

19 Sweden



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19.1 Linguistic Situation and Language Policy

On an everyday basis, Sweden, like its neighbouring countries, is a highly monolingual country, with immigrant and minority languages playing a minor role. Officially, though, Sweden recognises five minority languages: Yiddish, Romany Chib, Sami, Meänkieli (Tornedal Finnish) and Finnish. Finnish, originally a borderline language which in the 50s and 60s transformed into the largest immigrant language so far, is currently spoken by some 200 000 individuals. Today this number almost equals that of important immigrant languages of a later date, such as Serbo-Croatian and Arabic. Immigrant children receive some municipal support learning their mother tongue at school (as a subject or, more seldom, through CLIL), but the official debate strongly focuses on how they should best learn Swedish.

At present, CLIL has a controversial status. This is the result of an ambiguous national language policy, where Sweden, being well aware of the enormous influence of English, in a joint effort together with the other Nordic countries (see www.nordforsk.org) is trying to ensure that Nordic languages remain at the forefront of research and technology. On the other hand, the government and school authorities do very little to promote the learning and teaching of languages other than English. English, as the key language of globalisation, has had an enormous impact on all levels of Swedish society, resulting from both top-down pressures (in professional life, culture, education) and bottom-up processes (sub-cultural use of English within all facets of youth culture and computer usage). The latter may also be understood as a forceful type of corporate-driven consumerism (Phillipson 2003:89). As a result, English, available as a school subject from roughly age 8 onwards, is learned for many years and relatively effortlessly, whereas foreign languages such as French, German and Spanish (with teaching starting at approximately age 13), by comparison, are considered difficult, academic subjects. Consequently, these languages are not studied, or, if studied, are not followed to a high level of competence. This is further reinforced by their status as optional subjects after two years of study at lower (compulsory) secondary school or one year at upper secondary school. Recruitment of students specialising in these languages in higher education is also shrinking, with German currently recruiting less than half the number of just a few years ago. Thus it may not come as a surprise that the vast majority of all Swedish CLIL programmes have English as their target language and are a consequence of local initiatives, considering the above-mentioned grassroots popularity of English, the official language policy of

promoting Swedish, and the absence of any national policy to promote languages other than English. Consequently, in a recent CLIL survey initiated by the Swedish Board of Education (with the telling title 'CLIL –Threat or Possibility?', Falk 2001) the line of argument is latently emotive, with doubts about CLIL's pedagogical efficacy. The most serious criticism, however, concerns the detrimental impact CLIL may have on children's Swedish language development – study through the medium of a foreign language (i.e. English) may contribute to weakening the social position of Swedish on a general level (Falk 2001:39). The same vein of criticism can be found in a draft action programme for the Swedish language initiated by the government in 2002 (Mål i mun 2002:71-80)

19.2 Start and Development of CLIL

As CLIL is not promoted officially, all pilot projects and programmes stem from local initiatives, i.e. mostly from individual teachers, with the exception of some municipal authorities. Parents, on the other hand, have mostly initiated projects at pre-primary, and primary level.

CLIL has been offered in Sweden since 1977, when it was first introduced in an electro-technical stream of an upper secondary school (Åseskog 1977).⁵⁶ A few more schools joined over the next 15 years. Then, in 1992, came the new school law which, besides laying down new curricula, and formulating national objectives and general guidelines, gave a considerable amount of autonomy to schools and municipalities to run the system in detail and attain the objectives. Because of this, the number of CLIL programmes began to increase dramatically, first spreading to the (voluntary) upper secondary level (Years 10–12) in 1993–95, and then to many compulsory schools (Years 1–9) in 1995–96. The CLIL boom lasted up to 1998–99 with some 10–15 CLIL programmes commencing every year in secondary/adult education and compulsory schools. Since then the increase seems to have stagnated.

19.3 Regulations, Structure and Aims

In accordance with the new school law there are no regulations regarding CLIL as long as the programmes conform to the school law, and the national objectives are reached. This also implies that CLIL takes a great variety of forms. Normally, however, they exist in schools alongside the ordinary educational provision.⁵⁷ For the youngest children CLIL is often combined with Montessori teaching, and in Years 2–5 there are some individual teachers who systematically integrate content and language teaching in one or two subjects. Their number is very restricted though. In Years 3–9 at upper secondary level there are more schools involved, many of which reserve CLIL for promoting the study

⁵⁶ The learning of school subjects through the medium of a foreign language, however, has a long tradition in some ethnic schools in the capital, Stockholm, such as in the Estonian (1945), German (founded in 1624) and French (1954) schools.

⁵⁷ Only a few independent ethnic schools have 'whole school CLIL', as have some five IB-schools; 14 Swedish schools abroad (of 40) also offer CLIL.

of foreign languages by introducing short, cross-curricula projects, or thematic days or weeks.⁵⁸ CLIL is most widespread in Years 10–12, with a variety of forms: one or several subjects, or courses within a subject can be affected, and there may also be cross-curricula thematic projects. In some schools the target language is used almost exclusively, in others, only the textbooks are in the target language, whereas the teaching is conducted in Swedish. The duration of CLIL teaching is more consistent at this level than in compulsory school, with a majority of the programmes providing CLIL for three years.⁵⁹

As already implied, the principal objective in offering CLIL in compulsory school is to increase pupil motivation for studying a foreign language and to improve their communicative competence in this language. These objectives also relate to upper-secondary level, with special focus on promoting skills for future work and study abroad. As for the individual schools, especially at upper secondary level, CLIL is also a means by which to raise the school profile and attract new students. In many schools, reference is also made to the value of CLIL in helping the school to achieve the goals for internationalisation laid down by the school law. This implies strong involvement in international projects (such as Comenius) where English is used as a means of communication (Nixon 2001:20).

19.4 Statistics, Languages and Subjects

All national CLIL data available come from a survey commissioned by The National Agency for Education (Skolverket) in 1999 (Nixon 2000). The outcome of this survey, no doubt, is very representative, as it was based on a questionnaire, distributed to 6320 schools, which elicited a response rate better than 70% in all categories (compulsory schools, upper secondary, adult education and Swedish schools abroad). The results show that 4% of all compulsory schools, and 23% of all upper secondary schools provide some form of CLIL. Geographically these schools are distributed across the country, but mainly found in heavily populated areas around the capital, Stockholm, on the east coast further south, and all along the west coast.

The target languages are English 75.5%, German 8%, French 6%, Spanish 4%, Finnish 2%, and other (Arabic, Estonian, Hebrew, Modern Greek and Sami) 4.5%. At compulsory level English is somewhat less widespread (68%), probably owing to the fact that thematic CLIL weeks in a third language are being provided here in order to raise motivation for learning: French (7%), German (10%) and Spanish (6%). At upper secondary and adult education level English is more dominant, being offered as a target language in 82% of all schools (Nixon 2000:23), whereas French, German and Spanish come far behind (approximately 5% each). As to vocational programmes, there are no exact statistics available.

58 See Nixon 2000:35-37.

59 See Nixon 2000:37-38.

In the 163 schools providing CLIL at compulsory level the principal language-integrated subjects are social science (44 schools), history (25) and music (23). Subjects such as music, sports and craft are more prevalent in the lower classes, whereas natural and social sciences attract more attention in the later years (Nixon 2000:25). The mostly affected subjects at upper secondary level (approx. 122 schools) are history (58 schools), mathematics (42) and social science (39). This also mirrors the fact that CLIL is provided in the dominating theoretical programmes, the Natural Science Programme (37 schools) and the Social Science Programme (45). Eight schools offer the third most common affected programme, the Health Care Programme (Nixon 2000:26-27).

19.5 Student Recruitment and Expectations

Normally, all pupils are accepted in CLIL programmes in the compulsory school system. If there are too many applicants, the school will first accept those living in its geographical catchment area. In most cases admission to an upper secondary CLIL programme is restricted to the number of places available, as long as the students have pass grades from compulsory school in Swedish, mathematics and English (the ordinary standard regulation for entry to all upper secondary programmes).⁶⁰ There is a general tendency, though, for students entering CLIL programmes to have somewhat better grades than their peers. Critics of CLIL use this as an argument, maintaining that CLIL might foster a kind of elitism (Falk 2000:8).

19.6 Teachers, Materials and Funding

Teachers working with CLIL do not have to fulfil any formal qualifications other than those governing teacher recruitment generally. The 1999 survey revealed that more CLIL teachers are qualified to teach the language in compulsory school (75%) than at upper secondary level (42%). The same goes for the dual qualification to teach the target language and one or more school subjects (approx. 50% as compared with 22%) (Nixon 2000:33-34). In both groups there were few subject teachers who were also native speakers of the target language.

No pre-service training opportunities are available and the only in-service training currently running is a minor course (15 ECTS credits) at the Stockholm Institute of Education. Financing the programmes has been a problem for many schools. This has led to CLIL teachers putting together their own teaching material or using ordinary textbooks from the target language school system. The economic constraints over the last ten years have also made it difficult for school management to offer benefits to CLIL teachers, e.g. in terms of in-service training or a reduction of teaching hours. A few programmes have received some degree of recognition from the authorities. Thus, since 1999 eight CLIL programmes have been awarded the European Label for innovative projects in language teaching and learning by the National Agency for School Improvement (Myndigheten for skolutveckling).

60 The schools offering the International Baccalaureate, however, select their students on the basis of an entrance test.

19.7 Quality and Research

As there is hardly any support, neither on state nor municipal level, CLIL in Sweden manages to survive through the endeavours of some 300–400 teachers working (mostly alone) as fiery spirits against bad odds. This implies that most schools have no internal monitoring system to evaluate how the goals are fulfilled or how to facilitate further development. However, there are some schools taking on this responsibility (Åseskog 1977, Ekman 1994, Washburn 1997). There are also some CLIL evaluations commissioned by the educational authorities (Knight 1988, Nixon 2000, 2001). Recently the Swedish research community has also begun to take a more active interest in the effects of CLIL, especially on target language proficiency, subject matter knowledge, and on the students' command of Swedish. There exist some 20 bachelor's and master's theses and two doctoral theses (Washburn 1997, Sylvén 2004), with three more in progress.

Summing up the results as to the students' language proficiency in English at upper secondary level, there is a slight but statistically insignificant improvement among CLIL students in comparison with their peers (Åseskog 1977, Knight 1998, Washburn 1997, Sylvén 2004).⁶¹ The results in L3 German at lower secondary level are far better (Dentler 2003). As for the impact of CLIL on knowledge of the subject matter, most evaluations show no detrimental effect of CLIL (Knight 1988, Nixon 2001), with one exception (Washburn 1997). The results concerning the effect on the pupils' command of Swedish are also somewhat divergent. However, all evaluations but two (Hägerfelth 1993, Alvtörn 2000) point to no impairment (Ekman 1994, Hall 1998, Hansson 1999, Nixon 2001).

19.8 Future Development and Outlook

It seems difficult to predict the future development of CLIL in Sweden. Some CLIL projects have recently been turned into IB programmes, aspiring for better outcomes as a result of the strict IB curriculum. It is to be hoped that the national educational authorities will support CLIL projects with target languages other than English. These should include important immigrant languages as well as third foreign languages in Sweden. There is a broad consensus among language teachers that there is a wide delivery gap between what is provided in teaching, and what comes out in terms of learning.

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⁶¹ In a qualitative interview study with students from 11 schools, the students themselves, however, were quite adamant about having improved their command of English (Nixon 2001:36)