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Contemporary Sociolinguistic Situation with Minority Language: a case study of Finland Swedish in Finland

Purpose of Work. The aim of this pilot study is to explore the significance of different local contexts for classification of the learning of a minority language, in this case the possibilities of applying the term second language on Finland Swedish in Finland.

Research Questions. Is it possible to use the term second language when learning Finland Swedish in different regional contexts in Finland? What are the theoretical implications of the results?

The Research Methods. The method is rational reconstruction. The included terminology and the context of its application are illustrated through a fictitious case study that is used as a heuristic tool.

The Material. Official national documents

The Result. The results show that contextual prerequisites differ considerably between varieties of Finland Swedish in Finland and that these differences are crucial for adequate terminological choices. Examples of this are that there are no clear cases when the learning of Finland Swedish can be accounted as second language learning. Åland and Nerpes are examples of these unclear cases while Helsinki is an example of a case where second language learning is impossible. The results indicate that there is a need for more research on the applicability of common linguistic terminology on small minority languages.

The Scope of the Results and Research Prospects. The results point out the need of new research in order to develop a more contextual sensitive terminology in case of small minority languages

Keywords: second language, minority language, pluricentric language, Finnish Swedish, Ålandic, Nerpes-dialect

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Шведский язык в Финляндии: Современная социолингвистическая ситуация с языком меньшинств (на примере финского шведского в Финляндии)

Целью статьи является исследование региональных контекстов в области изучения языка меньшинств, в данном случае возможности применения термина «второй язык» (финский шведский) для языка меньшинства в Финляндии.

Исследовательские вопросы: можно ли использовать термин «второй язык» при изучении финского шведского в различных региональных контекстах в Финляндии? Каковы теоретические последствия такого применения?

Методы исследования: рациональная реконструкция, включая использованную терминологию и контекст ее применения, проиллюстрирована на примере созданной модели, используемой в качестве эвристического инструмента.

Материал исследования: официальные национальные документы.

Результаты показывают, что контекстуальные предпочтения значительно различаются между разновидностями финского шведского языка в Финляндии и что эти различия имеют решающее значение для адекватного терминологического выбора. Доказательством этому может служить отсутствие явных случаев, когда изучение финского шведского можно отнести к изучению второго языка. Оланд и Нерпес являются примерами этих неясных случаев, в то время как Хельсинки является примером случая, когда изучение второго языка невозможно. Результаты показывают, что существует необходимость в дополнительных исследованиях применимости общей лингвистической терминологии к языкам меньшинств.

Полученные результаты подтверждают необходимость новых исследований для разработки более контекстно-зависимой терминологии в случае языков меньшинств.

Ключевые слова: *второй язык, язык меньшинства, плюрицентрический язык, финский шведский, оландский, нерпес-диалект.*

Introduction. This current study is the second pilot study of the international research network project Digital multiliteracies, integration, language and mutual cultural learning investigating integration, migration and digitalization. The participating countries of the network are Lithuania, Moldova, Rumania, Russia and Sweden. The first pilot study studied Nordic second language teachers' attitudes and values concerning second language education and the migrant's citizenship. The re-

sults showed great differences in attitudes between the countries despite their linguistic, cultural, societal and geographic proximity (von Post, Wikström, Råihä & Liubiniene 2017). The current study is the next step in studying the differences by seeking explanations and describing some of the consequences. This is done by departing from the national context of teaching migrants Swedish as minority language in Finland, and at the same time having Swedish as a majority language in Sweden and considering the neighbor's potential impact on the teaching of its minority variant in Finland. First, some introductory notes on the terminology used in this article regarding Swedish language in Finland and in Sweden. Finland Swedish is a national minority language in Finland, Sweden Swedish is a majority language in Sweden, Ålandic is majority language in Åland, an autonomous region in Finland, and Närpes dialect is a minor, but local majority, dialect in Finland. The varieties of course also appear outside their typical locations, for example Finland Swedish in Sweden, and in that context Finland Swedish is a Swedish minority language in Sweden. This complex terminology is a reflection of the complexity of language learning in an international context. This current study is also claims that this complexity can be used as a starting point for developing a terminology more in line with teachers needs when they are teaching migrants local languages as a part of their inclusion and integration into local and transnational contexts (see Råihä 2008).

Purpose of the Study. The aim is to explore the significance of different local contexts for classification of the learning a minority language, in this case the possibilities of applying the term second language on Finland Swedish in Finland.

Research Questions. Is it possible to use the term second language when learning Finland Swedish in different regional contexts in Finland? What are the theoretical implications of the results?

Research Methods. The research is carried out by using a fictitious case study as a heuristic tool for describing prerequisites for learning Finland Swedish in Finland. The method can be characterized as a reflexive reconstruction. Habermas (1988, p. 85) refers to this type of method as rational reconstruction, including the terminology used and the context of its application. The central term in this study is second language and the empirical context reconstructed for its application is the language situation of Finland Swedish in Finland. The case study is used for illustra-

ting the possibilities of using the term second language for describing the learning of Finland Swedish in Finland.

One of the theoretical motifs for choosing the term second language as a starting point is the notion of Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) that what is first or second language is complicated to determine and influenced by the context. The latter notion also gives us the reason to explore the contexts of its application. The emergence of more recent views, such as Translanguaging (Garcia & Wei 2014), gives a further reason for scrutinizing traditional terms which can be seen as theoretical tools for our understanding.

Results. Three Swedish contexts in Finland. We use a fictitious case, in which two people migrate to Finland, in order to arrive at our results. One of these persons has Swedish as her first language and the other person has Swedish as a second language and Finnish as a first language. Both of these persons have decided to learn Finland Swedish during their stay in Finland. They will spend their first half year on Åland, the second in Helsinki and the third in Närpes, a region of Finland. This fictitious case is realistic in the sense that if the authors of this article were to move to Finland we would have the persons used in the case study. Initially we will use the traditional terminology concerning language learning, such as first language, second language and foreign language. While using this terminology, we will also reflect on the use of these terms in the Finnish and Swedish contexts, at the same time being aware that they may not be fully compatible with the contexts explored in this study.

Swedish in Finland and Sweden. Swedish in Finland and Sweden can be seen as a typical case of asymmetric pluricentric language. In the current study the language studied is spoken in Sweden, Finland and autonomous Åland. Swedish spoken in Sweden is the dominant variant, based on its number of speakers and historical, cultural and political dominance, while the other varieties, in our case Ålandic, and other varieties of Swedish are much smaller in comparison. Asymmetric pluricentric languages are described in detail in Muhr (2005, p. 12).

In our study we mainly focus on Swedish in Finland. As far as the Swedish is concerned, it should be borne in mind that Sweden Swedish is a majority language in Sweden and its official status is main language (but not national language), while the Finland Swedish in Finland is both a national language, a minority language and also a local majority language. However, the official name is only Swedish both in Sweden and in

Finland (Parkvall 2009). Thus, the above-mentioned complexity does not appear explicitly in formulations in the countries' language legislation.

Nationally, only a few percent of the population have Swedish as their first language in Finland, while in some parts of Finland, for example in Åland with local autonomy, 88% have Swedish as their mother tongue (ÅSUB 2014). It may be mentioned that this is a higher percentage than in Sweden where the percentage is around 80% (Parkvall 2009). Statistics (Eurostat 2016) also show that 97% of Swedish speakers in Sweden speak at least two languages, which is the highest number of multilinguals in the EU. These types of figures may seem as plain and simple truths about conditions in a particular country, but questions about who speaks a particular language can prove to be complex. The question of whether it is the same Swedish spoken in Sweden and Finland is an example of this. One may ask whether the Finland Swedish and its varieties are Swedish dialects or whether some or all of these should be seen as their own languages. Already the discussion about which varieties should be included in the Finland Swedish is both complex and sensitive. When Els Oksaar, an Estonian professor in linguistics, argued that Ålandic should be seen as an independent language, it aroused strong feelings and a heated debate in Finland (Lönnroth 2004, p. 136). The complexity of these types of questions is also linked to the applicability of linguistic terms, such as second language, and their suitability to act as a tool of thought for the professionals and as implicit theories of language and language learning in these kinds of contexts. Now let us take a closer look at what this complexity may look like in language training of migrants in Finland and other Nordic countries.

Ålandic as a second language in Åland. Our two fictitious migrants from Sweden first arrive in Åland. In order not to complicate the case description, we will not initially discuss the question of whether the Ålandic should be seen as a Swedish dialect, a variety of Finnish Swedish, a native language or something else. In the Åland Autonomy Act it is clear that the region is monolingual Swedish (FINLEX, Självstyrelselag för Åland). On the other hand, there is no definition of what the term Swedish denotes more explicit, but at the same time, the "one language only" policy is clearly stated. The latter is seen as problematic by the current research on language learning (see Garcia & We 2014), pointing out that "one language only" policy is impossible to achieve and harmful for individuals and

the society. (Lainio 1999, p. 139; Garcia & Wei 2014, p. 12). The Åland Self-Government Act thus provides no further guidance in this sense.

Since one of the migrants in our fictional case has Swedish as a second language and Finnish as a first language, one can ask if Ålandic can be learned as a second language by that person. In view of the fact that 88% of the population of Åland has Ålandic as first language (ÅSUB 2014) this should be considered as possible. One of the criteria for second language learning is that the new language is learned in a natural context where the language is spoken in one's everyday life (Hammarberg 2013, p. 28). Thus, there are no such obstacles to learning Ålandic as a second language since it is used by most Ålanders. On the other hand, if Åland is seen as part of Finland, the question of second language becomes more complex, since Swedish in Finland in general is only spoken by about 5% of the total population compared to Finnish spoken by about 88% of the population. The other minority languages make up the rest and Russian is the largest of these, about 1.5% of the speakers in Finland (Statistikcentralen Finland, Befolkningen efter språk 2019). It can also be mentioned that the Finland Swedish is also spoken in Sweden by about 55,000 people (Parkvall 2009, p. 24). Finland Swedish nevertheless does not have a national minority language status in Sweden. Sweden's attitude in this case could be seen as a hidden monolingual norm (Lainio 1999, p. 182), in contrast to the Åland's more explicit monolingual norm.

Here, however, one can see that the group of Finland Swedish speakers is hardly big enough nationally to be able to constitute a proper context for second language learning, except locally in Åland. The question of the context of language learning in Åland will also be difficult to answer in case of our second fictional migrant who has Swedish as a first language. Among other things, the answer is related to the choice of views on the Ålandic in relation to the Swedish. Some such views consider Ålandic as a dialect to the Swedish in Sweden, i.e. a kind of Sweden Swedish minority language in Finland or alternatively a dialect of the Finnish Swedish, i.e. a Finnish-Swedish minority language, or perhaps a separate Ålandic majority language. However, none of these would constitute the typical case for the context of second language learning if the migrant has Swedish as a first language. In an inverted perspective, Ålandic also does either not constitute the typical case for a foreign language or a minority language or a second language in Sweden. If, on the other hand, the Ålandic was recognized as its own language, as, for example, Oksaar suggests (Lön-

nroth 2004, p. 136), it could constitute a second language for all people migrating to Åland and who does not have it as a first language. Perhaps you could also argue that it would be the case also for migrants who have Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish as a first language, let alone that they most probably would learn Ålandic much faster. But then again this situation is not the case at present.

What then, can we say about the Swedes' acquisition of Ålandic? It is reasonable to assume that a person who has Sweden Swedish as their mother tongue could experience that they are simply learning a dialect of Sweden Swedish. This can then not be counted as learning Swedish as a second language or Swedish as a foreign language. The experience of closeness between languages may vary, among other things, depending on which part of Sweden the person comes from or the person's attitudes to language or the person's and the surrounding's experiences of how the Swedish-speaking person fits into the category "migrant" etc. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981, p. 26) points out for example, that attitudes are important as criteria for what counts as a first or second language and that their relationship is dynamic and additive, and their mutual order can change during life. Finally, it can also be mentioned that Nordic citizens are hardly typical migrants in Åland, which is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that they don't need passport or visa to be able to move to Åland (Utrikesministeriet Finland). They can also obtain homeownership rights (that is corresponding status to citizenship) after three years of residence (Landskapslag 2015). The Ålandic scenario suggests that the local contextual conditions are terminologically decisive for the question of how to label the migrants language learning. The question is whether these or other kinds of contextual premises are equally complex when we discuss other varieties called Swedish in Finland.

The Finland Swedish in Helsinki. The Finland Swedish in Finland's largest city of Helsinki is in a completely different situation compared to the Ålandic. According to our previous definition of second language Finland Swedish in Helsinki cannot be learned as a second language regardless of a person's first language. The number of residents having Swedish as their first language has been falling during the last 70 years in Helsinki, from 20% in 1950 to 5.7% in 2017 (Helsinki Statistical Yearbook 2017). These figures suggest that the Finland Swedish in Helsinki is learned by migrants as a foreign language. But there are at the same time conditions that complicate any simple conclusion. A potential objection

is that national languages in a typical case are learnt as second language and Swedish is a national language in Finland. The Finnish Constitution says clearly that Finland's national languages are Finnish and Swedish" (FINLEX, Självstyrelselag för Åland) and there is no distinction between Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish and the formulation is the same as in the Åland Autonomy Act. Also, learning Swedish as a foreign language may sound strange from a Swedish-Swedish perspective, despite being learned in Finland, because Swedish is their mother tongue and the main language in Sweden. Now let's also look at how the learning of Finland Swedish in Helsinki may look like for migrants from Sweden. Most probably none of them will learn Finland Swedish as a second language because such a context is missing in Helsinki with Finnish as a large and dominating national language. In most everyday situations the residents in Helsinki need to master Finnish, this is also reflected in the school's governing document for Swedish schools in Finland, with the exception of Åland (Opetushallitus 1999).

Finland Swedish speaking people in Helsinki are often bilingual. This indicates that anyone who has Swedish as a second language can continue their development of Swedish in Finland, but hardly as a foreign language, since the person has already learned Swedish as a second language in Sweden and Swedish in Finland is a national language, and because there are no contextual second language prerequisites for this. All this is interesting when it comes to terminology of language learning and as it seems there might be a terminological gap in how to describe migrants learning of pluricentric languages such as Finnish-Swedish in Helsinki. This is also the case of describing the language learning of persons with Sweden Swedish as their mother tongue and the situation in Helsinki may also be similar to that in Åland, depending on how one defines the relationship between languages in Åland, Finland and Sweden. Terminology that hits just right thus seems to be missing in these cases. We will return to this potential terminological gap later on in our interviews of teachers in Helsinki.

The Finland Swedish as a second language in Närpes. Närpes is a Swedish speaking area on the Eastern Bothnia area in Finland where it is compulsory for people who want to become Finnish citizens to learn Närpes dialect (Helander 2015). Närpes dialect is a variety of Finland Swedish (Greggas Bäckström 2011, p. 17). It is interesting to compare the dialect in Närpes, Swedish in Sweden and the Swedish in the other

parts of Finland. Firstly, as we already noted, the language in Närpes is counted as a dialect to Finnish Swedish. It is only spoken in the Eastern Bothnia part of Finland but it is regarded as a national language, a minority language, a dialect of Finnish Swedes and as a compulsory language for integration. The question is then whether the Närpes dialect can be learned as second or foreign language if you are a Swedish migrant.

Since the local majority speaks Närpes dialect, it is possible to consider it as a second language for migrants. If we compare with Helsinki where the overwhelming majority speaks Finnish and where the contextual conditions point towards Swedish as a foreign language, then the local situation is quite the opposite in Närpes. The learner is surrounded by the Närpes dialect and migrants are expected to master it in order to become a Finnish citizen, and for living in Närpes. The situation for learning the Närpes dialect, despite relatively few speakers in total, is thus similar in some respects to the learning of the majority language Sweden Swedish in Sweden. But the situation is at the same time terminologically more complex if we consider that the Närpes dialect is not regarded as a language in its own right, but rather a dialect of Finland Swedish and also close to Sweden Swedish. It thus has similarities both with a minority language and with a majority language. Although the Närpes dialect can be counted as a dialect of both the Finnish and Swedish Swedes, it has specific rights besides that, which also makes it similar to a national language, among other things it can be learned as a compulsory second language, despite having relatively few speakers, about 8000 in total (Greggas Bäckström 2011, p. 19). We can again ask ourselves what term is appropriate for the language learning concerning our two fictional migrants. Contextually the person who learned Swedish as a second language in Sweden has a similar situation in Närpes since the majority context is similar to that in Sweden. The difference is the nationwide context, because the great majority of people in Finland speak Finnish and those who speak Swedish in Finland are almost always multilingual with Finnish as one of the languages. Migrants in Närpes usually learn Finnish later in their vocational training (Helander 2015, p. 69) as Finnish is entirely dominant outside of Närpes. The question is to what extent the second-language context in Närpes includes Finnish and in that sense is actually multilingual. The learning context for the Swedish in Närpes is thus geographically limited and includes multilingualism to a greater extent than, for example, Åland. It is also more difficult to answer how

Swedish migrants with Swedish as their mother tongue learn Närpes dialect. If persons with Sweden Swedish as their mother tongue perceive the Närpes dialect as a dialect of Sweden Swedish then it constitutes neither a second language nor a foreign language. However, the issue is more complex than this for both migrants who have Swedish as their first language and those who have Swedish as a second language. As we have already mentioned, one cannot use the inter-intelligibility as the decisive criterion. Furthermore, the inter-intelligibility may vary depending on where you come from and who you are. In the case of migrants from Sweden, for example, it may have to do with what part of Sweden a person comes from and the dialect spoken there. A comparison with Norwegian and the Danish is relevant in this case. They are counted as their own languages but are inter-understandable to the Swedish speakers. If one uses inter-intelligibility as criterion, it is not unreasonable that the Närpes dialect could be taught either as a Swedish dialect or as a second language depending on the person's first language. What seems less likely is that the Närpes dialect could be taught as a foreign language, regardless of whether the person has Swedish as first language or Swedish as a second language.

The conclusion is that the terminological question of how migrants learn Finland Swedish in Finland cannot be given a general answer, because the answer is always a local one. Åland is an example where the Finland Swedish can appear as a second language if the Ålandic is counted as Finnish Swedish. Helsinki is an example where the Finland Swedish appears to be learnt more like a foreign language and Närpes on the other hand is an example where learning the Finland Swedish is reminiscent of learning a local second language in a wider national majority language context. This kind of description is at the same time a simplification because it is difficult to describe in a simple way the learning context of a pluricentric language by using traditional terms such as second language.

Conclusion. The results of our reconstructions of local perquisites for language learning show that there is no general answer to the question of how the learning of a small pluricentric language, such as Finland Swedish in Finland, should be labeled. As we have already seen the use of the term second language doesn't fit two of the three studied local contexts without reservations, Åland and Närpes, and as we have also seen, it does not fit at all one of these, Helsinki. Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) notion that what is labeled as second language is heavily influenced by the context is

then corroborated in our reconstructive analyzes of the relation between the term and the three studied contexts. And from what we've seen so far, this can also be suspected to be the case for some other common terms. This is also in line with the above mentioned reasons for scrutinizing our traditional concepts as theoretical tools. Our results point toward that some of them, like the term second language may not correspond to some current needs as they are supposed to, because the language situation in some cases, indicated by the three cases that we scrutinized, seems to be more complex than our, in terminological sense theoretical, tools may give an impression of. The further follow up questions, such as what kind of terms and thinking will substitute terms like second language is not clear for the moment but the need of these kinds of developments is evident. Keeping in mind that Finland Swedish is a highly privileged minority language having the status of a national language for a country, an interesting follow-up study could be to explore how contextual circumstances and common linguistic concepts go together in case of even smaller and less privileged minority languages in Northern pluricentric transnational contexts, for example in case of Saami in the Barents region (see Ivanishcheva 2014).

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