

# Teacher Beliefs on using Swedish in the Teaching of English

*An interview-based study of three upper secondary teachers in the south of Sweden*



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## **Abstract**

This essay examines three different English teachers' beliefs on using Swedish in their teaching. Through interviews it is uncovered what they think of the benefits and drawbacks of using Swedish in the teaching. They also approximate how much Swedish they use in the classroom and for what reasons. The teachers also interpret what the steering documents say on this subject and connect it to their own practice. The results show three very different attitudes towards the use of Swedish. One teacher reports almost never using it, whereas the other two report using it around 20 percent of their lessons. The teacher that reported almost never using Swedish used it only for translation of single words and this occurred very rarely. The two teachers that reported using the Swedish language more in their teaching had different main purposes with it. One teacher reported using it to bond with the students, and the other one reported using it to secure the students' comprehension. The results of the interviews also indicated that what the steering documents say on this subject are both somewhat contradictory but also very much open for interpretation. The essay concludes with implications for further research such as what the students with other mother tongues think of the inclusion of Swedish in the English teaching.

**Keywords:** Teaching English as a second language, First language, Teacher beliefs, Steering documents, English teaching in Sweden

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## 1. Introduction

To use or not to use the students' first language in the classroom has been a well-debated topic (Dailey-O Cain & Liebscher, 2009). A monolingual approach on language teaching has been seen as common sense due to several reasons such as monolingual English teachers, theories on exposure to the target language (TL) and since it is a reaction to the old "grammar-translation" method (Harmer, 2007). Levine (2012) point out that: "The status quo in language teaching has similarly approached the L1 as if it were something, if not dangerous, then at least undesirable and stigmatized" (p.332). Lately this approach has been questioned and a many studies have been conducted that show benefits and possibilities with the use of the L1 in the classroom (Dailey-O Cain & Liebscher, 2009). There still seems though, to be a monolingual norm in language teaching classrooms (Cummins, 2007). Due to the monolingual approach has been questioned, this "common sense" and what the steering documents say on the topic, it is interesting to examine what the teachers feel about this issue.

Firstly, research on the use of the students' L1 in the classrooms is explored. After this, the choice of instruction is theorized by firstly examining why it is that the monolingual approach has become "common sense". Thereafter some of the reasons why the principle has come to be questioned are brought up. The L1 issue is then discussed in relation to the steering documents for the subject of English at the Swedish upper secondary school.

The aim is to contribute to the discussion on the L1 in the classroom by examine three teachers' beliefs on using Swedish in the teaching. What they think of using Swedish in their teaching is interesting because of this debate that is going on concerning the L1. Why Swedish is examined is since it is the official language in Sweden, which means that it is the

L1 of many students and teachers. There are of course several other mother tongues in the classrooms as well, but Swedish is the one most likely to be used in an English classroom in a Swedish upper secondary school setting since it is the official language.

## **2. Research and Theories on Language Use in the Classroom**

There has been a good many of studies conducted on the use of different languages in the language classroom. Here follows reviews and summaries on some, and thereafter research on teachers' beliefs about using the students' L1 in their teaching is explored.

### **2.1 Current Research**

The following sections present research on how the students' L1 may be used in the language classroom and the possible benefits and drawbacks with this.

**2.1.1 First language in the additional language classroom.** Kamwangamalu (2010) discussed whether using the L1 in the language classroom should be considered a tool or an obstacle in the learning of a new language. He stated that a great deal of recently conducted research support the use of the L1. A way in which the L1 can be beneficial is through illumination and interillumination (Bahktin, 1981 as cited in St John, 2010). St John 2010 wrote about these concepts, which means that the languages help each other to be understood: "As focus flits between both L2 and L1 language exponents in the attempt to orient to 'foreign' words of expressions, new relationships are brought to light" (St John, 2010. p.213). Research by Dailey-O Cain and Liebscher (2009) has supported that "when teachers give students permission to use both languages during classroom interaction, they tend to use them in ways that promote both second language learning and bilingual behavior" (p.143). Levine (2014) argued for a principled space for the L1 in the classroom, stating among other reasons that the classroom is the only bilingual environment where only one of

the shared languages is used. Harmer (2007) also pointed out “irrespective of whether students grow up mono- or bilingually, the likelihood is that, especially in urban areas and on the Internet, they are likely to be operating in more than one language. That is the way the world is”(p.133).

Levine (2014) further stated that the use of the L1 might reduce anxiety and facilitate learning. Even though the use of the L1 is promoted, Levine (2014) suggested that the TL should be used as much as possible and every time the L1 is used it should be in a principled way for a pedagogical purpose. To use several languages with a purpose is called (among other terms) “Translanguaging”. This is described in Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2013) “Translanguaging refers to a systematic shift from one language to another for specific reasons” (p.16). Canagarajah (2011) conducted a study on translanguaging, analyzing the writing process of a student writing a text in a second language. The findings indicated a great deal of translanguaging used during the process of writing. This is also seen in Gunnarsson, van der Weijer and Källkvist’s (2015) research on students’ use of different languages when writing in English. The study was done through a questionnaire and it was found that Swedish (the official language) was the language mostly used as a language of thought during the stages *task-examining* and *process-controlling*. 92 % of the students used Swedish as one of the languages of thought at some stage during the task. This internal use of the L1 is supported in Butzkamm (2003) who wrote about the impossibility to turn off the L1. Butzkamm (2003) cites Hammerly 1989:51: "Ignoring or forbidding English will not do, for learners inevitably engage in French-English associations and formulations in their minds".

Contrasting the sources promoting the L1 in the classroom, Turnbull (2001) and MacDonald (1993) both found a positive correlation between the amount of the TL used in the classroom and the student motivation (as stated in Turnbull and Arnett, 2002). One of the reasons for this was that the students evolved instrumental goals, that is, the personal needs to

be able to communicate in the TL. MacDonald (1993) also found that overuse of the L1 could lead to de-motivation among the students since they did not have to improve their TL comprehension level when they were frequently provided with L1 translations (as stated in Turnbull and Arnett, 2002). Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) stated that it is a common belief that students prefer to learn English from native speakers. They found in their study that learners of English preferred a native English teacher as a proficiency model since they are “ideal models of accurate pronunciation” (p.12).

### **2.1.2 Teacher beliefs on using the first language the in the classroom.**

Clearly, there is research supporting both the use of and the exclusion of the L1 in the teaching of an additional language. The next section examines what teachers themselves think of the L1 issue.

In Copland and Neokleous (2010) four English teachers in Greek Cypriot were observed and interviewed regarding their use of the students’ L1 (Cypriot) in the classroom. The teachers in the study used the students’ L1 differently from each other and with a significantly varied amount. One teacher used Cypriot 634 times during one lesson whereas another used Cypriot only once. The teachers’ in Copland and Neokleous (2010) had different reasons for using their students’ L1. One teacher that frequently provided Cypriot equivalents of the English words thought of this as a motivation for the students and stated: “if you don’t teach them what it means in Greek, they won’t be interested in knowing the word” (p.273). Another teacher pointed out that: “Translation helps because you cannot explain everything in a foreign language” (p.273). There were four teachers in the study and three of the teachers thought of using the L1 when explaining grammar as a good way because it saved time and reduced stress. The fourth teacher thought that explaining grammar in the L1 would generate

complications. This teacher was the same that used only one Cypriot utterance in her lesson. She had earlier had bad experiences from learning a new language with frequent use of her L1, which was one reason why she tried to avoid using the L1 in her classroom.

The teachers in Copland and Neokleous' (2010) study provided several reasons for the use of the L1 in the classroom, such as increase student motivation, save time and reduce student stress. However, they all felt that using the students' L1 was a shortcut and they were all critical of their own amount of using it. The differences in the teachers' beliefs on and their actual use of the L1 could be explained by feelings of 'guilt', which, according to Copland and Neokleous (2010), is "an emotion recognized as significant by a number of researchers with an interest in L1 classroom use" (p.277). Butzkamm (2003) also supported this claim. He argues: "Time and time again, using the mother tongue is accompanied by feelings of guilt" (p.29). Maybe that is because the monolingual approach has come to be "common sense" by teachers and policy makers, as is pointed out in Cummins (2007, p.225). On the other hand, Copland and Neokleous (2010) wrote that accepting and using the L1 in the additional language classroom has been proved in research as a beneficial tool towards acquiring the new language but that these findings has not reached out to the four teachers in their research.

## **2.2 Theorizing Medium of Instruction Choices**

As seen in the previous sections, there is potential in using the L1 in the classroom. Contradictory to this research, the Swedish syllabus for English guides teachers to conduct their teaching in English "as far as possible" (Skolverket, 2011a). The next section tries to theorize the medium of instruction.

**2.2.1 Questioning the monolingual principles of language teaching.** The monolingual principle, to teach a language only through the language, of foreign language

teaching has been dominating for decades (Littlewood and Yu, 2011). Levine (2012) wrote: “the status quo in language teaching has similarly approached the L1 as if it were something, if not dangerous, then at least undesirable and stigmatized” (p.332). Recently this approach has come to be questioned (Butzkamm 2003; Cummins 2007; Levine 2012).

Macaro (2005) made an attempt to explain why this debate and the subject of it is such a “contentious issue” (p.64). Firstly, he spoke of the dominant countries’, such as the USA and the UK, will to make people believe that code switching is not a profitable tool in English learning. Butzkamm (2003) stated that a good many of English native speakers spread out through the world as teachers of English. They did not know their students’ L1s and therefore they promoted monolingual teaching. This claim was also supported by Harmer (2007): that teachers from English speaking countries promoted a monolingual approach to teaching since they did not know the languages of their students. Butzkamm (2003) wrote that a great production of cheap English-only books has helped to form the common monolingual approach to teaching. Harmer (2007) stated that this methodology was grounded in the issues of teaching English to classes where the students had mixed L1s. The monolingual approach emerged from the “Direct method” which in its turn, at the end of the nineteenth century, was a reaction to the “grammar-translation method”. For the Direct method it was important that only the TL were used in the classroom. Today there are, still, many people arguing for an English-only classroom (Harmer, 2007). The biggest argument for this view should be that “if English is the medium of communication in a classroom, then students will be provoked into more and more communication attempts, and in the process language learning may well ‘take care of itself” (Harmer, 2007. p,132). Also, Harmer (2007) continues, the teacher is an important source of comprehensible input, and using the L1 would mean restricting the students’ exposure to the TL. Turnbull (2001, p.535) states that “it is crucial for teachers to use the TL as much as possible in contexts in which students spend only short periods of time

in class on a daily basis, and when they have little contact with the TL outside the classroom” (as stated in Cummins, 2007, p. 224). Also Krashen (1982) and Mitchell and Myles (1998) pointed out the importance of being exposed to comprehensible data when acquiring a new language.

On the subject why the L1 use is a contentious issue, Macaro (2005) pointed out that earlier, bilingualism was viewed like monolingual competence in two different languages, and that interference was to avoid. Today neurological research suggests that bilingualism is a “homogenous architecture” (Libben, 2000 as cited in Macaro, 2005 p.65), that is, one and the same system. This view is also supported in Canagarajah (2011), that for multilinguals: “languages are not discrete and separated, but form an integrated system for them; multilingual competence emerges out of local practices where multiple languages are negotiated for communication” (p.1)”. Macaro (2005) further stated that code switching reminds people of the old method of language teaching, grammar-translation, and that might feel outdated. Why code switching is a contentious issue was also explained in Macaro (2005) with that it contradicts the theories on Krashen’s “i+1”, negotiating and exposure to the TL. However, Macaro (2005) argued about these theories: “It is possible, I would argue, that the unswerving faith in the comprehensible input-meaning negotiation- comprehensible output continuum has been entirely due to the fact that the proponents of these theories and hypotheses simply did not speak the first language of their subjects or students” (p.66).

Cummins (2007) argued that “when we free ourselves from exclusive reliance on monolingual instructional approaches, a wide variety of opportunities arise for teaching languages by means of bilingual instructional strategies that acknowledge the reality of, and strongly promote, two-way cross-language transfer” (p.222). Along the lines of this claim, Butzkamm (2003) argued: “The mother tongue is, for all school subjects including foreign language lessons, a child’s strongest ally and should, therefore, be used systematically”

(p.30). Butzkamm (2003) also provided ten reasons for why the students' mother tongues should be used, and the monolingual teaching approach questioned. One example of this is that mother tongue aid may make it possible to use rich authentic texts that would otherwise be incomprehensible. The L1 use would then lead to faster acquisition of the TL. Cook (2001) also brought up several reasons for why the L1 should be used in the English classroom, such as for explaining grammar, convey meaning or get to know the students in their main language.

**2.2.2 The steering documents on language use in the classroom.** The Swedish syllabus for English in upper secondary school guides the teachers on the L1 issue. It includes directions on how to use the L1 in the teaching. Regarding this issue it says: "Teaching should encourage students' curiosity in language and culture, and give them the opportunity to develop plurilingualism where skills in different languages interact and support each other" (Skolverket, 2011a). It also says: "Teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English" (Skolverket, 2011a). The commentary document on the syllabus also guides the teachers on this area and it says (my translation):

### **Education in English**

The syllabus emphasizes that the teaching should be conducted in English "as far as possible". There are several reasons for this:

- The students get to hear more English when teaching is conducted through the language. The linguistic input increases. The students are stimulated to use the language in the classroom and get the opportunity to naturally develop different communication strategies.
- The students might have other mother tongues than Swedish. A contrastive perspective that follows from the Swedish language is most likely not meaningful for students who have a mother tongue other than Swedish.
- In the syllabus there are no requirements for translation or interpretation between English and Swedish or the student's mother tongue. The expression

”as far as possible” does not exclude the occurrence of single instances in Swedish or in the students’ mother tongue in teaching. It requires professional judgment on what in the best way helps the student reach the goals and if there are situations where the occasional use of a language other than English could contribute to strengthening the student’s understanding and improve the development of knowledge (Skolverket, 2011b).

What the steering documents say on the L1 issue is somewhat contradictory. Firstly, the syllabus states that the teacher is to give the students opportunity to develop plurilingualism. Thereafter it says that the teaching should be conducted in English ”as far as possible”. This sentence confirms what Cummins (2007) explained, that the monolingual approach has come to be “common sense” by teachers and policy makers (p.225). It is interesting how one is supposed to make the students develop plurilingualism when English should be used as much as possible.

In the commentaries on the syllabus Skolverket (2011b) wrote that one of the reasons for using English as much as possible is that the students might have different L1s. Harmer (2007), as we saw in section 2.2.1, stated that the monolingual methodology was grounded in this issue. However, if a student is taught in the mother tongue, the student will still read Swedish or Swedish as a second language (Gymnasieförordningen, 2010:2039). Therefore, if Swedish is used in the teaching of English, it will hopefully benefit all of the students to some degree. If code switching is beneficial in teaching, and since it is most unlikely that a teacher will be able to code switch with all the L1s there might be in a classroom, Swedish might be a profitable way to go, since all the students study Swedish as well. Skolverket (2011b) also wrote that it is up to the teacher to “make a professional judgment” on whether it could be beneficial to use another language than English, which gives a good deal of freedom to the teacher when interpreting the syllabus.

### **3. An Interview Study of Teachers' Beliefs about Language Use**

The goal with this study was to investigate three different English teachers' beliefs on the use of the official language, Swedish, in their teaching of English. The questions aimed to answer were:

- What are the teachers' opinions on using the first language/the official language in their teaching?
- Do these opinions differ depending on which course of English (5, 6 or 7) is taught?
- Do other first languages than the official come up in the teaching, if so, how?
- How do the teachers interpret the sections in the steering documents that concern the issue of the first language in the classroom?

Since this study aimed to explore the beliefs' and not the actual practice, the most appropriate method was interviewing. The method was used along lines with "Interviewing as a qualitative research" written by Irving Seidman (2006). Seidman (2006) discussed some considerations when conducting research through interviewing. Seidman (2006) and Trost (2005) both talked about the significance of the place for the interview. They argued that interviewees have to feel secure and that there should preferably be no risk of disturbances. Because of these reasons, the interviews for this study were conducted in the different teachers' schools, in separate rooms.

Along the lines of Seidman (2006) the questions used in the interviews were "real" questions, which means that the answers were not already predicted. The questions were open-ended and as far as possible not leading in any direction, which is recommended by Björklund and Paulsson (2014). All of the teachers were familiar with the subject of the interview beforehand, but not the explicit questions. The questions were discussed with the

supervisor and then piloted on peer researcher to make sure that they were relevant and comprehensible (Lantz, 1993). Additionally to the questions, the teachers were asked to read the excerpts from the steering documents that are presented in section 2.2.2 and discuss what they meant to them.

The teachers for this study were chosen with purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling means that the participants of the study are not randomly picked but picked with a purpose. The purpose/strategy chosen for this study is what Patton (1990) called “Maximum variation sampling” (p. 172). Seidman (2006) described this method “This sampling technique should allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading” (p.52). Since all the participants were English teachers at Swedish upper secondary schools, the readers that will connect to the reading are already limited. On the basis of the aim for this study, which was to examine the teachers’ beliefs on using Swedish in the English classroom, teachers with different language backgrounds were interviewed.

The teacher who was interviewed first, from now on referred to as “T1” had been working as an English teacher for eight years and was currently teaching English 5, English 6, English 7 and Spanish, which also was T1’s mother tongue. The second teacher interviewed, T2, had the TL, English, as mother tongue. T2 had worked as an English teacher for four years and was currently teaching English 5, 6 and 7. The third teacher had the same mother tongue as the official language, Swedish. T3 had been a teacher of English for eleven years and was at the moment teaching English 5, English 6 and English for students who had not completed their elementary school English. T3 also taught media-subjects and computer knowledge.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with Green, Franquiz and Dixon (1997) in mind. They argued for transcripts not being the real interviews, but a representation of them. They also argued for transcripts not being objective but a result of several choices and interpretations made by the researcher, such as what is important in the context. The content of the answers is what is important in this study and therefore pauses and possible grammatical errors were not transcribed. Trost (2005) argued that he thought it would be unethical to transcribe interviews verbatim, since spoken language and written is not the same. He stated (my translation): "If I got to see my spoken language written, I would be ashamed – and it would be unethical for the interviewer to put me through that" (p.134). The interviews were transcribed in Swedish, and the parts that were to be quoted were translated into English.

When transcribed, the transcripts were analyzed one by one using a system of coding found in Saldaña (2009), namely "descriptive coding" (p.70). Saldaña explains that this method is beneficial in working with interview transcripts. In the margin a descriptive word (a code) symbolizing the content of every passage or sentence was written. The reason for this process was to help sort the data later. To make the categories, which emerged from the codes, even more explicit, every code got its own color. All the sentences or passages that got the same code were highlighted in the same color. This method was used since it was a good help in analyzing major themes. When searching for codes the research questions were kept in mind and the themes and codes that emerged were used in analyzing the transcripts and answering the questions.

## **4. The Teachers' View on the Use of Swedish in the Classroom**

Here follows a summary of the results of the interviews. The results are divided into two sub-sections. First comes a section on the beliefs and practices of the teachers and then a section on the teachers' interpretations on the sections in the syllabus and the commentaries on the syllabus that concern the issue of the L1.

### **4.1 Beliefs and Practices**

This part on beliefs and practices is divided into four sections. The first section is on the teachers' general thoughts on the official/L1 issue and the second is on the reasons why they use it. The third section is about how the teachers use the official language differently depending on the proficiency of their students, and the fourth is about how they use mother tongues other than the official language in their teaching.

**4.1.1 The teachers' thoughts on using the official language in the language classroom.** The three teachers' general opinions on the use of Swedish in the English classroom differed a great deal. T3 stated that:

My general opinion on using Swedish in the teaching very much depends. It depends both on the students' previous knowledge in English, but also on which level of English that is being taught (T3)<sup>1</sup>

T3 was teaching English to a class where some of the students might have had no previous teaching of English at all and then, T3 argued, a good deal of Swedish had to be used in order for all the students to follow. T3 also stated that the more English that is used, the more the students intercept, but emphasizes that the students have to be at a certain level to be able to make something out of all the input. Krashen (1982) stated that to acquire

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<sup>1</sup> Since the interviews were conducted in Swedish, all quotes are my translations.

language one has to be exposed to a great deal of comprehensible input. This claim was also supported in Mitchell and Myles (1998): “It has always been obvious that comprehensible and appropriately contextualized L2 data is necessary for learning to take place” (p.126). If the input is too advanced for the student, it is most likely incomprehensible and it will not benefit the acquisition of English.

The teachers held very different views on the use of Swedish. T1 thought that it was rather good to be able to use Swedish in the teaching, whereas T2 stated “my opinion towards that is very negative”. T2 believed that inclusion of Swedish would generate complications when learning English, for example in grammar. In Copland and Neokleous (2010) one of the teachers interviewed also thought that teaching grammar in the L1 would complicate matter.

T1 was positive towards the use of Swedish and talked about the importance that the students had to feel secure with the teacher and that in order to later on be able to help the students as profitable as possible one should have a bond beyond just the ordinary “student-teacher”. Cook (2001) wrote that, “The main benefit of the L1 for personal contact is naturalness. When using the L1, the teacher is treating the students as their real selves rather than dealing with assumed L2 personas” (p.416). Levine (2011) said that the L1 provides “validation of learners’ identity in their dominant language” (p.334). Skolverket’s commentaries on the syllabus stated that it is up to the teacher to make a professional judgment on whether if and how the “use of another language than English” could benefit a student’s learning (Skolverket, 2011b). This judgment is what T1 was making here. Also T2 made a professional judgment but with a different outcome: “I feel that it is about sink or swim”. T2 stated that if English was used as the medium of communication in the classroom it would lead to better progress. Also this reason is stated as one of the justifications for maximizing the use of English in the classroom in the commentaries on the syllabus: “The

students are stimulated to use the language in the classroom and get the opportunity to naturally develop different communication strategies (Skolverket, 2011b). This reason for using the TL is mentioned also in Harmer (2007): "if English is the medium of communication in a classroom, then students will be provoked into more and more communication attempts, and in the process language learning may well 'take care of itself' (p.132). Macdonald (1993) also wrote that when having an English only classroom the students develop instrumental goals, that is, personal needs to communicate in the TL, which is good for motivation (as stated in Turnbull and Arnett, 2002). T2 reasoned along with these lines, and argued that a new language should be learned from the ground and that the students should not be able to fall back on Swedish:

I do not answer when they ask me something in Swedish, they have to explain and try to find words in English. The words don't have to be advanced. They can be simple as long as they make themselves understood. That contributes to the student's development (T2).

When using this approach the students will not be able to fall back on Swedish. To be too comfortable and fall back on Swedish was one of the drawbacks that T1 found with using Swedish in the classroom:

I think that the students get too comfortable in speaking Swedish and since they know that I am speaking Swedish as well they might just keep answering in Swedish even though I am trying to move on to English (T1).

T1 had also observed the students getting unproductive and not attempt to negotiate meaning and find the English words if they knew that their Swedish would be accepted/understood. Macdonald (1993), as stated in Turnbull and Arnett (2002), found that if a teacher used the students' L1(s) to convey meaningful information, it would decrease student motivation since

they had no need for higher proficiency in the TL. This finding could be connected to T2's view on sink or swim. Since T2 is a native English speaker and nearly never speaks Swedish with the students, and also since no answer is given when the students ask something in Swedish, they do not have Swedish to fall back on. T2 indicated, though, that there could be situations where Swedish was beneficial, but that these occurrences were "very, very few". T2 pointed out that Swedish might be beneficial to use when a student does not have sufficient proficiency in the TL. But, since the students in the Swedish school system are introduced to English very early and also since the students get a good deal of English input from elsewhere, T2 argued that the use of Swedish for this reason was almost never necessary. T2 felt that when having a dialogue with the students they comprehended "the most, if not all" and therefore the use of Swedish was not needed. This thought was shared by T1 who pointed out that Swedish was not mainly used for securing comprehension, because the students already understood most of the English.

T2 also said, however, that the negative opinion towards using the official language in the classroom might have something to do with T2 feeling insecure in the language, and was worried that it might lead to misunderstandings if it was used:

Maybe if I were completely Swedish and had Swedish as mother tongue, that I would use the Swedish language more. But that is not the case, and therefore I feel that it is a safety for me to do everything in English (T2).

Macaro (2005) stated that one reason for why the "English only" classroom is promoted by teachers and theorists might be that they themselves are not familiar with the students' L1s. However, T2 also thought that being a native speaker of English gave advantages in teaching the language. One way in which this claim is true is the study of Walkinshaw and Duong (2012) where it was found that students prefer native speakers as language models.

**4.1.2 Reasons for using the official language in the classroom.** Although the teachers had very different attitudes towards using Swedish in their teaching, they could all see situations where it might be beneficial to do so, such as to gain connection with the students, to clarify or to make sure that everyone followed. T1 talks about one such situation:

I think that it is very important that the students feel confident. And they aren't always doing so in English in the beginning. So sometimes you might have to say something in English and then again in Swedish to clarify. Because them being confident sometimes mean that they don't want to ask questions and admit in front of the class that they didn't understand (T1).

To bond with the students and make them feel confident are the main reasons why T1 used Swedish in the teaching of English. One way of making the students feel confident is to clarify and make sure that they understand. Cook (2001) wrote: "Using the L1 to convey meaning may be an efficient way to help learning and to feel natural in using the L2 in the classroom" (p.414). This is the main reason for why T3 used Swedish in the teaching. T3 argued that just because the people around a student talk more English, the student will not automatically gain proficiency. Instead, if the people in the classroom speak a great deal in a language that the student does not understand, the student will feel more alienated. Butzkamm (2003) wrote that: "Studies in which informal meaning checks were used at the end of a lesson have repeatedly shown that pupils misunderstand more than their teachers realize" (p.31). Butzkamm (2003) also stated that the L1 could be used in a way that make incomprehensible texts comprehensible, which is similar to what is happening here.

It is said in the commentaries on the syllabus that Swedish should not be used since it does not benefit those who have other mother tongues than Swedish (Skolverket,

2011b). T3 thought, that since these students are also studying Swedish, they would most certainly benefit from it. T3 also believed that using Swedish in the teaching of English might improve the students' proficiency in Swedish as well.

Although T2 generally had a negative view, a few occasions where it could be beneficial were stated. One case where T2 reported using Swedish was to refer to books and pages where the grammar, that had just been gone through in English, was explained in Swedish. It then worked as an additional resource if the students felt insecure about what had been said. T2 also said that translation of single words might occur, if the students asked, when teaching grammar: such as providing the Swedish translation for 'noun'. T2 emphasized that it was just single words, and not explanations that might occur in Swedish.

Additionally to bonding with the students, make them feel secure, clarifying and translate single words T1 also provided some reasons for using Swedish in the teaching such as ease the tension and also when doing performance reviews. The reason for the latter was to make sure that the students knew exactly what was going on, what they had to improve and what was good. Related to this reason, T3 conducts the run through of the central content and the grade criteria before every assignment in Swedish. This is to make sure that the students know exactly what is expected of them. T3 explained that Swedish is sometimes used for instructions and explanations. It was emphasized, however, that this was only done in English 5 and the introductory program since in the higher courses it is included in the assignment to understand the instructions. That is, in the lower courses, instructions are supported or totally carried out in Swedish to make the input comprehensible as talked about in Butzkamm (2003). T3 found it beneficial to carry out grammar teaching in Swedish, but with the use of English examples. T3 stated that what is important is that the students use the rules correctly and not the exact terms. Whether they think of "continuous" or "pågåendeform" (sw.

“ongoing condition”) is therefore not really essential. Three of the four teachers interviewed in Copland and Neokleous also found teaching grammar through the L1 as beneficial, since it saved time and reduced stress.

**4.1.3 When the official language is used – differences between groups.** As T3 mentioned in 4.2.2, the use of Swedish differs significantly depending on what course is taught. This thought was the main agreement among all the three teachers: Whatever volume of Swedish that the teachers reported using, it decreased as the students’ proficiency increased.

If a student has passed English 5 you can raise your expectations on the next course because then the student will have the proficiency and it lies in the assignment itself that the student should be able to understand it. That is also said in the ‘central content’, that understanding instructions is part of the assignment (T3).

T3 explained that within the introductory courses and English 5 Swedish might be needed to instruct and explain to make sure that everyone understands, but in English 6 and 7 the assignments and exercises are instead designed to fit the level of the course, that is on a level of comprehensible input. It is then included in the course to understand the assignments. That is, one can assume that the students understand English at a certain level, if they have passed previous courses.

All the teachers thought that in English 5, and in T3’s case also the introductory courses of English, were where Swedish was most beneficially used. T1, who said that the main reason for using Swedish is for bonding with the students, said that this bonding is done in English 5. T1 said: “I think that to get good results and to be able to help the students one first has to reach them. And you don’t do that in English, at least not in the beginning”. In

English 6 and 7, T1 further pointed out, they had already built up a relationship and Swedish is not needed as much. T1 explained that the only situation for which Swedish is used in English 7 is when doing performance reviews. Although T2 did not encourage the use of Swedish very much, if it is to be used it is used in English 5. T2 said: “If I use it, I do it in English 5, because they have just come from elementary school and it’s all new to them, but never in English 6 and 7. Never in English 7, absolutely not”.

T1 pointed out that it is not only the course of English that affects the amount of Swedish used but that it also may differ vastly between two classes of for example English 6. If one class is very active and talks a good deal and the other more passive, then Swedish might be used in a way to get that class started.

For both T2 and T3 the use of Swedish went along with the lines on making the input comprehensible by using the L1 (Butzkamm, 2003). That is, more of the official language is used when the proficiency of the learners is lower. T1 instead worked along the lines of Cook (2011) that the contact with the students gets more natural and also Levine (2011) who argued for validating the identities of the students in their main language.

**4.1.4 How mother tongues other than Swedish are apparent in the classroom.** All of the three teachers’ classes contained several mother tongues. It differed somewhat between the teachers how these came up in the teaching, but what was alike was that they did not come up at all to the same extent as Swedish. T1 used it sometimes, when drawing parallels concerning grammar. When talking about differences in first, second and third person for example, the students could think of how it was done in their mother tongue and draw parallels to English. However, T1 stated that a good many more parallels was drawn to Swedish than to other mother tongues. T2 said that other mother tongues than Swedish never came up in the classroom, since T2 did not speak them. In the classroom of T3, in

particular the introductory courses, students at different levels of English preferred to speak amongst each other in their mother tongues. T3 tried to get them to speak English, but allowed them to use their mother tongues as well. Freeman and Freeman (1993) gives some advice on how to incorporate all of the students' L1s in the teaching, even when the teacher is not proficient in them, such as having the "environmental print" (p.554) including all L1s. Also to have resources such as books and magazines in all the languages available in the classroom is one way of promoting the L1s of all students (Freeman and Freeman, 1993).

## **4.2 How the Teachers Interpret the Syllabus**

The following sections present the teachers' interpretations of the sections in the syllabus that concern this subject. The first section is about the interpretations on the syllabus, and the next is the interpretations of Skolverket's commentaries on the syllabus. These are all provided in section 2.2.2.

**4.2.1 Reflections on encouraging curiosity and provide opportunity to develop plurilingualism.** About this section all of the three teachers seemed somewhat confused. T1 said: "I'm not sure how to answer that question" and then moved on talking about encouraging students' curiosity. T2 said: "I don't really know how I interpret 'develop plurilingualism'. I guess I'm a little lost there". And T3 began the answer with: "How do I interpret that, that was hard...".

The problem with interpreting this section might have to do with what Cummins (2007) said on the monolingual approach being 'common sense' by language teachers and policy makers. This section both contradicts the monolingual approach and the other section on language use in the syllabus.

Concerning “encourage students’ curiosity” T1 felt that it was important to draw upon occurrences in the English speaking world and also to be aware of what the students are interested in and what they might find stimulating. Also, T1 said, in order to maintain student motivation it is important to be adaptive and be able to bring up relevant issues that might emerge in class, even if one has planned to do something else:

It might not have to do with literature (if that is what is being worked with) but it has to do with English and then you can stimulate them in that. I think that if you invite them to bring up things that they find interesting that will generate profit (T2).

T2 said that it was in the teacher’s job to conduct classes that will create curiosity for the culture where the English language is used and to stimulate the students to favorable progress in the future so that they can use the tool to manage in the global world, where English is the main language. Regarding the plurilingualism, T1 saw the profits in connecting languages not only in grammar but how languages work, and some linguistic history. If the students are aware of for example that the English language builds on the Germanic, they may well guess the meaning of certain words instead of get stuck. They can do this guessing since they might know the meaning of a similar word in another language. T1 was also a teacher of Spanish and explained that when teaching Spanish, grammar parallels to the Swedish language were always drawn to clarify the differences. T3 stated that parallels were brought up for the students to get that the languages go together and loan words from each other. Connecting English with other languages than Swedish is also done, such as German and French. T3 provides an example that had been talked about the same day the interview was held. The class then talked about Shakespeare and that he lived in Stratford-Upon-Avon. Then they talked about that the name of the river was added to the town’s name.

The students who were also reading French then brought up that something similar was also done in France.

It seems like all the three teachers were a little puzzled with the formation “develop plurilingualism”. After having read the section, they all focused on the “create curiosity”-part of the section and spoke about that. This finding is not surprising, since it contradicts the other statement about the use of languages in the classroom, which will be examined in the next section.

**4.2.2 Reflections on teaching ‘everything essential’ in English.** The English version on the syllabus says “the teaching should be conducted in English as far as possible” (Skolverket, 2011a). The teachers have reflected on the Swedish version, which says something similar to: “the teaching should in everything essential be conducted in English” (Skolverket, 2011c). The difference between these two sentences is significant in the teachers’ answers, and therefore another translation than the one in the original translation of the syllabus for English is provided. Overall it seemed like the teachers found it easier to interpret this section than the previous one. T2 said about this passage:

I interpret this as that whatever I do in my teaching I shall do it in English, and I do (T2).

T1 said that it felt somewhat like that what was said earlier in the interview was contradictory to the reading, but also continued: “I use Swedish to get the students to get confidence in me. It doesn’t build on to get everyone to understand, because they do”. T1’s use of Swedish is thus not to enhance learning in the short run but in the long: “If I don’t get to know the students then the teaching will be a lot harder later”. T3 questions the writing “everything essential” and concludes with stating that the essential parts (based on the grading criteria) are that the students should be able to instruct, reason, argue and draw comparisons in

English and adds that the students should know and use the grammatical rules correctly, but that it is not essential that they know the explicit rules in English.

As we see here, and as is stated earlier, the contradictions in the syllabus allows for very different interpretations. It is up to the teacher to interpret what “everything essential” means. It is interpreted here both as “everything” and also as everything that is in the grading criteria.

**4.2.3 Reflections on reflections.** The subject commentaries on the syllabus say that it is up to the teacher to decide whether a use of a language other than English is beneficial. T1 has made the ‘professional judgment’ that if the students have confidence in their teacher, which in the beginning is gained through Swedish, it will be easier to help them: “In English 6 and 7 they already know me and so then there is nothing strange with talking to the teacher in English”(T1). T2 states regarding this passage that it went along with what she thought from the beginning:

If you use English from scratch as the tool of communication in the classroom it will lead to better development (T2).

A parallel was drawn to moving to a new country where one does not have Swedish to fall back on. “It is almost like this in my classes as well: they will have to explain themselves in English”. T3 did not agree with the part in the subject commentaries, which state that one of the reasons for avoiding Swedish in the teaching was because the students might have different L1s:

The students that I teach who have another mother tongue than Swedish, they will have gone to IM<sup>2</sup> and will probably have read IM language to learn

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2. An introduction course for students that do not have complete grades from secondary school.

Swedish, so I rather think that getting certain parts in Swedish would strengthen their knowledge in Swedish, and that that will affect the English positively. What it says here, that it would be new and completely foreign to them, I doubt it (T3).

T3 also says about the commentary section that it is interesting because it takes for granted that all the students should automatically gain proficiency in English by hearing it more. T3 doubts so and states that one first has to be at a certain level to be able to gain knowledge. This is again relating to the comprehensible input (Butzkamm, 2003). These commentaries are not as contradictory as the syllabus, but still they are encouraging teachers to make their own judgment on which, when and why other languages should be used in order to help the students on the way to their goals. This encouragement provides the teachers with a good deal of freedom in deciding how to use the official language and the students' L1s in the teaching.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings showed a good deal of diversity in what the teachers thought of the use of the official language in the English classroom. As seen, previous research on the subject, such as Copland and Neokleous (2010), have also shown a lot of diversity and contradictions on how different languages are seen and used in this context. Not only this study and other, but also the steering documents seemed to provide contradictory ways of interpretation. They opened up for the teachers to make their own decisions on whether and how to use other languages than English in the English classroom.

The three teachers in this study reported using Swedish in their teaching very differently from each other, but still they all had their teaching grounded in the steering documents. The only thing they all agreed on was that the amount of Swedish used decreased

as the students' proficiency increased. T1 used Swedish in the beginning because that was when they were getting to know each other and T3, and also the few times T2 did use Swedish, used it for securing comprehension which is along the lines of Butzkamm (2003) that showed how the L1 aid can make data comprehensible.

Although the teachers reported using Swedish very differently, all of the teaching was grounded in the steering documents. The teaching that T2 reported conducting, with almost no use of Swedish, is supported in the research in Turnbull and Arnett (2002). T2's teaching is also justified in the syllabus where it says "teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English" (Skolverket, 2011a). Even though T1 and T3 has vastly different views on using Swedish in the teaching, their teaching is also well grounded in both research, the syllabus and the commentaries on the syllabus. They both reported using Swedish around 20 % in their teaching. In the commentaries that Skolverket has made on the syllabus for English, they have stated that it is up to the teacher to decide whether other languages than English can contribute to the students' learning, and this is what both T1 and T3 are doing (Skolverket, 2011b). T1 used Swedish for creating a contact with the students that would then help the students' learning in the future. T3 used Swedish to make sure that all of the students understood. The use of the L1 was also supported in Kamwangamalu (2010), Levine (2014) and St John (2010).

Of course, Swedish was not the first language of all students in this study and this is one of the weaknesses with this essay. Whereas the literature review focuses on the use on the first language in the classroom, the study examines the reported use of the official language. This is a mismatch, since it does not take into account all of the students who have another L1 than Swedish. In future research, it would be interesting to examine how students with other L1s than Swedish might or might not benefit from the inclusion of Swedish in the English classroom. In the interviews one questions that was asked was on how other L1s were

apparent in the classroom, and the results showed that other L1s were used sometimes to draw parallels, but not at all to the same extent as Swedish.

When conducting the interviews the questions were very hasty translated from English to Swedish, wherefore the questions on interpreting the steering documents appeared a little indistinct. The piloting was only made with the English questions on a peer researcher. The interviews would probably benefit from being piloted in the language in which they were then asked, and on a teacher instead of a peer researcher. Since this study was interview based the results are only concerning the beliefs on the use of Swedish in the classroom, therefore a direction for further research would be to examine the actual use of Swedish in the English classroom.

As the results of this study were very varied it would be interesting to conduct a similar study, only wider. Through doing so, one will be able to get an even broader perspective on language teachers' different views on using different languages in the teaching. To get different teachers' perspectives on the language issue in the classroom is one of the things that the reading teachers can bring with them from this essay. This essay will hopefully also contribute to self-reflection on what teachers themselves do concerning using different languages in the teaching and why. Since teachers are to work research-based (Skolverket, 2013) and the L1 issue is such a debated topic (Macaro, 2005, Cummins, 2007, Butzkamm, 2013) this essay will help teachers in the way that it gives an overview on existing research and an insight in other teachers' beliefs. It will hopefully work as an inspiration or aid.

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## Appendix A. The interview questions translated into English

Do you prefer to do the interview in English or Swedish?

Consent

Participant information

- Which is your mother tongue?
- What subjects do you teach?
- What courses of English do you teach?
- How many years have you worked as a teacher?

Questions on the first language in the teaching

What is your general opinion when it comes to using Swedish in the teaching of English?

In what situations in English teaching could it be necessary or beneficial for you or your students to use Swedish?

What would you say are the drawbacks of using Swedish in the teaching of English?

How do you use Swedish in your teaching?

Does your use of Swedish differ depending on what level of English you are teaching?

Students with other mother tongues than Swedish, do their first languages come up in the teaching?

When studying the teacher training programme, what were you taught regarding using the students' first language in language teaching?

Additional to these questions the teachers were asked to look at the three excerpts for the steering documents that are mentioned in the "theorizing medium of instruction choices" section and discuss what it meant to them, and how they interpreted them.

## Appendix B. The original interview questions

Föredrar du att göra intervjun på engelska eller svenska?

Medgivande till medverkande i min undersökning

Deltagarinformation

- Vilket är ditt modersmål?
- Vilka ämnen är du lärare i?
- Vilka kurser i engelska undervisar du?
- Hur många år har du jobbat som lärare?

Frågor om förstaspråket i undervisningen

Vad är din generella åsikt när det kommer till att använda svenska i engelskundervisningen?

I vilka situationer kan det vara gynnsamt eller nödvändigt att använda svenska i engelskundervisningen?

Vad skulle du säga är nackdelarna med att använda svenska i engelskundervisningen?

Hur använder du svenska i din undervisning?

Hur mycket svenska skulle du säga ungefär att du använder i din engelskundervisning?

Skiljer sig ditt användande av svenska beroende på om du undervisar engelska 5,6 eller 7?

Studenter som har andra modersmål än svenska, kommer deras förstaspråk upp i engelska-klassrummet?

När du läste till lärare, vad fick du lära dig då om att använda förstaspråket i andraspråksundervisningen?