Language policy in Swedish higher education

A contextualised perspective

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Abstract

In light of two main axes, namely internationalisation of higher education (HE) and national language policy discourse, this article investigates the answers provided by Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs) regarding the position of the national language and English. It first illustrates the phenomenon of internationalisation of Swedish HE and the use of English in Swedish HEIs. Then, by analysing several official documents, it investigates the simultaneous process of implementing a national policy, as well as the position of English and Swedish in the HE domain in light of this national policy. It then reviews the problems encountered by students and teachers when using English as a medium of instruction. The paper next exposes the language policy adopted by two Swedish HEIs and investigates the problems encountered and the solutions proposed to enhance linguistic diversity in Swedish HE at large. The paper concludes with a brief overview of the language issues pervading other domains, such as media, politics and business.

Keywords: Sweden; higher education; English; national language policy; internationalisation

Student mobility has drastically increased in Europe over the last two decades, particularly after the establishment of the Erasmus programme (1987) and the launch of the European Higher Education Area in 2010, to which 47 countries have signed up after having agreed to its creation in the 1999 Bologna Declaration. This mobility is sustained by the growing number of English-medium programmes in European higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in Scandinavian countries (e.g. Hilmarsson-Dunn 2009; Lauridsen 2009). Nevertheless, for several years now in Sweden (as in neighbouring countries) concerns have been raised about the increasing use of English in HEIs as a not unproblematic consequence of the phenomenon of the internationalisation of higher education (HE). At the same time language issues, i.e. the position and status of the Swedish language vis-à-vis the encroachment of English in several domains, have been recurrently debated. It seems, then, that Swedish HEIs have

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to reconcile the objective of internationalisation of HE together with the principles of national language policy, which is likely to reflect antagonistic interests in terms of language use and status.

In light of these two main axes, namely the internationalisation of HE and national language policy, this article will investigate the answers provided by Swedish HEIs for the position of the national language and of English. It will first illustrate the phenomenon of the internationalisation of Swedish HE and the use of English in Swedish HEIs. Then, by analysing several official documents, it will investigate the simultaneous process of implementing a national policy, as well as the position of English and Swedish in the HE domain in light of this national policy. It will then review the problems encountered by students and teachers when using English as a medium of instruction. The article will next expose the language policy adopted by two Swedish HEIs and investigate the problems encountered and the solutions proposed to enhance linguistic diversity in the Swedish education system at large. Finally, in order to contextualise the position of English in Swedish society, the paper will conclude with a brief overview of language issues pervading other domains, such as media, politics and business. The main objective of this article is to analyse Swedish language policy in HE by situating it in the wider societal context.

Internationalisation and use of English in Swedish HEIs

The increasing use of English in Swedish HEIs is, as in other countries, a consequence of the internationalisation of HE. But internationalisation generally is not a recent phenomenon in Sweden. It has been firmly anchored in the development of Swedish society for more than half a century, and "internationalism – together with democratism – has dominated political idealism in Sweden since the 1950s" (Dahlstedt 1976: 25). Decision-makers within Swedish education already made reference to it at the end of the Second World War to justify the introduction of English as an obligatory subject in the nine-year compulsory school system. Furthermore, internationalising education became a concern in the late 1960s (Cabau 2009a). In 1972, an Internationalisation Committee was appointed by the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities (Burn and Opper 1982: 49–50). According to the renowned educational researcher Torsten Husén, the two major objectives were "to achieve a heightened awareness among young people of global interdependence […] a sensitivity training in international thinking" and "to enable young people to function in an international setting, such as the mastery of foreign languages

and insights into foreign cultures" (quoted in Burn and Opper 1982: 50). At that time, international education was instrumental in securing the ability of Swedes to fill important positions abroad (Nilsson 2003: 27–28). However, the activities and programmes undertaken to apply the guidelines set by the Internationalisation Committee seem to have had little impact on the definition of curricula and integration of new priorities in HEIs (Burn and Opper 1982: 52). In a bill titled 'New world – New University', the government devised a national strategy for the internationalisation of HE incorporating proposals based upon the Bologna Process. It emphasised the capacity of Swedish universities to welcome foreign students, i.e., to offer more courses in English at all levels and also in other languages (Regeringens proposition 2004/05: 162, 59)[1] .

HE is offered at about 50 universities, university colleges and other institutions. From 1999/2000 to 2008/2009, the number of students from abroad tripled, amounting to 36,600. This means that one newly enrolled student out of four is an overseas student. These figures include the exchange programme students (13,100, mainly European under the Erasmus programme) and the students outside exchange programmes (more than 23,000), the so-called "free-movers". The increased number of programmes offered in English at master's level led to an increase of free-movers, one-third of them coming from Asia. The number of outgoing students amounted to almost 25,000 in 2008/2009 (Högskoleverket/Statistiska centralbyrå 2010). In master's programmes, more than half of the students are foreign; in doctoral programmes, one-third of first year students are foreign (coming from China, India, Iran and Pakistan), most of them opting for technology and natural science (Högskoleverket 2010). The number of PhD students has almost doubled since the mid-1990s (SOU 2008: 26; 182).

The vast majority of international students give very positive feedback about their academic stay in Sweden: they praise Swedish teachers' proficiency in English and knowledge in their subjects; and more than 85 per cent would recommend Sweden as a study destination to their fellow students (Högskoleverket 2008a: 23–24). But an important factor played a major role in their choosing this destination, namely that until recently, education was free at public universities. HE (like education as a whole) without any kind of tuition fee has always been considered a civil right (Nillson 2003: 30). Nevertheless, in the bill 'Competing on the basis of quality – tuition fees for foreign students' (Regering-

1. The *Regeringens proposition* is a government bill. The following numbers refer to the year of publication, then the number of the study and, when applicable, to the page number. The Works Cited section lists the bills chronologically. The same reference system applies for the Swedish Government Official Reports Series SOU (*Statens Offentliga Utredningar*).

skansliet 2010), the government proposed that HE will no longer be free of charge for students from a EU/EEA states or Switzerland as of the autumn term 2011. The government wants Swedish HEIs to compete on the basis of quality, not on the basis of a free education. The same is to be observed in other Nordic universities (Stensaker et al. 2008: 3), in order to compete more aggressively in the lucrative market for international students. The introduction of fees will be combined with a grant system (Regeringskansliet 2010).

One clear effect of internationalisation is that more and more courses and degree programmes taught in English are being developed at HEIs in Sweden. Many institutions have drawn up master's programmes in English with the explicit intention of attracting international students, and several of them assert that competence in English is now a direct requirement for appointment to teaching posts (Högskoleverket 2005: 35). In 2007, Sweden was in the fourth position among the leading countries providing English-medium tuition in continental Europe, with 123 reported English-taught programmes (Wächter and Maiworm 2008). About 65 per cent of master's programmes are delivered in English, while only 10 per cent are at the undergraduate level (Språkrådet 2010). The arguments in favour of English language programmes are the following: Swedish students are better prepared for PhD studies where English is dominant (except in social sciences); they are also better prepared for their professional life, so they are able to work in an English-language environment; and their understanding of other cultures and experiences is enhanced in multilingual study groups, which represents an attractive asset for job-hunting, together with the ability to encompass different perspectives and solutions for problem-solving situations, as well as an international contact network.

In a 2008 survey of PhD students carried out by the National Agency for Higher Education, Högskoleverket (HSV), 29 per cent mentioned that the level of English was high, and 24 per cent said that it was very high. But a distinction should be made as regards the research domain: whereas 81 per cent of natural science PhD students reported that courses were delivered in English, only 10 per cent of law students reported the same, with 20 per cent in humanities and 26 per cent in social sciences (Högskoleverket 2008d: 68). HSV exposed three reasons for requiring textbooks in languages other than Swedish, i.e. English: the use of another language in a course; the absence of suitable texts in Swedish; and the objective of introducing an international dimension by using texts in another language (2005: 51).

About 87 per cent of all PhD dissertations are written in English, a figure that has hardly changed for the last fifteen years and is considered to have reached its peak. But there are some discrepancies according to discipline: 94 per cent

in natural sciences; 65 per cent in social sciences; and 37 per cent in humanities (Språkrådet 2010).

National language policy

The dominant position of English in Swedish HE is to be examined in the light of its position in Swedish society at large. As we will see later, the position and status of English have been and are still being discussed in domains other than HE. Whereas a debate about linguistic diversity has been taking place for several years now in Sweden, the term "language policy" was hardly used before the 1990s (Josephson 2004: 155) and if it was used, it was very likely not understood (Cabau-Lampa 2007: 1). In fact, the debate mainly revolved around the position and status of the Swedish language vis-à-vis the encroachment of English in several domains. It was exacerbated by the official recognition of five minority languages (Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli or Tornedal Finnish, Romany Chib and Sami) in 2000 (Regeringens proposition 1998/1999: 143), while Swedish was not the de jure official language of the country. The beginning of the millennium witnessed the publication of several official documents aimed at implementing a national language policy.

In 1998, at the request of the Swedish government, the Swedish Language Council (now, the Language Council) drew up a 'Draft Action Programme for the Promotion of the Swedish Language'. The idea was to establish by law the position of the Swedish language in Sweden, and the main objective was that "Swedish should be preserved as a complete language serving the needs of society". The Swedish Language Council document was revised by the Committee on the Swedish Language appointed by the parliament and titled 'Speech: Draft Action Programme for the Swedish Language' (SOU 2002: 27). In 2003, the government appointed a working party to prepare a language policy proposal to be presented to parliament. In 2005, a language policy bill (Regeringens proposition 2005/06: 2) established Swedish as "the main language of Sweden". The centre-right alliance criticised the refusal of the social democratic government to recognise Swedish as the official language of the country (Cabau-Lampa 2007: 347–48). In 2007, the newly elected centre-right coalition government appointed a committee of inquiry to draft a proposal for a language act to govern the status of the Swedish language. The committee submitted its report 'Safeguard Languages' (SOU 2008: 26) on which was based the Language Act (Ministry of Culture 2009) introduced on 1 July 2009. The main provisions of the Language Act are stated as follows:

> The purpose of the Act is to specify the position and usage of the Swedish language and other languages in Swedish society. The Act is also intended to protect the Swedish language and language diversity in Sweden, and the individual's access to language. […]
> Swedish is the principal language in Sweden.
> As principal language, Swedish is the common language in society that everyone resident in Sweden is to have access to and that is to be usable in all areas of society. (Ministry of Culture 2009. Official translation)

All five national minorities are also included in the Language Act. A new act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages introduced on 1 January 2010 strengthened the rights of national minorities.

The position of English and Swedish in HE in national language policy documents

After exposing the phenomenon of internationalisation in Swedish HE, together with its corresponding consequence i.e. the increasing use of English, and the newly introduced national policy, we will now focus on the discourse about the position of English and Swedish in HE in the various official documents cited previously.

In the late 1990s, the Swedish Language Council, the official language cultivation body of Sweden, expressed its concerns about the increasing use of English material and English as a tool of instruction in undergraduate courses, which could affect the students' learning process. While recognising the need for Swedish research to be international, the Language Council highlighted that

> this unbalanced focus on English could result in highly qualified individuals in Sweden no longer being able to talk and write about complex subjects in Swedish. In the long term, this trend could leave academics less well equipped to participate in public debate about serious social issues – such as environmental policy, health care or the economy – in Swedish in Sweden. (The Swedish Language Council 1998: 4. Official translation)

It made the following recommendations: the use of Swedish for teaching and examinations in undergraduate education; the submission of an extended written summary in Swedish or a trial lecture in Swedish on the subject of the thesis (provisions which should be included in the Higher Education Ordinance); the enhancement of students' ability to use Swedish and English in parallel in their subjects; and finally, the completion of an advanced course in Swedish in upper secondary school as an entrance requirement for most academically oriented HE programmes (The Swedish Language Council 1998: 20). As discussed later, these recommendations had a limited impact on language practices at HEIs, the last one having been ignored.

In 2002, the Committee on the Swedish Language considered the question of the position of English and Swedish in the HE arena as "essential". But whereas the position of Swedish should be reinforced, this should not be at the cost of English, since both languages are seen as necessary. Hence, the Committee recommended the development of the parallel use of English and Swedish in research and science (SOU 2002: 27; 89). A definition of parallel use of languages is given in the proposal for a language act to govern the status of the Swedish language, 'Safeguard Languages':

> Parallel use of languages means, as opposed to diglossia, that two or multiple languages can coexist in a field. In a society characterised by parallel use of languages, speakers master two or several languages and these languages can, in principle, be used in any context, for example, at home, school and work. Parallel use of languages does not necessarily mean that languages are used on the same scale, but that information and, hence, relevant terminology, is in both languages. (SOU 2008: 26; 45. The author's translation)

Whereas the 2005 bill 'Best Language – A concerted language policy for Sweden' made Swedish the "main language of Sweden", it clearly advocated an intensified use of English in HE to answer the objectives of the internationalisation of Swedish HE and the recognition of Sweden as a leading nation in scientific research (Regeringens proposition 2005/06: 2; 47). In this regard, humanities and social sciences were considered to have problems in that they do not use English as the language of PhD dissertations more frequently. Nevertheless, the bill introduced a new requirement, i.e. the writing of an "extensive summary" in Swedish, which was presented as the way "to safeguard Swedish terminology and keep the Swedish language alive" (Regeringens proposition 2005/06: 2; 47; author's translation). Cabau (2009a) was somewhat doubtful about the result this new requirement could have on the continued existence of a scientific register in Swedish. Another problem is the lack of a definition of an "extensive summary". Nevertheless, the requirement in the 2005 bill seems to have had an impact: currently, one-third of PhD dissertations written in English include a summary in Swedish, against only 10 per cent at the beginning of the new millennium. The figures differ between HE institutions: at Lund University, the percentage amounts to more than 50 per cent, against only 20 per cent at Stockholm and Göteborg universities (Språkrådet 2010). This is interesting to note, since Göteborg was the first university to draft a language policy document, including the requirement of an extensive summary in Swedish for dissertations in languages other than Swedish (discussed below).

It is worth mentioning that in its bill 'Language for all: Proposal for a language law' the government underlined the fact that there was no antagonism between internationalisation of HE and the protection of Swedish as principal

language. (As we will see later, the Ombudsman for Justice does not share this view.) Nevertheless, the government recognised the HE arena as a special domain by proposing to modify the Higher Education Ordinance in order to make possible the use of a language other than Swedish in research and HE (SOU 2008/09: 153; 16; 30).

English as a medium of instruction: not unproblematic

Behind the rosy picture traditionally enhancing the benefits of the internationalisation of HE lies a shift in discourse that has been taking place over the last few years: for example, several Swedish sources (official reports, articles in academic journals, press articles, etc.) refer to the use of English and its consequences in the teaching/learning process. In late 2009 HSV organised a conference titled 'Teaching in English in Swedish higher education: how do we avoid negative effects?'.[2]

Several academics have reported differences among students when it comes to understanding and analysing academic literature in English and in Swedish, i.e., students reading texts in Swedish gain a deeper understanding than students reading the same text in English. Another study exposed the differences in the way Swedish physics undergraduates experience lectures in Swedish and English: "when taught in English the students in our study asked and answered fewer questions and reported being less able to follow the lecture and take notes at the same time" (Airey and Linder 2006: 558). Grades obtained in English subjects taught at high school reflect competences which are different from lecturers' expectations of first-year students in English programmes. If students possess a better proficiency in oral communication and listening comprehension, their written proficiency has deteriorated, their vocabulary is limited, and their grammatical knowledge is insufficient (Högskoleverket 2009: 42). The Swedish Language Council considered that the proficiency in English of students (and lecturers) was often overestimated. Hence, it was important to investigate the impact of the use of English on the teaching/learning process (1998: 20).

Another issue to consider is the fact that incoming students are far from possessing similar proficiency levels in English (Högskoleverket 2008b: 38). Some foreign students have a poor knowledge of English, which may create problems for work/study groups, for oral presentations… [Swedish] students

2. Available online at: http://www.hsv.se/omhogskoleverket/konferenserochseminarier/undervisningpaengelskaisvenskhogreutbildning.4.1dbd1f9a120d72e05717ffe6125.html (accessed 20 June 2010).

may be irritated by this poor knowledge, which provokes tension within the study group (2008a: 29). Stockholm University, the Royal Technical Institute in Stockholm, the Aarhus School of Business and the University of Aarhus in Denmark reported that some students could not benefit fully from their academic courses because of their low level of English proficiency (Caudery, Petersen and Shaw 2007). HSV highlighted the uncertainty about quality performance of education in the context of heterogeneous student classes being taught in English (Högskoleverket 2008a: 7). The fact that foreign students have difficulty in following courses in English, together with the fact that teachers are not used to teaching in English, could entail a lower knowledge level and, according to a survey made in economics programmes at Göteborg University in 2002, several courses were devoted to repetition. Hence attention is drawn to the need to adopt a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to internationalisation and to consider what prerequisites should be introduced for foreign students (2008a: 34).

Foreign students create new challenges and requirements for teachers: variable knowledge of written and oral English, pedagogic competences, and intercultural communication (2008a: 27). In the 2004 review of quality in internationalisation in Swedish HE at undergraduate and postgraduate levels published by HSV, several institutions reported that one of their weak points was the poor offerings of courses/programmes in English and difficulties in recruiting teachers able to teach in English (2005: 35). This is particularly true for small HEIs, and this is the reason why the teaching body includes more foreigners and has become more international and younger, "sometimes at the expense of skilled older Swedish professors who do not want or cannot teach in English" (2008a: 30; author's translation).

Cabau (2009a) reported the concerns that several Swedish academics have expressed for several years now vis-à-vis the use of English in the HE arena. The first concern is diglossia, i.e., students not being able to carry on a discussion about their research in Swedish, and so accessible to the general public, because of their lack of knowledge of Swedish terminology in their domain; they also have difficulty grasping complicated intellectual problems in a language which is not their mother tongue. The consequences are domain losses and capacity losses, i.e., students and teachers not using the language they master best, which affects the quality of teaching and learning. These problems of communication and transmission of knowledge would make the universities "a kind of elitist ghetto, posing challenges for democracy" (144). A final concern is related to the problem of thinking behaviour, i.e. unilateral thinking, as the consequence of Anglo-American influence in the HE field.

Finally, it is important to mention the established link between the use of English in publications and the objective of consolidating academic recognition at international level. Among the nations that produced 20,000 or more papers (articles and reviews) from 2005 to 2009, Sweden ranks fourth in percentage of cited papers (*Times Higher Education* 2010). The Swedish Research Council aims to distinguish Sweden as a leading research nation, but has recently expressed its concern about the present-day lack of competitiveness of Swedish publications; in recent years, Swedish publications have not seen increasing citation rates as several other European countries have (Vetenskapsrådet 2010). Hence, Swedish researchers may expect to feel even greater pressure to use English for their publications, in order to increase the chances of seeing their research work quoted within the international academic community.

We will now turn to the Swedish Research Council's position and recommendations as regards the position of English and Swedish in HE, before considering how some Swedish HEIs are trying to address this issue.

Language policy in Swedish HE institutions

It can be said that until the beginning of the new millennium, Swedish HEIs, like the majority of English-medium academic programme providers, were mainly occupied with implementing measures to sustain the Bologna process. Little attention was given to the impact of internationalisation on HE, or to the increasing use of English as the medium of instruction in the teaching/learning process (European Language Council 2006: 7). Nevertheless, given the public debate about adopting the national policy regarding the position of Swedish and English, and the drastic increase of English-medium academic programmes which the Swedish HEIs had to offer to answer the need of internationalisation, HSV had to take a position. On the one hand, the agency agrees that universities should contribute to reinforcing the position of Swedish, but it deplores the lack of resources in that domain: "It is indeed strange that the only country – along with Finland – that has responsibility for research into the Swedish language invests so few resources in this culture-bearing and culture-building subject" (Högskoleverket 2002a: 20; author's translation).

On the other hand, HSV clearly wants to preserve the autonomy of the HEIs regarding linguistic regulations and is opposed to the state's intervention in that regard (2002b).

In several documents HSV declares itself in favour of the parallel use of Swedish and English. For example, it criticised a small number of institutions that in

some cases offered curricula only in English for the courses delivered in English. It stresses the basic principle that regulations drafted by a public authority should be written in Swedish. This principle, even if not clearly mentioned, was supported by the Ombudsman for Justice in an official document published in 2006 (JODnr 4283 2006,[3] quoted in Högskoleverket 2008a: 42) and reasserted in 2009 after the introduction of the Language Act.

According to HSV (2008c) the language bill proposal (SOU 2008: 26) was not satisfactorily adapted to the HE sector. In order to make the bill work effectively it would be necessary to establish clearer directives under the form of a special regulation for the HE sector, where rules and possible exemptions could be mentioned; HSV would also need to monitor whether or not HEIs apply the language law. This type of regulation is justified by the fact that the HE sector is presented in the bill as being a special domain, where English is being used to a great extent. Universities and colleges also need incentives and resources to promote both Swedish and English in teaching. The strengthening of Swedish as the principal language in HE requires prompt action. If English is unquestionably to be used in many HE activities, it is important to prevent economic incentives becoming the leitmotiv of the development of HE at the expense of quality considerations. As we have seen, the 2009 Language Act made no reference to the use of English.

In fact HSV recommends that HEIs devise their own language policy: university language policies should define the status of Swedish, English and, eventually, any other foreign language, and the concrete measures that should be implemented to achieve the stipulated goals as set out in the policy document (Högskoleverket 2008a: 28). Two HEIs – Göteborg University (GU) and the Royal Institute of Technology (Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan, or KTH) – will be taken as exemplars of devised and adopted language policies.

Göteborg University is among the largest universities in the Nordic countries. It was the first HEI in Sweden to draft a language policy document. The overall aim of its language policy is "to increase language awareness among all those who study or work at the university" (Göteborg University 2006: 4; official translation). The document refers to the necessity of using more Swedish in research fields such as medicine, the natural sciences and technology. It also concurs with the statement that the Swedish language is losing ground in competition with English and that other languages are being marginalised. Whereas undergraduate studies are to be offered mainly in Swedish, course literature and teaching at that study level should be in English "to a certain extent", in order to

3. JO is the abbreviation for *Justitieombudsman*, the Ombudsman for Justice.

increase and improve students' comprehension and prepare them for postgraduate studies where English is the dominant language (8). The same document contains some other imprecise language. Students are expected to acquire in Swedish "*a certain* [my italics] amount of language for specific purposes (LSP) in terms of comprehension and production". The proportion of doctoral dissertations in English should increase, but must include extensive summaries in Swedish. GU aims at promoting students' and teachers' abilities to read and understand scientific literature in languages other than Swedish and English. But, all in all, it seems that the position of English is reinforced, particularly at advanced levels but also in research domains where Swedish is the dominant language (14). In fact GU language policy lies in perfect line with the statements made in the 2005 language bill (Regeringens proposition 2005/06) and, like the 2005 language bill, it clearly establishes a link between quality and the use of English to promote quality research (Cabau 2009a: 147). It is interesting to note that it does not refer to the concept of parallel use of languages and, as has already been mentioned, only 20 per cent of GU dissertations written in languages other than Swedish include an extensive summary in Swedish.

The Royal Institute of Technology is one of the leading technical universities in Europe and is responsible for one-third of Sweden's capacity for engineering studies and technical research. It has the most foreign students (with Lund University) in the country: 2,500 (Högskoleverket/Statistiska centralbyrå 2010). Parallel language competence is clearly advocated as a rule in its language policy (Royal Institute of Technology 2009), in order to avoid

> Swedish becoming a low language and English a high language. Both languages are needed. […] domain losses for Swedish may have serious consequences for the universities' contacts, for the standard of general education and, by extension, for democracy. They may also affect the training of teachers in the school system. To counteract such a development, KTH should draw attention to the question of scientific Swedish in its education and promote the development of Swedish terminology in its areas of activity. (Official translation)

KTH acknowledges the risk of reduced effectiveness and inferior understanding when not using one's mother tongue in communication. Swedish is mainly used for the first three years of study, while the subsequent two years are taught mainly in English. Undergraduate KTH students will have developed a certain degree of competence in specialist language in Swedish and passive specialist language competence in English, English is usually the language of publication and often the working language. As for advanced-level studies, engineering and architecture graduates will have developed specialist language competence in both Swedish and English, i.e. they will have parallel language competence. They are expected to be able to use English as a working language to answer the

needs of the international labour market. The KTH language policy also gives an image of compliance with the recommendations made in various official language policy documents. But its policy seems more concerned about the development of terminology in Swedish and the difficulties arising from the transmission of knowledge at school level than that of GU. KTH does not need to stress the necessity to increase the use of English, since it has long been recognised as an international institution.

Some institutions have taken initiatives other than simply drafting a language policy document, for instance developing language training for students, teachers and other personnel. Malmö University, for example, has been offering courses such as 'How to Teach in English' and 'Practical English for Administrators' for several years now, with the objective of doubling the number of courses taught in English (Nilsson 2003: 37). The objective was to improve teaching in English, as well as teaching in multicultural groups (Högskoleverket 2008b: 33). In 2007, Stockholm University launched a Centre for Academic English. The Centre offers a module titled 'English for Academic Research', which is required of master's students within the Humanities.[4] Moreover, a course in administrative English has been active for some years, aimed at non-teaching staff, as well as a course titled 'Effective Communication for Students' with a focus on academic writing and discussion in English (Shaw et al. 2008: 272).

All the above-mentioned resolutions and measures and the general acceptance of the parallel use of English and Swedish do not mean that linguistic issues are no longer discussed and scrutinised in the field of HE. In fact the first decision that the Ombudsman had to reach regarding the 2009 Language Act was indeed related to the academic arena (JO 2009).

In late 2009, the Ombudsman expressed the view that Swedish organisations which provide funding for research had no right to require potential recipients to write their applications for funding in English. The Ombudsman's arguments were as follows: since there was no specific regulation for HE in the Language Act, its rules and principles should serve as the basis to assess the compliance of language use in HE. The result was the classification of the administration of HE as one of the core domains where the Language Act was applicable, i.e. public services, according to the principle that it should always be possible to communicate with Swedish authorities in Swedish. However, the use of English was acceptable if necessary and objectively justified, for example in case of research grant applications sent to panel members who do not speak Swedish (JO 2009). But in other fields of HE, such as research and teaching, the compulsory use of

4. Available at http://www.su.se/pub/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=3191&a=19821 (accessed 3 June 2010).

Swedish was not applicable. In fact, contrary to the government's point of view, as was previously mentioned, the Ombudsman viewed research and [higher] education as evident illustrations of antagonistic interests between internationalisation [of HE] and the protection of the Swedish language: the origin of the introduction of the Language Act was precisely related to the various concerns about the future of the Swedish language, such as domain losses and capacity losses in the teaching/learning process. At the same time, the requirement to use Swedish may represent a handicap in international academic exchange. As we have seen, the government proposed one solution: to modify the Higher Education Ordinance in order to make possible the use of a language other than Swedish in research and HE (SOU 2008/09: 153; 20). Even if there is no plan for such a revision for the time being, we may wonder whether this modification might not entail a further encroaching of English on the Swedish HE arena. Finally, the Ombudsman rightly concluded that the legislators might have underestimated the weight of legal guidance on how conflicts between the new language policy rules and the needs of research could be solved (JO 2009).

It seems, then, that the introduction of a language policy at some HEIs and the implementation of the Language Act will have little impact on the encroaching presence of English in research and teaching in the HE arena. In order to extend our scope of contextualisation of this phenomenon, we will now investigate the position of foreign languages (FLs) other than English in the Swedish school system, as well as in HE.

What room for languages other than English?

It is interesting to note that at the beginning of the 1980s the dominant position of English was already noticeable in the HE arena, but not only because of the objective of internationalisation of HE. The dominance of English was supported by reforms introduced at school level, which reduced the importance of FLs other than English in the secondary school curriculum (the 1969 teaching programme for compulsory schools abolished the linguistic prerequisite of French or German for acceptance into secondary education), as well as in academic requirements for HE admission. The result is that:

> Whereas in the 1930s university students were expected to be proficient in German, English and French, today English overwhelmingly dominates while proficiency in other languages lags and indeed is often lacking. The recent internationalising effort has supported relatively few programmes to strengthen foreign language teaching and foreign language-related programmes have involved English more than other foreign languages. (Burn and Opper 1982: 53)

As is briefly discussed later, these educational choices are reflected in Swedish society at large, where English not only leaves little room for linguistic diversity but also challenges the position of Swedish.

HSV deplores the absence of the use of texts in languages other than English and the Nordic languages. It recommends encouraging students who have acquired knowledge through a language other than English to use their language skills by offering the choice of alternative texts in other languages (Högskoleverket 2005: 51). If no other language can be expected to dethrone English, the only option left is to enhance linguistic diversity (Maassen and Uppstrøm 2005: 10).

In fact it is in the school arena that language policy was initially implemented: first, by introducing English as a compulsory subject for all pupils in 1962; second, by offering immigrant languages as optional subjects and possible media of instruction at the end of the 1960s; and in 1994–1995 by imposing a linguistic option, hopefully a second FL, in grades six or seven at compulsory schools (Cabau 2009b). This last measure tried to tackle the issue of declining interest for second FL learning (Cabau-Lampa 2007). Moreover, the existing system of linguistic options in the school system leads to diversity in terms of linguistic proficiency, which is not easily manageable. It is a strong argument in favour of establishing English as the common communication platform at HE level (Enkvist 2005). The decline in interest in studying any FL other than English is also noticeable at HE level. As a consequence, several HEIs have had to discontinue programmes in major languages such as French, Spanish and German because of too few applications. This fact, combined with the concentration on English, could entail the risk of leaving empty many exchange places in non English-language countries. In the long term this could have major implications for both the business and public sectors in Sweden. A lack of knowledge in foreign languages and cultures leads to important contracts being lost and the selection of company partners and other foreign contacts becoming too unilateral (Högskoleverket 2008b: 33). As is discussed below, this assumption is supported by the findings of surveys of the effects of shortages of FL skills in European enterprise (Ben Habib 2010; CILT 2006). Some institutions tried to tackle students' declining interest in FL learning by adopting various measures: cooperation between several institutions to offer language courses, supplementary financial support for the teaching of French, German and Spanish, and the introduction of language classes in technology-oriented programmes.

Recently, the government has decided to reform education at upper secondary schools. One of the main reasons behind this initiative is that too many pupils are dropping out or finishing their studies without achieving pass grades.

The government submitted the bill 'Tougher requirements and higher standards in the new upper secondary school' (Regeringens proposition 2008/09: 199), which was adopted by Parliament in October 2009. Entrance requirements for upper secondary education will be changed: in future, pupils must have achieved a minimum of a pass grade in Swedish, English, mathematics and nine other subjects to be eligible for general upper secondary education (HE preparatory programmes). Furthermore, a qualification that prepares pupils for HE will be introduced and this will impose higher requirements than are currently needed for obtaining basic eligibility for HE. The new upper secondary school structure will be introduced in autumn 2011 (Regeringskansliet 2009). This reform could result in students opting for subjects they consider easier to get better grades in than second FLs. Nevertheless, the new rules for admission to HE, according to which students having learned a second FL would gain 2.5 points, could encourage upper secondary students not to drop their FL subject.

We can see that some laudable efforts are being made at secondary and higher education levels to enhance the learning of FLs other than English. Nevertheless, these efforts are likely to be of limited effect because of the overwhelming presence of English in Swedish society, to which we now turn.

Language issues outside the higher education arena

While language issues are recurrent in the Swedish HE field, they also pervade other domains. The question here is whether the dominant position of English in HE is echoed in other spheres of Swedish society. English has been described as a second language in the daily lives of Swedes (Phillipson 1992: 25) and as "an articulated component of Swedish life" (Hult 2003: 61). Based on the results of a survey, the 2002 report 'Speech: Draft Action Plan for the Swedish Language' concluded that the majority of Swedes do *not* think that they use too much English in Sweden (SOU 2002: 27; 210). In 2005 only 27 per cent of Swedes believed that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak two European languages in addition to their mother tongue, the lowest percentage among EU members (CoEC 2006). The following gives a brief overview of language issues as discussed in the spheres of media, politics and business/economy, which echo the interests of internationalisation and globalisation.

The political arena is an appealing domain of investigation with regard to language issues. As was mentioned previously, the centre-right alliance was in favour of introducing Swedish as the official language of the country, while the

social democrats rejected the idea. In 2005 the change in the proposal of the alliance to institute a pass grade in a second FL as a prerequisite for admission to most academic programmes was rejected (Cabau-Lampa 2007: 351). Nevertheless, there is consensus on the dominant position of English in the school system (Cabau 2009a). In 2009, the Liberal Party appeared to want to reinforce the status of English: based on the government's Globalisation Council it proposed English study from grade one rather than from grades three or four. Not surprisingly, this proposal has been met with criticism by some members of the Swedish Academy, who saw in it a simplified approach to language learning, an overestimation of the importance of English, and an unnecessary reinforcement of the status of English (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2009). But it echoes moves made back in the mid-1960s when the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (Landsorganisationen) was already in favour of introducing English as a compulsory subject from the first grade (Cabau 2009a: 141).

It is worth remembering that today English is also an electoral tool. Ironically, one year after the introduction of the language policy bill establishing Swedish as the main language of Sweden (Regeringens proposition 2005/06: 2), Swedish politicians reached consensus on the language to use to present their political platforms: during the 2006 electoral campaign, the representatives of the two blocs competing to form the next Swedish government debated in English in a one-hour debate on the public television channel Sveriges Television. The presenter articulated the arguments favouring English as the tool of communication: "the main aim of the debate is to give immigrants a better understanding of the election, with four leading politicians discussing issues including unemployment and immigrants' integration in Sweden. […] When politicians are asked questions in a foreign language, it's harder for them to avoid answering. […] It also keeps the debate at a basic level – you don't have to have knowledge of Swedish political history to be able to grasp it" (*The Local* 2006). Regarding the position of languages on the public television channel, Hult (2010) highlighted the fact that the prevalence of material coming from English-dominant countries supported the high status of English in Sweden.

It seems that English is also pervading the domain of official authorities. In summer 2009 the former head of the Language Council of Sweden, Olle Josephson, reported the government to the Ombudsman for using English email addresses, which was against the law. The Ombudsman criticised the government practice (JO 2010a), but as of November 2010 the email addresses are still in English. It should be added here that the Committee on the Swedish Language recommended that official authorities should use Swedish email addresses (SOU 2002: 27; 123).

Another domain where English holds a prominent position is the business sector. Because of its small domestic market, Sweden depends heavily on exports. Swedish industrial companies became internationalised – or dependent on other countries – at an early stage and thus became multinational and multicultural (Cabau 2009a: 141). This was presented as a "major impetus" for internationalising the educational system (Burn and Opper 1982: 51). Nevertheless, a survey of nearly 2,000 small and medium exporting enterprises across 29 European states found that "a significant amount of business is being lost as a result of lack of language skills" (CILT 2006: 5). It is interesting to note that firms in Scandinavian countries appear to experience more than average difficulty with cultural barriers: 37 per cent of Swedish companies confirmed that they have experienced difficulties with foreign customers due to cultural differences. Even if this may be explained by geographic isolation, a more isolationist policy, or a higher awareness level compared to other Europeans, we may also wonder at the impact of a lack of cultural/language knowledge while relying upon English as tool of communication. Sweden was also among the countries that reported that their businesses have missed opportunities of winning export contracts because of a lack of cultural competence. Ben Habib (2010) exposed similar findings. Some Swedish respondents believed that an improvement in language skills would increase trade as much as by 50 per cent.

The systematic use of English in the business sector met some resistance recently. In 2005 Stockholm launched a strong marketing campaign to attract foreign investors by designating herself as the "Capital of Scandinavia". In 2010 the Language Defence Network reported the Stockholm City Council, the Stockholm Visitors Board, Stockholm Business Region and the Stockholm Entertainment District to the Parliamentary Ombudsman for not respecting the 2009 language law. The Ombudsman rejected the claim, arguing that it did not concern one of the core domains where the Language Act was applicable: public services, legislation or decision-making processes (JO 2010b). The Ombudsman used the same argument to reject other claims also made by the Language Defence Network concerning the use of English by some municipalities to promote their region and attract tourists. It seems, then, that the 2009 Language Act will have little impact on the growing presence of English in the domain of trade/business.

The examples mentioned above illustrate that the issue of use and status of languages is far from being restricted to the HE arena. Business, media and politics are also domains where the three-faceted dilemma, preserving the national language while recognising the importance of English as a tool of communication *and* enhancing linguistic diversity, is apparent.

Concluding remarks

The main dilemma facing Swedish HEIs and their Nordic counterparts is how to maintain an international profile in providing high-quality English-medium academic programmes and increasing the numbers of international students while assuring the preservation and development of the national language in the HE arena. The question now is to what extent the endeavours to achieve linguistic balance under the concept of parallel use of English and Swedish is realistic, considering the usual association made between the advantages of linguistic uniformity, i.e. English as academic lingua franca, and the internationalisation of the HE field. Moreover, this concept seems to be limited to the issue of which language should be used as a tool of instruction, and not which language should be used for publications and doctoral dissertations.[5]

It seems that Swedish HEIs are becoming more aware of the fact that internationalisation of HE is problematic and can entail some consequences, including the preservation and development of Swedish as a scientific language, domain losses and capacity losses in the field of teaching, and adverse effects on the learning process. The 2009 Language Act ensures that Swedish is to be used in the public sector, which means in HE administration, but it did not include specific regulations as to the language used for publications and teaching. The drafting of local language policies and the implementation of language training for students, teachers and other personnel compensate for the absence of special regulations for HE regarding the use of Swedish and English. Swedish HEIs are unwilling to allow too much state interference in academic rulings, and are pleading for autonomy in order to adopt more flexible measures to allow them to comply with the Language Act in their own way.

European HEIs are not likely to possess the tools to counteract the encroaching position of English. After all, they are only a reflection of national and/or international policies, and, as we have seen, the HE domain is no exception: Swedish society as a whole (school, business, politics and media) widely acknowledges the high status of English. Teaching in English as a means of increasing the number of international students and as an argument for internationalisation and quality of HE actively undermines the role of mobility programmes such as Erasmus, where linguistic diversity is seen as fundamental to the 'Lifelong Learning Programme 2007–2013' of the European Union. It leaves little room for the presence of other European languages, not to mention minority languages.

5. It is important to mention here that parallel use of languages has also been taken as a guideline in Norwegian and Danish HEIs, for example at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business and the University of Copenhagen.

Whereas the Bologna Process is very much concerned with the concrete future objectives of education systems, i.e. mobility, employability, and the European dimension, languages have been widely ignored. However, as Mackiewicz (2002) rightly asserts: "If it is true, that plurilingual competence is of crucial importance to a person's employability on the European labour market, then the universities have to place languages at the centre of their internationalisation strategy".

As long as English is associated with internationalisation, quality of education, academic promotion and research success, there is little hope of seeing any change in HE language policy in Sweden or anywhere else. Nevertheless, some pressure could come from the business arena. Young Europeans, like young people the world over, have a main priority: to find a job. If the discourse held in the professional environment enhances the values of competence in languages other than English, the echo will be heard not only in academic programmes but also in primary and secondary education syllabi. However ideal it may sound, it is unlikely that this scenario will take place in the near future. Why? Simply because proficiency in English is not evenly spread across Europe. It is only when proficiency in English is mastered by an overwhelming majority of students and teachers that proficiency in another language will be determined an advantage.

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Résumé

Le présent article étudie les réponses apportées par les établissements d'enseignement supérieur (EES) suédois quant à la position de la langue nationale et de l'anglais selon deux axes principaux, à savoir l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur (ES) et le discours relatif à la politique linguistique nationale. La première partie de l'article s'intéresse au phénomène de l'internationalisation de l'ES suédois ainsi qu'à l'utilisation de l'anglais dans les EES suédois. L'analyse de documents officiels permet ensuite d'examiner le processus simultané de mise en place d'une politique linguistique nationale et de la position accordée à l'anglais et au suédois dans l'ES selon cette politique. L'article passe ensuite en revue les problèmes rencontrés par les étudiants et les enseignants lorsque l'anglais est utilisé comme langue d'enseignement. Puis, il expose la politique linguistique adoptée par deux EES suédois pour s'intéresser ensuite aux problèmes rencontrés et aux solutions proposées pour renforcer la diversité linguistique dans le système éducatif suédois dans son ensemble. Enfin, l'article donne un aperçu des questions de langue telles qu'elles se présentent dans d'autres domaines, tels que les media, la politique et le monde des affaires, afin de mettre en contexte la position de l'anglais dans la société suédoise. Le principal objectif de cet article est donc d'analyser la politique linguistique suédoise dans l'ES en la situant dans son contexte sociétal.

Mots clés : Suède, enseignement supérieur, anglais, politique linguistique nationale, internationalisation