaakkola 1989, Hyltenstam & Tuomela 1996).

In order to contribute to a more serious study of the Sweden Finnish school issue, a joint Swedish-Finnish large-scale project was proposed (Bruun et al. 1984) and carried through with resources from both Finnish and Swedish research councils. The main results are published in Peura & Skutnabb-Kangas (eds.) 1994. There were subprojects on the cooperation and

participation of minority parents in the decision making process in their children's schooling. Municio (1994), for example, showed that the parents were treated by the school authorities as neither cooperators nor adversaries but as non-parties whom the Swedish authorities listened to politely and then completely ignored. With respect to gender differences in the parents' and children's generations, Rosenberg and Toukoma (1994) showed a pattern of strong women and self-marginalising men, with these roles possible carrying over to the younger generation. Other projects focused on the development from an immigrant group to a national ethnic minority (Peura 1993, 1994), on communication strategies of youngsters in Finnish medium grade 7-9 classes (Kuure 1994) and on the integration and ethnic identity of these youngsters and their parents (Skutnabb-Kangas 1994).

The last two subprojects studied 20 working class children, born in Sweden, who had had 9 years in Finnish-medium classes in two metropolitan Stockholm schools in Botkyrka and Upplands Väsby. The children were trained as co-researchers and they also studied their own communication strategies themselves. The project has rich observational data, several interviews with the children and their parents (e.g. transcribed parent interviews, with 291 questions, 1.653.000 bytes; children's interviews, 99 questions, 510.000 bytes), non-verbal IQ tests [Raven], language tests in both languages (including Swedish-language tests for the parents), essays, videotaped sessions where the children analyse their own communication strategies, and many other types of data. The children were compared to Finnish children in northern Finland (N= 28), to Swedish (and other) children in two Swedish-medium parallel classes, one in each school (N = 53) and to those class mates in Finnish-medium classes (N= 34) who could not participate in the project because they did not fulfil the criteria, e.g. were not born in Sweden. The languages tests showed that their Finnish was almost at the same level as that of Finnish children in Finland. Their Swedish language test results and their school achievement were somewhat better than those of the Swedish mostly middle class controls (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1994). They and the parents fulfilled the criteria used for integration preparedness, with high cognitive, affective and behavioural competence in both languages and cultures and high degrees of metalinguistic/metacultural awareness. The children identified positively with both languages, cultures and countries. They themselves explained the positive results in terms of having had continuation in their educational career and support from their parents and teachers, in addition to the local authority having supported the educational choices which their parents and they themselves had made.

The results confirm what has been at the core of the debates of the last quarter of a century: when mother tongue medium education (with good second language teaching) lasts long enough, minimally the first 6 years, high levels of bilingualism and a possibility of strong achievement at school follow.

Admittedly the numbers involved were small, but very few Finnish children in Sweden have had 9 years of mother tongue medium (MTM) education. Also, the chances of studying children from other minority groups in Sweden with 9 years of MTM education are zero. No other group in state schools has had or will have any MTM education above grade 6, and the State Committee report 1996 limited even the mother tongue teaching as a subject to only 7 years during the whole formal education for other groups. Still some recent studies point in the same direction as the above.

Hill's ethnographic study (1995) with 42 17-year olds from several ethnic minority groups in the first grade of upper secondary school ('gymnasieskolan'), with a dozen mother tongues, chosen amongst 'immigrant children' in Gothenburg born in 1977 who had had 'home language training'

in preschool, divide the youngsters in three groups: those who had had mother tongue teaching throughout their comprehensive school without any break (group A), those who had had at least a few years of it in comprehensive school (group B) and those who stopped it earlier, before grade 3 (group C). (There are some similarities with the threepartite division in Ramirez et al. study in the U.S.A., see Faltis, this volume). 81% of all the children came from the lowest social layers. In short, those who showed the best results (school achievement, Swedish language, identity, capacity to express abstract concepts, etc) were the ones with continuous mother tongue teaching from preschool throughout the comprehensive school, group A. The lowest scoring group, with difficulties in Swedish according to both their own and the researcher's evaluation, and with negative scores on all the other measures, were the ones with most Swedish, group C. Several other recent studies can be interpreted in a similar vein, or at least showing that MTM education or teaching of the MT as a subject has not had any adverse effect on the children's Swedish or educational achievement (e.g. Bergman 1993, Eriksson 1994, Skolverket 1993, Virta 1994). Other researchers (e.g. Linde & Löfgren 1988, Löfgren 1991, Löfgren & Ouvinen-Birgerstam 1980) have argued that Finnish and other minority students should be in largely Swedish medium classes. However, the data which they base this recommendation on provide little support for it. All these studies can thus be interpreted differently from what the authors themselves do. Hyltenstam & Tuomela (1996), for example, point out that the very high degree of heterogeneity of the participating students, shown in one of the substudies in Löfgren 1991 can have played a role for all the results (not only in this but also in the other substudies). They list some of the heterogeneity, where on the one hand some students did not yet know much Swedish whereas others who were monolingual in Swedish were also included, because of the definition of "immigrant students" used in the project (1996, 82). According to Hyltenstam & Tuomela (1996, 83) it is "not impossible that it is conditions of this kind which, when one [= the authors] looks at the group as a whole, are responsible for the result being that mother tongue teaching does not have any impact" (my translation). Furthermore, Linde and Löfgren found that grade 8 Finnish students who had received the bulk of their education through Finnish were performing just as well in Swedish as similar students who had been educated predominantly in Swedish.

## Future Directions

The large gap between some of the positive intentions behind earlier reforms, the resistance from many local authorities and many problems in the implementation of regulations have been described in several studies (e.g. Huss, in preparation, Källström 1982, Muncio 1994, Peura 1993, Tingbjörn (ed). 1984), some of them longitudinal (e.g. Johansson 1993, Muncio 1987). One site of struggle has also been what kinds of research and experiments have been allowed and financed and how research has been conducted and used. Cooption of the fairly few researchers is easier and pressure on them to conform to state ideologies is also more fierce in small countries than in countries with more opportunities (see, e.g., the contributions to Peura (ed.) 1983, also showing the big differences in research design, finance and results between Swedish researchers and those researchers who themselves represent minorities). Research used for control can easily dominate under those circumstances.

The latest developments in minority education include a harsh attempt in 1991-92 at slaughtering the rest of the mother tongue teaching with economic cutbacks in state schools (and most schools in the Nordic countries are state schools). The official message in the final report from the (State)

Committee on Immigration Policy, summer 1996 has not been interpreted in optimistic ways for minorities in Sweden.

An interesting contradiction is that the conservative government, in the name of "choice for parents" and "free markets", mainly geared towards elite education, also had to allow independent minority schools to start in 1991, with state support (provided at least 50% of the teaching was in Swedish, though). The present (1997) Social Democrat government has already cut some of the support. There were in 1996-97 11 Finnish schools, with altogether fewer than 1.000 students (one of these is used as an example in Skutnabb-Kangas & García 1995) and several Muslim schools. Some small scale evaluations are planned. In general, the children seem to be doing very well indeed in these schools.

Some of the worries for future include:

- a risk of the existence of independent schools making it seem unnecessary to have mother tongue medium classes in state schools;
- the rest of the teaching of the different minority mother tongues disappearing fast from school time tables (but followed by some teaching of some of these languages as foreign languages in upper secondary schools);
- a further widening of social gaps in society, with the dismantling of the welfare society, leading to still more marginalisation of the weakest immigrant and refugee minorities, with a housing "ghettoization" as an additional result, with the same type of educational consequences as in inner cities in the north Americas;
- celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity in the European Union resulting at best in some support for national minorities but only a few crumbs for immigrant and refugee minorities.

Research results are not decisive for educational change - economic and political power politics often carry much more weight. With both Finland and Sweden having joined the European Union at the same time (1996) and the Finnish economy now (after the initial shock of Eastern European trade disappearing over night with the disintegration of the Soviet Union) starting to overtake the Swedish, the need for the small Nordic countries to work together seems to start dawning on Sweden, a country which has not seen itself in a power minority position. The ideological decolonisation, discussed in many Asian and African countries as an urgent necessity, is starting to be approached also in Sweden (and Finland). Some high-level political shouting, together with outrageously arrogant comments from Finland have been almost gracefully received in Sweden and seem to be possibly resulting in a few careful compromises in relation to educational language rights.

Also, even if no rehabilitation has been suggested, some recent analyses seem to echo much earlier ones by Hansegård, Toukoma, etc. The more covert and sophisticated Swedish hegemonic measures, using linguistic and cultural rather than biologically argued hierarchising arguments in the educational assimilation process and attempting linguistic and cultural genocide, rationalised as 'helping', with the help of shame, carrots and ideological persuasion, making minority resources (including their languages and cultures) invalid through making them invisible or constructing them as handicaps not resources, seem to have started much earlier in Sweden's policies towards Finns than in most other countries (see Skutnabb-Kangas 1991, 1996a). Where physical force and cruder assimilationist arguments were earlier used to disempower minorities via education, without asking for or trying carefully to manufacture consent, the education of Finnish children in Sweden after WW2 has clearly shown that racism can be linguistically and culturally argued, rather than biologically argued, and that it is not about skin colour but about power relations. There are hopefully some more general lessons to be

learned, not only for the involved parties but also others. Some of the more vocal "second and third generation" youngsters who have succeeded **despite** the system, seem to be continuing the discussion.

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