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English as an academic language at a Swedish university: parallel language use and the ‘threat’ of English

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In recent years, universities across Europe have increasingly adopted the use of English as an academic lingua franca. Our article discusses current trends in Swedish higher education by presenting the results of a large-scale survey on the use of English conducted at Stockholm University. The survey involved 668 staff and 4524 students and focused on the use of English for academic purposes and students’ and teachers’ attitudes to English as a medium of instruction. The results indicate that complex patterns of academic English use emerge, which are related to the specific discipline studied, the level of instruction (undergraduate versus Master’s) and the receptive versus productive use of English. They also indicate that in the sciences the use of English is a pragmatic reality for both teachers and students, whereas in the humanities and social sciences, English is typically used as an additional or auxiliary language in parallel with Swedish.

Keywords: language use surveys; language planning; language policy; language politics; education policy; English-medium instruction

Introduction

In recent years, universities across Europe have increasingly adopted the use of English at various levels of learning. This trend has been motivated by a number of factors, including the implementation of the Bologna process aimed at standardising degrees across EU countries. Another reason has been the influx and exchange of students for whom English serves as a medium of instruction. Of the non-English-speaking countries, only the Netherlands offers more English-medium university programmes than the Nordic countries (Wächter and Maiworm 2008), and the spread of English in Swedish universities has been linked to the increasingly globalised character of university education and to ‘internationalization at home’ (Nilsson 2003). The vast majority of textbooks and other course literature across most disciplines are English-language publications. At the same time, most Swedish universities now encourage their faculty to publish in international peer-reviewed journals.

Over the last decade, the role played by the English language in research and teaching has been highlighted in a range of policy discussions. These have resulted in various controversies and debates concerning the status of English in higher education (e.g. Haberland 2005; Haberland et al. 2008; Linn and Oakes 2007) and

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various studies on the use of English in university contexts in Northern Europe (e.g. Airey 2009; Björkman 2010; Hellekjaer and Westergaard 2002; Klaasen 2001; Kuteeva 2011; Ljosland 2008; Preisler 2008; Söderlundh 2010; Tange 2010; van Leewen and Wilkinson 2003; Wilkinson and Zegers 2008). The role played by local languages has been officially reinforced. Thus, in 2006, ministers for education and culture from the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – published the *Deklaration om nordisk språkpolitik/Declaration on a Nordic Language Policy* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2007), which contained an entire section on the ‘parallel language’ use of English and one or several Nordic languages in research and education. In Sweden, after the introduction of the Language Act (Swedish Government 2009) which established the official status of Swedish as the country’s main language, parallel language use is regarded as a guiding principle for the dual use of Swedish and English in higher education. However, there are still questions about how parallel language use is best implemented in practice. On the one hand, universities feel the need to improve their research profiles and their international rankings, which are calculated not only on international citations but also on the proportions of non-local staff and students at a particular university. On the other hand, they are also concerned to ensure access to a university education for Swedish students, who might be disadvantaged in various ways by an over-emphasis on the use of English as a teaching medium.

In this context, we address the issue of English language use in relation to conflicting pressures faced by Swedish universities. Our study discusses the results of a research project conducted at a major Swedish university, which set out to survey the use of English at various levels of instruction, and to investigate attitudes to English and Swedish among students and staff. More specifically, we sought to answer three research questions:

- How does the use of English vary among students and academic staff across different disciplines?
- How does the use of English-medium instruction differ between the undergraduate and Master’s levels?
- What attitudes towards language choice and language policy are reported by students and staff across different disciplines and levels of instruction?

Before proceeding to the discussion of the empirical results of this project, we provide a broad sketch of the sociolinguistics of contemporary Swedish society, with particular reference to the use of English in higher education. This overview is relevant because the linguistic profile of many Swedish universities has changed radically over the last few years. Following this overview, we present the results of the 2009 survey in conjunction with a discussion of the role of English in higher education in Sweden.

The sociolinguistic background to the use of English in Swedish higher education

Across contemporary Europe, English is generally regarded as an academic *lingua franca* and the default language for increasingly ethnically diverse universities. As Marginson and van der Wende (2009, 32–33) note:

English is also spreading as a medium of instruction in non English-speaking nations, particularly in programmes designed to attract foreign students. ... Within Europe, English is increasingly used as the language of instruction in selected programmes, especially at Masters level and those targeting students from Asia.

Trends such as these have obviously had their impact in Sweden. The internationalisation of education has come to Sweden at a time when Swedish society is coming to terms with relatively recent and very high levels of immigration domestically. Sweden's transition from a largely homogeneous to an ethnically diverse multicultural society has been by no means easy and by no means welcomed by all sections of the Swedish population (Oakes 2005, 167). Thus, one may conjecture, current debates concerning language in Swedish higher education have been affected by at least two streams of influence: the first from outside in the form of the transnational flow of students into Sweden from other countries; and the second, from within, through the increasing diversity of its own students.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Swedes developed a growing sense of pride and self-confidence in their proficiency in the English language, which gained them a reputation alongside Holland as having a high general competence in the language (Oakes 2001). In recent decades, however, societal changes combined to radically alter the linguistic demographics of contemporary Sweden, including trends in immigration in particular. Today, at least 150 'home languages' are recognised by educational authorities, and the ethnic and linguistic geography of major Swedish cities has been transformed (Oakes 2005, 167).

Language policies and the languages of education

Until recently, the government generally took a benevolently non-interventionist approach to language planning, but this stance began to change noticeably in the 1990s. One source of anxiety during this era was a growing concern about the 'threat' of English in the Swedish context. Teleman and Westman (1997) argued that the spread of English in Swedish society was a threat to the status of Swedish across a range of public and private domains, and argued for an explicit national language policy to avoid a 'truly undesirable truly undesirable language situation' (Teleman and Westman 1997, cited in Hult 2005, 74). Around the same time, in 1997, the Swedish Language Council was instructed by the government to investigate the need for an official language policy in support of Swedish. This resulted in the publication of *The Draft Action Programme for the Promotion of the Swedish Language* that was to set the agenda for a decade of discussions concerning language policies and language planning in Sweden (Swedish Language Council 1998). The 1998 *Action Programme* was followed by a series of policy documents over the following 10 years that included the *Report of the Committee on the Swedish Language* (Swedish Government 2002), and the '*Best Language*' Proposition (Swedish Government 2005), which contributed to, and culminated in, the government's *Language Act* (2009). In early 2010, *Språkrådet* (the Swedish Language Council) published a report that focused on the role of English in higher education and research, *Engelska eller svenska: En kartläggning av spraksituationen inom hogre utbildning och forskning* ('English or Swedish: A survey of the language situation in higher education and research', hereafter Salö 2010).

The core of the report deals with the 'language situation' in Swedish higher education, where English has a wide use as a language of textbooks and other publications and as a language of instruction. With reference to written work in English, their analysis shows that English has been increasingly dominant as the default language of dissertations since the 1950s. Currently, around 87% of all dissertations at Swedish universities are written in English, 12% in Swedish and 1% in other languages. There is disciplinary variation in English-language doctoral dissertations, with 94% in Natural Sciences, compared to 65% in Social Sciences and 37% in the Humanities. In addition, in 2009 nearly two-thirds (65%) of all Master's programmes were taught in English, with about 50% of foreign students (Salö 2010). To conclude, the 2010 report recommends that parallel language use should be a key goal in the arenas of both instruction and research, to ensure that Swedish universities can perform well in an internationalised educational world.

However, it seems that the concept of parallel language use may have been conceived primarily with reference to administrative aspects of the education system, rather than teaching, learning and disciplinary competences (Airey 2009). A recent collection of studies conducted at Swedish universities has explored different aspects of parallel language use (Kuteeva 2011). Pecorari et al. (2011) point out that the form of coexistence of Swedish and English in a parallel-language university may vary, but that it typically provides 'exposure to the second language ... during authentic communicative events' (2011, 57). Another common scenario for parallel language use is when the course literature is in English but all instruction, including lectures, seminars and student discussions, is conducted in Swedish: 'The ambition is often that both languages should be usable for all academic purposes, but factors such as proficiency, group make-up, and policies constrain this in a number of ways' (Shaw and McMillion 2011, 143). On a practical level, parallel language use is only possible when both students and teachers have adequate language competences in English and in the local language. This is certainly not the case when students and/or faculty are not from Sweden and English is used as a lingua franca (Björkman 2010). The full implications of parallel language use remain unclear, but we would hope that the survey research reported in this article will make a useful contribution to discussions of such issues. The following section outlines the background to the survey and the method used to collect and analyse the data.

Method

Background to the survey at Stockholm University

As a result of the factors noted earlier, the use of English at Swedish universities, including Stockholm University, has grown substantially in recent years. Furthermore, despite the changing demographics and sociolinguistics of Swedish universities, relatively few language surveys have been carried out. Those that have been conducted have focused on the extent to which English is used in higher education and the attitudes of lecturers and/or students to teaching and learning in English at Scandinavian universities (Brandt and Schwach 2005; Carroll-Boegh 2005; Gunnarsson and Öhman 1997; Hellekjaer and Westergaard 2002; Jensen and Thøgersen 2011; Melander 2005). In 2009, we conducted a survey of language use at Stockholm University in order to inform the work of the Centre for Academic English in the Department of English, as well as that of the administration and senior management

of the university. Stockholm University was felt to be a good place for research of this kind, given that it is located in the capital city, and is one of the largest universities in Sweden, with more than 50,000 undergraduate and Master's students, of which around 24,000 were full-time students and 1800 research degree students (PhD and *licentiate*, equivalent to MPhil). The university comprises four faculties: Social Sciences, Humanities, Sciences and Law, the two former being the largest ones. In recent years the number of international students has increased dramatically, and Stockholm University has also entered a wide range of international exchange agreements for its students. In the academic year 2011/2012, of the total 200 undergraduate and Master's programmes run by the university, 85 Master's programmes were run in English (facts and figures at Stockholm University at www.su.se/english/about/facts-and-figures). In addition, many free-standing courses are offered in English across different faculties. In September 2011, the university adopted a language policy promoting the parallel use of Swedish and English, with an emphasis on English-medium instruction at the Master's and research levels, a policy partly informed by the 2009 survey reported on in this article.

Data collection and sample description

The survey on language use at Stockholm University was conducted through online questionnaires which were posted on the university server during the period April–June 2009. Both student and staff questionnaires were designed to elicit information concerning (1) the comparison of English use at undergraduate versus postgraduate level, (2) the comparison of patterns of language use across disciplines, faculties and departments and (3) attitudes towards the use of English for university education and research. The student questionnaire contained 41 questions, while the staff questionnaire included 59 questions. In addition, the survey participants were invited to provide additional comments on the issues raised in the questionnaires. In this article, we make use of these comments in order to interpret the quantitative survey data.

A total of 668 staff (out of 1683) and 4524 students (from approximately 24,000 full-time students) responded to the questionnaires. These totals represent a response rate of approximately 40% of staff and 19% of students. Given the fact that this was an entirely voluntary survey, the response rates were regarded as highly satisfactory. The 668 staff included 40 administrative personnel and 130 PhD students. After these categories were excluded, 498 teaching and research staff remained. The calculations that follow in the results section of this article are drawn from this sub-sample of 498.

With regard to the students, the demographic characteristics of the sample largely matched those of the general student population rather well. The proportion of females to males was 64–36%, approximately 70% of the sample was aged between 17 and 30 years, 20% between 31 and 45 years and 10% over the age of 45 years. With reference to the question on 'the first language learnt', a total of 75% of the sample reported that this language was Swedish, 3% reported English, 2% Finnish and Spanish and 20% other languages. These other languages included Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, German, French, Persian, Polish and Russian, contributing to a total of more than 90. When asked what their 'dominant' language(s) was/were, 91% responded Swedish, 20% English, 2% Spanish and French; while 75% of Master's students gave their nationality as Swedish, compared with 89% of undergraduate

students. When it came to the academic staff, the characteristics of the sample again matched those of the general staff population well, with reference to age and gender. With reference to the question on ‘the first language learnt’, a total of 68% of the sample reported that language was Swedish, 8% reported English, 5% reported German, 2% Finnish, 2% Spanish and 16% other languages, including Arabic, Danish, Latvian, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, plus some 30 other languages. When asked what their ‘dominant’ language(s) was/were, 87% responded Swedish, 31% English, 4% German, 2% Spanish, plus smaller counts for other languages; 79% of staff and 75% of PhD students gave their nationality as Swedish.

The statistical results were compiled with the assistance of the Social Sciences Research Centre at The University of Hong Kong. The initial analysis showed that although the sample was generally representative of the wider population at Stockholm University, certain faculties were over-represented in the student and staff surveys. The Science and Social Sciences faculties were over-represented in the staff survey and the Faculty of Humanities in the student survey. In order to correct for this, both sets of results were weighted for ‘faculty’, i.e. in relation to the general percentage of students and staff distribution across the four faculties. The information concerning student and staff population was obtained through official university channels, and throughout the rest of this study, we refer to the results that have been weighted so that they are representative of the overall percentages of students in the four faculties.

One important limitation of our study concerns the nature of the data generated by self-report. As Airey (2009) points out, asking questions directly may elicit responses which do not necessarily provide accurate information, so that certain answers may reflect respondents’ projected beliefs rather than the true reality of their experiences (Airey and Linder 2006). Bearing such considerations in mind, we now proceed to report a number of the most important findings of our survey.

Results

Survey results for students

A number of questions were asked of students concerning the use of spoken English in various educational settings at the university, i.e. in lectures, in seminars and in labs or workshops. A total of 4524 students answered this questionnaire, and of these 3277 were undergraduate and 1247 were Master’s students. As can be seen in Table 1a–c, the responses to these questions varied greatly according to the field of study and the level of education (undergraduate versus Master’s). Thus, a much higher proportion of English use was reported at the Master’s level, due to both the institutional language policy and more intake of international students. The questions on lectures generally referred to the extent to which students were ‘exposed’ to content lectures presented through the medium of English.

As can be seen in Table 1a, at the undergraduate level, the frequency of English use varied according to the type of teaching setting. In the case of lectures, the greatest use of English was found to occur in the Science faculty, where 23% of students reported that either ‘about half’ or ‘all/almost all’ of their lectures were given in English. Lower totals were reported for the Humanities with 15%, the Social Sciences with 13% and Law with 6%. When it came to seminars (Table 1b), the Humanities students were in first place, with 16% of their seminars being either ‘about half’ or ‘all/almost all’ given

Table 1. Students' exposure to and use of spoken English in various settings (undergraduates versus Master's students).

Questions 9–11: Of the lectures, seminars, lab/workshops you have, what proportion are in English? Overall, how often is English used in your education at Stockholm University?

| Faculty | All/almost all (%) | About half (%) | Almost none/none (%) |
|--|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| <i>a. Students' responses on lectures in English^a</i> | | | |
| Humanities | 11 (21) | 4 (4) | 85 (75) |
| Law | 6 (41) | 0 (0) | 94 (59) |
| Science | 13 (60) | 10 (15) | 77 (25) |
| Social Sciences | 10 (38) | 3 (11) | 86 (51) |
| <i>b. Students' seminars in English^b</i> | | | |
| Humanities | 12 (20) | 4 (5) | 85 (75) |
| Law | 6 (38) | 0 (1) | 94 (61) |
| Science | 8 (52) | 7 (12) | 86 (36) |
| Social Sciences | 9 (35) | 3 (10) | 88 (55) |
| <i>c. Students' lab/workshops in English^c</i> | | | |
| Humanities | 8 (11) | 1 (3) | 91 (86) |
| Law | 3 (26) | 0 (0) | 97 (74) |
| Science | 11 (51) | 7 (14) | 82 (35) |
| Social Sciences | 4 (23) | 2 (7) | 94 (70) |

^a*N* = 3071 (1175).

^b*N* = 2983 (1168).

^c*N* = 2679 (1023).

in English, while the figures for Science indicated a response of 15%, compared with 12% for Social Sciences and 6% for Law. The discrepancy between the Science and the Humanities in this case can be explained by a more frequent use of seminars as a mode of instruction in the humanistic disciplines.

Several undergraduate students made additional comments about English-medium instruction. Some of them offered a rather negative assessment of taking lectures in English, with reference to their teachers' poor language skills. These comments refer primarily to non-native accents which often cause irritation among Swedish students (Björkman 2010). In our survey, such opinions prevailed across different faculties and disciplines, as in the following example:

Some guest lecturers and teachers who give lectures in English are catastrophically bad at English, which significantly affects the quality of education. It is good with English as the teaching language, but there should be rules to teachers' competence. (Undergraduate student, aged 21–25, from Sweden, Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences)

The parallel use of English and Swedish, however attractive to policy makers, was sometimes seen as confusing by students. The learning difficulties caused by the language switch are related to subject-specific terminology and code-switching (Airey 2009):

If literature is in English, courses should also be in English. It is very difficult to switch languages between lecture and studies. (Undergraduate student, aged 31–35, from Sweden, Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Sciences)

In addition, some students indicated that they found it difficult to sit examinations in Swedish when the course literature was in English.

At the Master's level, students in the Humanities faculty reported the least use of English in lectures, in contrast to the Science faculty (see Table 1a). The relevant figures for the frequent use of English (i.e. 'all/almost all' and 'about half') were 75% for Science students, 49% for Social Sciences students, 41% for Law students and 25% for the Humanities students. For seminars (Table 1b), the same rank order applied, with figures of 64% for Science, 45% for Social Sciences, 39% for Law and 25% for the Humanities. When it came to labs or workshops (Table 1c), the relevant figures for frequent English use were 65% for the Science faculty students, 30% for the Social Sciences, 26% for Law and 14% for the Humanities.

Question 15 in the student questionnaire asked respondents to report on their overall use of English in their studies (see Figures 1 and 2). From the aforementioned results, and the students' own self-report, it is clear that there is a much greater use of English in the classroom at Master's level. At the undergraduate level, 51% of Science students reported the frequent use of English, followed by Social Sciences students with 44%, the Humanities students with 40% and Law students with 9%. In fact, almost 91% of undergraduate Law students reported 'almost none/none' regarding their exposure to, or use of, English at the undergraduate level, a result clearly explicable by the fact that their legal studies at this level focus on Swedish law. Otherwise, in the three other faculties, there appears to be a clear general perception that exposure to English is an integral part of students' university studies.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, English is used much more at the Master's level. Some variation can be observed between the four faculties: 79% of Science students report a high degree of English use, compared to 66% of Social Sciences students, 49% of Humanities students and 44% of Law students. It is noticeable that the figure for Law students is considerably higher at the Master's level, where there is a greater emphasis on EU and international law, than is the case at the undergraduate level. Nevertheless, a rather high percentage of Master's students in both the Humanities (51%) and in Law (56%) report 'almost none/none' in regard to exposure to, or use of, English in their studies. Some students even wished they had had more English during their undergraduate studies, which would facilitate the transition:

Generally it would be good if we had more English courses at the undergraduate level to which it had become easier at advanced level (*sic*). (Master's student, aged 21–25, Department of Economics, Faculty of Social Science)

In addition to those questions asking students about their use of the language in the classroom, undergraduate and Master's students were also asked about their course reading. Significantly, at the undergraduate level, across most disciplines, student responses indicated that there was a high frequency of English language reading materials. In many disciplines, there are simply no textbooks available in Swedish. The highest reports for frequency of reading in English came from Science students with 72% ('all/almost all' and 'about half' reading materials in English), Social Sciences students with 68%, the Humanities students with 62% and Law students with 10%. At the Master's level, there was an even higher report of the use of English language reading materials, with 92% of students from the Science faculty reporting frequent use of English language reading materials, followed by the Social Sciences with 84%, the Humanities with 76% and Law students with 44%.

Question 15: Overall, how often is English used in your education at Stockholm University?

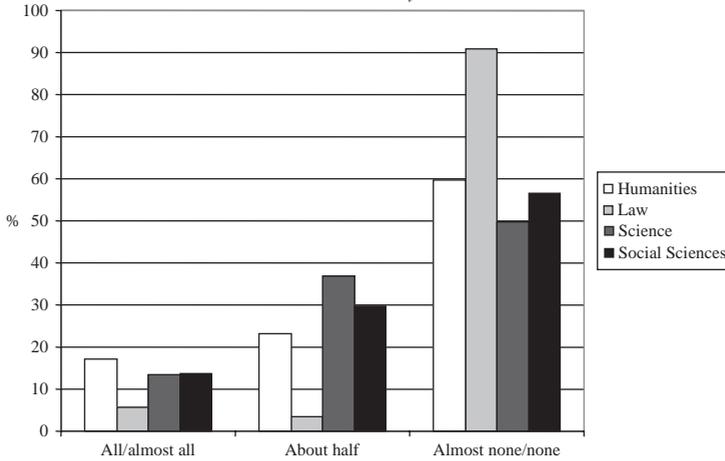


Figure 1. Undergraduates' use of English ($N = 3088$).

Students were also asked about their own abilities in English with reference to discussing academic subjects. Taking into consideration the limitations of such self-report, it is nevertheless noteworthy that the vast majority of undergraduate students responded that they were 'much more/more able' to discuss their academic interests in Swedish than in English, although a significant minority of students in the Humanities, Science and Social Sciences, around 12–20%, claimed to be equally able in both languages. When it came to Master's studies, 26% of Science students reported that they were 'much more/more able in English', and between 17 and 20% of Humanities, Science and Social Sciences students claimed that they were 'equally able' in both languages.

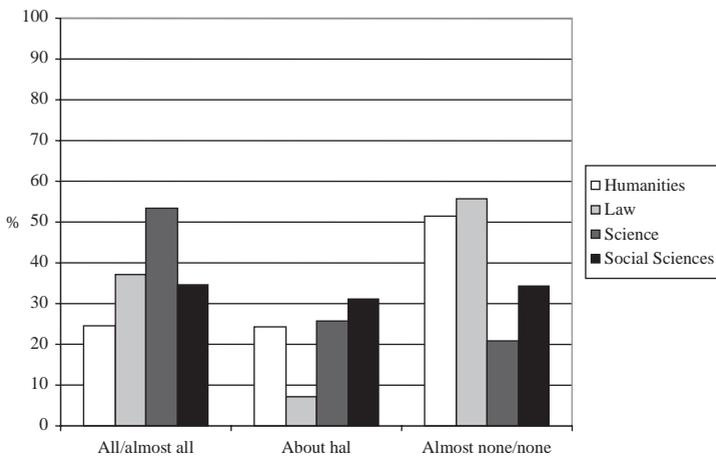


Figure 2. Master's students' use of English ($N = 1207$).

Survey results for academic staff

Parallel to the student survey, academic staff at Stockholm University were asked about their own use of English in various types of settings, including both undergraduate and Master's level courses. The information provided by staff matched student responses fairly well, both in terms of English language use across the four faculties and in terms of undergraduate versus Master's education, and here we provide only a brief overview. On the same scale as the one used in the student questionnaire, academic staff from the Science faculty reported that 59% of lectures were 'all/almost all' or 'about half' conducted in English, compared with 78% of seminars, and 48% of labs/workshops. This compared with figures for the Social Sciences of 46% for lectures, 53% for seminars and 33% for labs and workshops; for Law 43% for lectures, 57% for seminars and 36% for labs and workshops; and for the Humanities 24% for lectures, 30% for seminars and 17% for labs and workshops. All in all, these results suggested that most academic staff in the sample were involved in some form of English-medium instruction, with the exception of significant numbers of staff from the Humanities, where many faculty responded that in the case of lectures and seminars 'almost none/none' of their teaching was done in English.

When academic staff were asked to assess their own English abilities in the university context, only a minority reported significant levels of difficulty in speaking and writing English. In the Science faculty, around 90% staff reported 'no/very little difficulty' in both speaking and writing English, as did the Social Sciences academic staff. The greatest difficulties were reported by faculty from the Humanities, where more than 20% reported 'some difficulty' or 'a lot of difficulty' in speaking and writing English. Around 50% of staff in the Humanities and Law responded that they were 'much more/more able' to discuss their subject in Swedish, while 31–39% of academic staff in all faculties reported that they were 'equally able' in both English and Swedish. Interestingly, 44% of academic staff from the Science faculty claimed that they were 'much more/more able' to discuss their work in English than in Swedish. From scientists, there were also comments indicating a clear acceptance of the role English in research, as illustrated in the following comment:

In our field of science, English is the dominant language, and there's not so much to do about that. It would be stupid trying to reduce the dominance of English, since very few of our collaborators would understand a word of Swedish. I would have difficulties having a scientific discussion in Swedish, since many terms are lacking a Swedish translation. (Researcher, aged 26–30, from Sweden, Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics, Faculty of Science)

Although one must consider the limitations of self-report data mentioned earlier, consistent with student results, the staff self-reports suggest that the use of English in Swedish university settings is a complex reality, with significant variations across disciplines and educational settings. Thus, giving a content-based lecture in English to a large number of students is not the same as conducting an argument-based seminar with a small number of students from different linguistic and educational backgrounds. Content-based lectures are very common in the Science faculty, and the difference in terms of content transmitted through a lecture in English or Swedish is small, although the lecturer may speak more slowly and improvise less and repeat the same information more when lecturing in English (Thøgersen and Airey 2011). Thus, it appears that transmitting knowledge in English may not present as many

challenges as constructing knowledge through discussion in English, a core pedagogical method for the Humanities and Social Sciences:

Within humanities and social sciences, where ‘meaning’ is important it is almost impossible to express oneself clearly in any other language than in one’s native language. At the master classes the level of the discussions can sometimes be very low. The reason for this is to large extent language problems. (Senior lecturer, aged 51–55, from Sweden, School of Business, Faculty of Social Sciences)

Teaching, especially lecturing, in English when it is not your native language usually makes for less lively and engaging lessons, which is pedagogically detrimental. (Reader, aged 56–60, from Sweden, Department of Social Anthropology)

This last comment is consistent with the findings of the study conducted among the students of Economics at Uppsala university, which found that Swedish students did not ask as many questions when they were taught in English and frequently switched to the local language (Söderlundh 2010). Thus, officially English-medium courses often involve some degree of parallel language use, when both lecturers and students resort to the local language. This kind of practice is of course problematic if international students do not have a sufficient command of Swedish and may result in segregation within the classroom (Söderlundh 2010).

Student and staff attitudes to the language choice and language policies

In order to assess student attitudes to issues relating to the use of English and Swedish within the university among students, a number of questions relating to both languages were included in the questionnaire. The results for these questions are set out in Table 1b.

Generally, the results set out in Tables 2a and 2b appear to indicate a reasonable level of acceptance and support of English-medium instruction at Stockholm University, with only a minority of students, 30–38%, across faculties, disagreeing with the provision of courses conducted entirely in English, with similar levels of support for the provision of more English-medium courses. These results may in part be explained by the composition of the student body, of whom some 11% of undergraduates and 20% of postgraduates identified themselves as non-Swedish in terms of nationality. It might also be noted that 25% of the students reported a language other than Swedish as their ‘first language learnt’, indicating Swedish is not necessarily the default academic language for students at Stockholm University. In fact, some new disciplines, such as Computer Science, rely heavily on English:

English is an international language and well accepted in the world. Therefore, I think all of masters and PhD courses should be in English, even Bachelor’s degree. Swedish is the mother tongue in Sweden, so I do not think if all university courses are in English, Swedish language will be under threat. (Master’s student, aged 26–30, from Sweden, Department of Computer and System Sciences)

In addition, students were also asked whether they perceived the use of English as an academic language to be a ‘threat’ to the use of Swedish in higher education (Table 3). The results for this question can be compared to those for a similar question given to academic staff (Figure 4).

Table 2. Student attitudes to English at university (undergraduate versus Master's students).

Question 36: I think it is important to have some of my courses taught entirely in English;
Question 37: Stockholm University should offer more courses offered entirely in English.

| Faculty | Agree/strongly agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree/strongly disagree (%) | Do not know (%) |
|---|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>a. Some courses taught entirely in English^a</i> | | | | |
| Humanities | 34 | 23 | 38 | 5 |
| Law | 53 | 21 | 20 | 6 |
| Science | 46 | 23 | 27 | 4 |
| Social Sciences | 44 | 22 | 30 | 4 |
| <i>b. More courses taught entirely in English^b</i> | | | | |
| Humanities | 34 | 31 | 26 | 10 |
| Law | 51 | 23 | 13 | 13 |
| Science | 34 | 32 | 23 | 11 |
| Social Sciences | 42 | 30 | 19 | 9 |

^a*N* = 4161.

^b*N* = 4139.

The results for the question produced divided opinions across the student body, with similar percentages of students agreeing and disagreeing. In Humanities, 39% of students agreed that English was a threat, compared to some 35% who disagreed and 19% opting for a 'neutral' position. The relatively high proportion of agreement among Science students (36%) may be related to a heavy reliance on English-language course literature and the consequent difficulty in finding corresponding Swedish terms, so the danger of 'domain loss' is perceived as particularly high (Gunnarsson 2001). By contrast, only 28% of Law students perceived English as a threat, a response that may be explained by the relatively low level of use of the language in that faculty. However, despite some difficulties, many students commented that it would be unrealistic not to use English at university:

English language is not a threat to Swedish. We have used English as a second language since after World War II. A very large part of new developments and inventions come from other countries and they are often written in English. If we can put enough money into translating university textbooks it would be quite good, but it is probably impossible given the current situation. (Master's student, aged 51–55, from Sweden, Department not specified, Faculty of the Humanities)

Table 3. Student attitudes to the 'threat' of English at Stockholm University (undergraduate and Master's students).

Question 41: The emphasis on using English as an academic language at SU is a threat to the use of Swedish as an academic language.

| Faculty | Agree/strongly agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree/strongly disagree (%) | Do not know (%) |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| Humanities | 39 | 19 | 35 | 7 |
| Law | 28 | 18 | 46 | 8 |
| Science | 36 | 24 | 34 | 6 |
| Social Sciences | 30 | 21 | 43 | 6 |

Note: *N* = 4140.

Question 56: The dominance of English in international academia gives an unfair advantage to native speakers of English

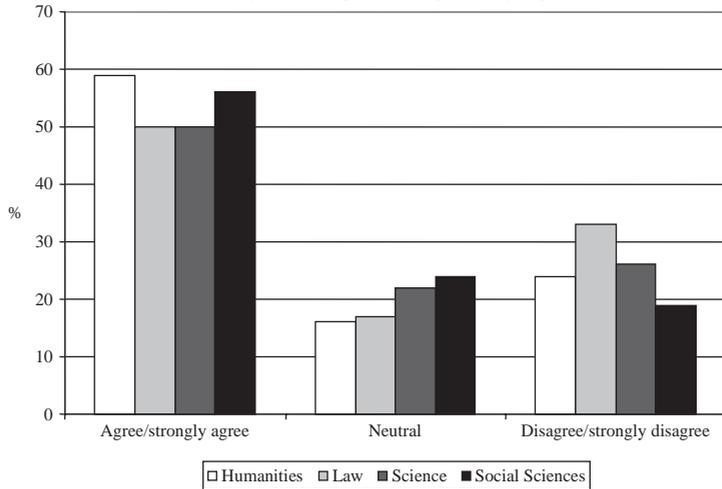


Figure 3. English gives an unfair advantage to native speakers ($N = 468$).

In order to assess the attitudes of academic staff towards the use of English and Swedish, a set of questions comparable to those given to students were included in the questionnaire. First, the academic staff were polled on their attitudes to the provision of English-medium courses, with the results indicating broad levels of support for the provision of English-medium courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In the Social Sciences, 59% of the academic staff ‘agreed/strongly agreed’ with English-medium courses at undergraduate level, while 83% ‘agreed/strongly agreed’ with English-medium courses at the postgraduate level. A similar

Question 57: The emphasis on using English as an academic language at SU is a threat to the use of Swedish as an academic language

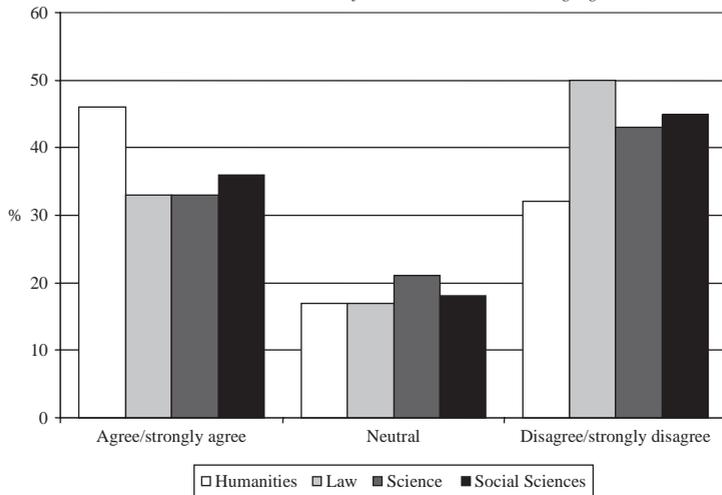


Figure 4. English is a threat to Swedish ($N = 472$).

level of support was found in the Science and Law faculties, although the Humanities registered somewhat less support at both levels of instruction.

However, the notion that the use of English as an academic language might on some occasions disadvantage academic staff, or prove a threat to Swedish, did draw substantial support, as can be seen in Figures 3 and 4.

A clear majority of academic staff agreed with the statement that the dominance of English gave an unfair advantage to native speakers of English, with levels of agreement ranging from 50 to 59% of the sample. On the issue of whether English is a 'threat' to the use of Swedish as an academic language, opinions were clearly divided across different disciplines, with a majority in the Law faculty disputing this claim, divided opinions in Science and Social Sciences and a near majority in the Humanities supporting this assertion (a distribution fairly consistent with the attitudes expressed by students from such faculties). Academic staff were also asked whether they and their colleagues at Stockholm University were placed at a disadvantage by the use of English as the international language of academic communication and whether they personally felt disadvantaged (Figures 5 and 6).

Interestingly, the majority opinion across nearly all faculties was that Stockholm University staff were not disadvantaged by the use of English, and when asked about their personal response to this question, a clear majority of academic staff responded that they 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' about being personally disadvantaged. Indeed, only 10–17% of academic staff claimed to be disadvantaged, with the highest level of agreement coming from the Faculty of Law.

Discussion

Returning to the three research questions posed in the introduction, a number of patterns emerge from the survey results presented earlier. With reference to the first question concerning how the use of English varied among students and academic staff across different disciplines, the results indicated wide variation across disciplines

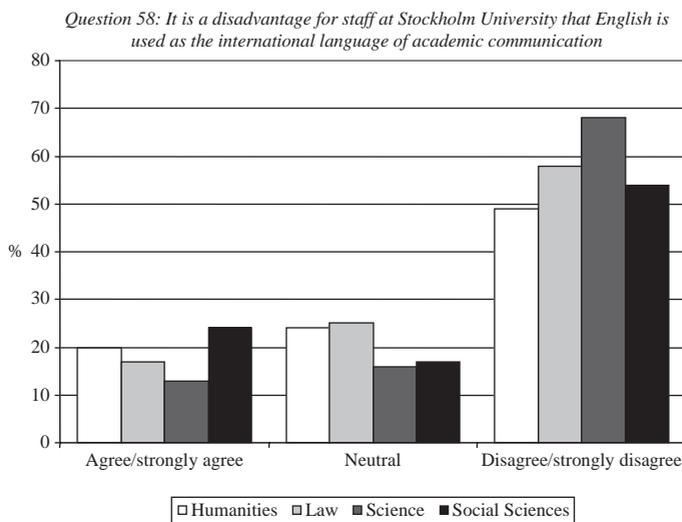


Figure 5. SU staff at disadvantage by the use of English. ($N = 466$).

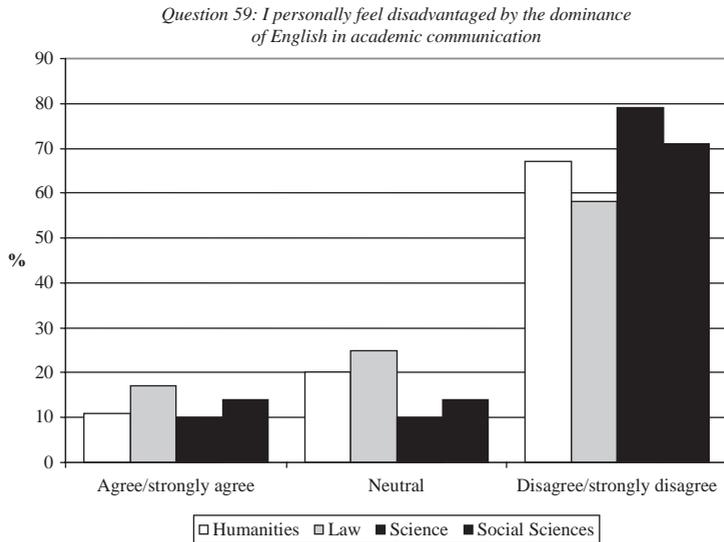


Figure 6. Personal disadvantage in the use of English. ($N = 467$).

and faculties. Generally a much greater use of English was reported in the Science and Social Sciences faculties, and considerably less in the Humanities and Law. This variation can be interpreted as being related to the nature of knowledge construction in different disciplines (Becher 1989). Such disciplinary differences may involve a relatively easy and straightforward language switch in the sciences, but present a greater challenge in the Humanities, Law and Social Sciences which rely more heavily on linguistic formulations, style of expression and typically deal with more 'local' or at least nationally oriented areas of inquiry.

With regard to the second research question concerning the use of English-medium instruction at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, our results indicate evident differences, with a significantly greater use of English in Master's rather than undergraduate programmes, although this is by no means problem-free. Another important finding is related to the importance of English reading materials, as the survey clearly indicated that large numbers of students at both the undergraduate level (with the exception of Law), and even larger numbers at the Master's level, report the frequent use of English-language reading materials. Overall, what emerges from the survey are rather diverse patterns of language use related to the specific discipline studied, the level of instruction (undergraduate versus Master's) and receptive versus productive language utilisation, with particular reference to the use of English-language reading materials and, in some reported cases, visual support such as PowerPoint slides.

When it came to questions on student and staff attitudes to the use of English and Swedish at university, similarly complex patterns of responses emerged. Among students, apart from somewhat mixed results for the Humanities, there appeared to be generally solid support from students for English-medium courses across the other three faculties, i.e. Social Sciences, Sciences and Law. In this context, however, one might bear in mind that these officially 'English-medium' courses often resort to parallel language use, both by students and lecturers, when content in English is unclear, or when students engage in group work (Söderlundh 2010). On the

ideological issue of whether English was perceived to be a ‘threat’ to Swedish, opinions were divided, with around 30–40% of students responding affirmatively. On the same issue, significant numbers of staff agreed with this proposition, with 33% of Law and Science staff, 36% of Social Sciences staff and 46% of Humanities staff expressing agreement.

However, when asked to consider whether the use of English was a disadvantage for Stockholm University as a whole, a significant majority of staff from each faculty disagreed. Even more dramatically, only a small number of individual academic staff responded that they felt ‘personally’ disadvantaged by the use of English in academic contexts, with totals ranging from 10% (Science) to 17% (Law). What was obviously interesting here was the apparent disjuncture between responses to the ideologically loaded question of the ‘threat’ of English and the question of one’s personal response to the language. The issue of English as a ‘threat’ is closely related to the discussions by Swedish linguists concerning a possible ‘domain loss’ in the natural and exact sciences (e.g. Gunnarsson and Öhman 1997). However, our survey has confirmed that in the Sciences the use of English is largely a pragmatic reality for both teachers and students alike. In the more language-sensitive Humanities and Social Sciences, English is often used as an additional or auxiliary language in parallel with Swedish. Here, one may infer that perceptions of ‘threat’ and ‘disadvantage’ evidently arise particularly when the use of spoken and written English creates major obstacles for learning and the effective communication of and discussion of academic ideas and perspectives. In other contexts, the notion of English as a threat to Swedish may resonate with (and be explained by) issues of broader sociolinguistic concern held not just by academia but more widely through the general community.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, we argue that the results presented earlier present valuable insights into the links between macro-issues of language planning in the educational context, and the realities of language use by students and staff. It seems clear that the use of English as a medium of instruction, in parallel with Swedish, is likely to continue into the indefinite future, not least so that Swedish universities can compete in the international arena. Furthermore, the educational leaders of Swedish universities are committed to aspirations and ambitions linked to the global academic community, whose research and publishing finds expression through the use of English. Due to limitations of space, we have not been able to present any data related to the use of English by academic staff for publication purposes, but a follow-up study will report these findings. A number of other issues raised in this paper call for further research, including the question of disciplinary differences in English use, the question of native-like proficiency in the use of English in academic contexts, as well as the question of the inclusion and/or exclusion of students and staff through parallel language use policies. In contemporary Sweden, moreover, debates on the languages of education are not simply grounded in purely pedagogical issues, but rather within a complex matrix of the sociolinguistic history and current realities of what has become a diverse, multicultural and multilingual society. In autumn 2011, the Swedish government, for the first time, introduced substantial fees for overseas students from outside Europe, with costs set around SEK 125,000 (approx. GBP 12,000) per year for non-EU students. A recent report in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* has asserted that, at present, ‘Swedish universities are at a

crossroads' (Fearn 2011). As recently as 2008–2009, around 50% of the 36,600 overseas students at Swedish universities were from outside the EU, with large numbers of these from China and South Asia, but it has been already reported that applications from such students had decreased by an astonishing 86% from 2010 (Fearn 2011). The government's explanation for this has been framed in terms of fiscal responsibility and financial prudence, apparently drawing strong support from the public. Nevertheless, it is difficult not to see this latest move as disconnected from series of policy changes that, since the late 1990s, have moved Swedish educational and cultural thinking from a view of committed internationalism and openness towards a more cautious and nationally-oriented stance. However, the challenges and attractions of global education remain, which appear to guarantee a continuing role for English in Swedish higher education, despite the problems of parallel language use, and, indeed, despite concerns about the 'threat' of English to the Swedish language.

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