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MULTILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICIES IN SWITZERLAND AND SWEDEN

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Abstract. Multilingualism represents a global challenge and a goal of education in European states. This meta-analysis examines how research studies on multilingual educational policy documents on a macro-level (national/regional) in Sweden and Switzerland differ in terms of foci and how the discourses in the articles represent different treatments of multilingual educational language policies. These countries were selected because of their similarities regarding the societal context, but they are different in regard to language policy issues and political formation. The articles were systematically identified via two databases, ERIC and LLBA, and in order to examine the latest developments after the introduction of a new language act in Sweden and the harmonization of public education in Switzerland in 2009, only research articles published between 2009 and 2016 were included. The results of the study suggest that a monolingual habitus exists in the Swedish nation state context compared to a more pluralistic approach in Switzerland. The most noteworthy result is the diverging definitions of multilingualism and plurilingual students and how this understanding influences the treatment of educational policies in these two linguistically and culturally superdiverse European countries.

Keywords: curriculum; educational language policy; European Union; language policy; multilingualism; plurilingualism; Sweden; Switzerland

In 2009, Sweden introduced a new Language Act (2009, p.600) to protect the Swedish language by making it the official principal language in the country. The Act's different provisions to ensure that an individual is given access to language was aimed at finding strategies for balanced multilingualism. In the same year, Switzerland agreed on the harmonization of compulsory education, including the introduction of a new language curriculum based on multilingualism. The systematic meta-analysis offered in this article therefore synthesizes research results on multilingual educational language policies from the two countries in order to identify and describe the predominant research topics during the implementation process in the years after the policy changed.

As Daryai-Hansen et al. (2015, p.110) note, “while the idea of plurilingual competence is well accepted in research on language education and promoted in language policies, it is not established in education in general.” A related conclusion is arrived at by Gogolin and Duarte (2013, p.6) who state that the notion “of a ‘language’ as a homogeneous and clearly defined or definable object, which can be linked to a likewise identifiable ‘people’ may no longer be reflected in state of the art research on language phenomena.” However, it prevails in the political sphere, educational practice, and as a common belief in European societies. In contrast to this ideology, sociolinguistic research shows that hundreds of millions use two or more languages without any particular difficulties, and “multilingualism is increasingly frequently seen as an emblem of identity – an essential component of European culture” (Lbdi & Py, 2009, p.156). According to Jessner (2008, p.27), “The application of monolingual norms to multilingual contexts is still predominant, despite the efforts of the European Union to foster plurilingualism.” Gogolin's hypothesis concerning the teachers' monolingual orientation in European schools “is an intrinsic element of their professional ‘habitus’ as members of the nation state school system” (2013, p.42). She uses the term ‘monolingual habitus’ as “the deep-

seated habit of assuming monolingualism as the norm in a nation” (2013, p.41). As a consequence, for these rather traditional classrooms, language subjects are often kept totally apart. Teachers with a monolingual habitus would therefore “keep knowledge about other languages, including the L1 [the students’ first language], out of the classroom in order not to confuse students” (Jessner, 2008, p.39). Also, according to Busch (2011, p.545), “Most of the European education systems are still under the heavy influence of monolingual and homoglossic ideologies.” While education systems continue to apply the construct of the monolingual habitus “displaying monolingual self conceptions in their constitutions, structures and practical arrangements” (Gogolin & Duarte, 2013, p.1), we live in a superdiverse society (Vertovec, 2007). The large number of refugees making their way to Europe since 2015 is only the latest development of a process that has already been in existence for several decades. Moreover, multiculturalism and multilingualism in Europe is by no means limited to refugees but “is affected by the now ubiquitous process of economic globalization and transnational activities of population mobility, wars, activism, and networking and communication technologies” (Lo Bianco & Bal, 2016, pp.4–5).

By synthesizing research results on multilingual educational policy documents on a macro-level (national/regional) in the nation states of Sweden and federalist Switzerland, it is possible to contrast the predominant foci and identify the similarities and differences of these countries. The comparison is relevant, as members of the Swiss educational arena are expected to be less guided by a monolingual habitus due to the country’s political and multilingual origins. While Switzerland and Sweden are different in terms of their political organization and language policy issues, their societal contexts are similar, with 8 to respectively 10 million inhabitants and around 200 languages used on a daily basis by many immigrants in both countries. Also, their Life Satisfaction Index by the OECD’s Better Life Index, which measures the well-being of societies is on a comparable level with 7.3 for Sweden and 7.6 for Switzerland out of 10 (OECD, 2017).

The aims of this meta-analysis are to identify and describe published research results on multilingual educational policy documents and how the findings differ between Switzerland and Sweden regarding the treatment of these policy documents. Two research questions have been formulated in order to achieve these aims:

What are the predominant foci in research results on Swedish and Swiss multilingual educational policy documents?

Do these findings show a rather monolingual or pluralistic approach in the treatment of current educational language policies?

Sufficient information about the sociolinguistic context of the two countries and the topic of multilingualism and multiculturalism in Europe provides a clear understanding of the situation in the two selected countries. After the section on the methodology used in this article, the results of the studies are discussed. Thus, this article seeks to contribute to the understanding of different educational policy contexts connected to multicultural and multilinguistic issues.

In terms of research on multilingual education, Busch (2011) describes two shifting paradigms in Europe. First, a more sociolinguistic approach has been taken into consideration, which views schools from the perspective of a historical-critical analysis by emphasizing the school’s social functions, criticizing its monolingual habitus, and advocating for an approach that relates teaching and learning practices to the specific social contexts. Moreover, the growing interest in bilingual or multilingual situations influences this. Second, in a more speaker-centered perspective, languages are no longer

regarded as segmented, autonomous entities but rather, as holistic conceptions of plurilingual competences which are multiple, dynamic, integrated, contextualized, and individualized is used (Lüdi & Py, 2009). Thus, access to different forms of multilingual education is increasingly seen as a necessary right for all learners, as it represents a resource on both the individual and societal levels (Lo Bianco, 2001).

This meta-analysis compares the development of the adjustments in European Union (EU) educational language policy based on the shifts described above in two European countries: Sweden, a EU member state since 1995, and Switzerland, one of the few countries in Western Europe that is not a member of the European Union but nevertheless adapts EU language policy recommendations like the “mother tongue plus 2” objective.

During the 2002 European Council in Barcelona, the Heads of State or Government of the EU called for at least two foreign languages to be taught from a very early age (European Commission, 2005). This eventually resulted in the policy objective, “Mother tongue plus two other languages,” already described in the European Commission’s action plan (European Commission, 2004). This usually means that English is one of the two other languages to be learned if English is not the mother tongue. For immigrants, the European Commission (2009) suggests that “Non-native speakers should therefore include the host-country language in their ‘one-plus-two’ combination.”

Some noteworthy differences between Sweden and Switzerland are to be found in the two countries’ political organization and their language history (including ideologies and policies). Given that “states typically license, authorize, fund, or certify educational practices” (Lo Bianco, 2008), differences in the political formation of states influence their educational systems and curricula. History in general “occupies an important position in most work in language policy and planning, whether at the micro-level of interpersonal communication or the macro-level of state formation” (Ricento, 2006, p.129). From a historical-structural standpoint in language policy and planning, where “historical processes are linked with language policies that contribute to (or undermine) language-related hierarchies” (Tollefson, 2015, p.141), it is therefore inevitable to take a closer look at the two countries’ history and central concepts in a historical-structural analysis, such as power and hierarchy in the two selected contexts.

Sweden

Because Swedish is officially used by the Church and the State, Sweden appears to be unproblematically monolingual (Boyd, 2011). As Hult (2004, p.181) writes, the country “might best be characterized as a multilingual polity with a monolingual image.” He continues, stating that “the Swedish language has been, and still is, central in shaping what it means to be Swedish.” This is a characteristic trademark of nation states that, according to Busch (2011, p.545), remain the major players in language and education policy. While trying to adapt education plans to the European requirements of multilingual education, the political discourse in many countries “foregrounds proficiency in the official national language(s) as exclusive means and as the proof of successful ‘integration’ into ‘majority culture’.” In respect to Sweden, Milani (2007) claims that a nation state experiencing an increased linguistic heterogeneity will also experience conflicting language ideologies as the people construct a new sociolinguistic landscape.

According to Andersson and Lundström (2010), the percentage of people who live in Sweden but were born outside of Sweden rose from about 11% in the year 2000 to about 14% in 2008. In 2015, the number had reached 17% (Statistics Sweden, 2015). However, societal multilingualism is not only determined by the number of people immigrating to a country but also by the number of people born where the national language is not their mother tongue. According to Statistics Sweden, by 2015, 22.2% of the inhabitants in Sweden had a foreign background.¹ This heterogeneity has also had an impact on the education system and policy:

Sweden is no exception in terms of having a history of multilingualism, especially when one considers that the Sami and Finnish-speaking minorities have inhabited Sweden for a long time. If the Swedish empire of the late seventeenth century is taken into consideration, 14 different languages and many varieties show proof of a multilingual nation even then (Winsa, 2005). Nevertheless, the Swedish-speaking majority had never felt challenged in a way that language policy had to be made more overt until the 1990s, when the Swedish Language Council initiated the endeavor of developing a new language act. These shifts in Swedish language policy are well-described by Boyd and Huss (2001), who mainly focus on the relation of the Swedish language to English and other minority languages. Also, according to the recent analysis by Halonen, Ihalainen, and Saarinen (2015), given the presumed unproblematic monolingual nature of Sweden, language policy has become explicitly problematized at the governmental level only since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Faced with the recognition of Swedish as an official and working language of EU institutions due to the accession of Sweden to the EU in 1995, and coupled with rising immigration and a further diversification of the linguistic landscape, an ambitious policy report entitled “Mel i mun” (SOU, 2002) was published by the parliamentary Committee on the Swedish Language. The document consists of nearly six hundred pages of proposals related to the promotion of the Swedish language. Nevertheless, it was only in the Language Act of 2009, in accordance with the language planning goals that were adopted in 20052 (“Bjsta spreket – en samlad svensk sprekpolitik,” 2005/06:2), that Swedish was officially defined as the ‘main language’ of Swedish society as well as the language of administration. The new language law was the answer to an imbalance in terms of language rights. In 1999, Sweden ratified the Council of Europe Framework convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, by which Finnish, S6mi, Mednkieli, the Romani chib, and Yiddish maintained their status as minority languages (Lindberg, 2007). This meant that for some years, in contrast to the five minority languages, Swedish itself had no legally recognized status. While the minority languages’ official status (see also Hult, 2004; Hyltenstam & Milani, 2005) was confirmed, the Language Act was mainly about securing the development of Swedish, its constant use in international contexts, and the right of every inhabitant of the country to have access to learning the language (Halonen et al., 2015). This last aim can be viewed as an attempt at implementing the EU goal of the mastery of three languages (mother tongue plus two) mentioned earlier in this article (Norrby, 2008).

A special focus was placed on the relationship between Swedish and English in addition to the societal multilingualism due to almost 200 ‘immigrant’ minority languages with no official status, although their speech communities far outnumber at least four of the five official minority languages. This is especially the case with English,³ which is widespread in many societal domains like culture, higher education, and internationally oriented companies and seen as a threat to Swedish. The following quotation is taken from the English version of the website of the Language Council of Sweden (Institutet fir sprek och folkminne, 2016):

During the last decades, English has started to compete with Swedish in a growing number of fields in Swedish society – in large, international companies, in the educational system and in the media industry. This poses a threat to democratic values as many Swedes have insufficient knowledge of English.

However, viewing English as a threat is only true for a limited circle of language professionals. English enjoys a good reputation with the rest of the population, while immigrant languages are regarded with suspicion and considered a threat to the Swedish

language (Lindberg, 2007). According to Hyltenstam (1999), the strong presence of English in high-status domains might create a diglossic situation with Swedish being the low-status variant. People with limited or no English proficiency could be excluded from important and powerful social discussions and decisions. However, other experts claim that no research confirms a domain-by-domain language shift (Boyd & Dahl, 2006). Sundberg (2013, p.212) states that the policy “attempts to ‘protect’ the Swedish language in a situation in which English is becoming too powerful in certain areas while at the same time recognizing its importance and supporting a balanced bilingualism by promoting parallel proficiencies in the two languages.” Generally, these contrasting opinions are interesting when bearing in mind Tollefson’s (2006, p.42) comparison of traditional research and a critical approach in language policy research. He states that “traditional research is characterized by the assumption that language policies are usually adopted to solve problems of communication in multilingual settings and to increase social and economic opportunities for linguistic minorities” while “a critical approach acknowledges that policies often create and sustain various forms of social inequality, and that policy-makers usually promote the interests of dominant social groups.”

According to Norrby (2008, p.73), the result of the most recent Swedish language politics is “societal monolingualism with Swedish being used for interaction in public life, whereas multiculturalism and multilingualism remain a question for the individual to pursue in private life.” This indicates that in order to achieve the language policy objective of the European Union (mother tongue plus two), the majority population whose first language is Swedish has to do more than expected by the Swedish Language Act. Winsa (2005, p.320) calls this development an assimilation policy with a nationalistic attitude, which is “a natural part of the Swedish monolingual identity, not one derived from a long tradition of language planning.” In contrast to Winsa’s statement, Hyltenstam, Axelsson, and Lindberg (2012) mention the tension in society between a pluralist ideology, established at the central political level since the 1960s (as is evinced by political documents) and an assimilationist perspective, which is strong in large segments of the population.

Switzerland

In contrast to the Swedish case, Switzerland is known as the multilingual country par excellence. According to Secretary General Schwab of the Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation (2014), “plurilingualism is an integral part of Switzerland’s identity and is a key element of the national culture. It is a result of the way in which the Confederation has developed historically.” However, due to the federalist system of this central European country, or to use Kymlicka’s (2011) term, “multination federalism,”⁴ one can be cautious about the Swiss individual plurilingualism. Switzerland is used as an example of multiple, monolingually oriented school systems in a state with a multilingual composition (Busch, 2011) due to the strong territorial autonomy of the various linguistic groups. Therefore, in contrast to the Swedish nation state, it is common for Switzerland not to have a national curriculum.

Currently, around 33% of the people living in Switzerland are not Swiss citizens (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2016b). This rather high percentage is the result of several factors: the bilateral agreement on the free movement of persons between the European Union and Switzerland, Switzerland’s restrictive immigration policy, and the high birth rate and low death rate of the non-Swiss population. In a previous press release (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2015), it is stated that about a fifth of the foreign population in Switzerland was born in Switzerland, and half of those who were born abroad have been living in Switzerland for more than 10 years.

According to the latest statistics, 60% of all people living in Switzerland use more than one language at least once per week. Furthermore, 40% of all people living in Switzerland use English at least once per week (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2016a). Compared to the long history of a plurilingual and pluricultural aggregation of states known as cantons, plurilingualism was introduced rather late into the Federal Constitution of 1848. Due to immigration and professional mobility, the diversity of languages in Switzerland has greatly increased.

In order to coordinate and optimize language teaching and learning in compulsory education, the Swiss conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK, Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektion) adopted a national strategy of language teaching (EDK, 2004) primarily consisting of several general objectives, including the following:

The reinforcement of the language of schooling

The compulsory study of two foreign languages⁶ at primary school level and of another (national) language as an option from the ninth school year

The development of the pupils' skills in their first language (if different from the language of schooling)

In 2007, a new Federal act (Sprachengesetz, 2007) aimed at promoting plurilingualism was introduced, and in 2010, a new article in the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, 1999 (2016)) went into effect stating the following:

The official languages of the Confederation are German, French, and Italian. Romansh is also an official language of the Confederation when communicating with persons who speak Romansh.

The Cantons shall decide on their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, the Cantons shall respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages and take into account the indigenous linguistic minorities.

The Confederation and the Cantons shall encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities.

The Confederation shall support the plurilingual Cantons in the fulfillment of their special duties.

The Confederation shall support measures by the Cantons of Graubünden and Ticino to preserve and promote the Romansh and Italian languages.

In 2009, an agreement on the harmonization of compulsory education (EDK, 2007) between the cantons came into effect. This agreement is relevant to the topic because it asked for new multilingual educational policy documents covering the 2004 national strategy for language teaching and the new Federal act mentioned above. Due to the federalist nature of the country, educational curricula for foreign language instruction are a matter of the cantons and their affiliation to a linguistic region. Therefore, Switzerland currently knows three curricula, one for each large linguistic area: *Le plan d'études romand*, *Lehrplan 21*, and *Il piano di studio per la scuola dell'obbligo ticinese*. The curriculum for the German speaking region of Switzerland consisted of different project curricula during the implementation period, resulting in foreign languages being taught in different orders in the Germanic area of the country, contradicting the intention of harmonization in educational policy.

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