

Multilingual Policies and Multilingual Education in the Nordic Countries

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Abstract

This article presents some aspects of multilingualism and multilingual education in the Nordic countries, drawing upon experiences from the project *Network for Researchers of Multilingualism and Multilingual Education, RoMME* (2011-2013), where Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are represented. The aim is to briefly present and discuss some similar and differing trends within the field of multilingualism and multilingual education in the Nordic countries, taking into account both outside and inside perspectives. On the basis of the RoMME-experiences a tentative holistic cross-professional framework of reference for understanding and researching multilingual education policies and individual language learning paths is suggested and discussed.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Multilingual education, Holistic framework of reference, Nordic countries, Minority languages

Background

The article draws upon experiences from the project *Network for Researchers of Multilingualism and Multilingual Education, RoMME* (2011-2013), where Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are represented. Both documentary studies within the network and the network workshops are used as points of departure for the presentation and discussed in the light of previously published studies in relevant research fields. The object of the study, *multilingualism* and in particular, *multilingual education*, is mainly viewed through two differing perspectives, representing an outside

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(The Nordic countries as a homogenous entity) and an inside (differentiating patterns within the Nordic countries) perspective.

Defined in numbers of living languages, Europe, including the Nordic countries, fall short of being truly multilingual, since statistics report less than 300 living languages in Europe in comparison with a range of 1,060-2,300 languages in the other four continents (Ethnologue, 2013). Multilingualism as a common global phenomenon is also pointed out by e.g. Gorter (2006), who states that the number of languages spoken around the world amounts to 5,000-7,000 depending on the definition of language, whereas there are only about 200 independent states. In other words, a large number of other languages are spoken in most countries in addition to those officially recognised. Finland, with two official languages, belongs to those few (fewer than 25 %, see Tucker 1999) nations, recognizing two official languages. There are, however, reasons for considering the Nordic countries to be relatively multilingual and multicultural, at least within a European context. As a societal and individual phenomenon, multilingualism and multiculturalism in the Nordic countries are by no means a recent development, but today we encounter a qualitatively different version of multilingualism. The numbers of immigrants are increasing, the languages and cultures present are no longer only indigenous and finally the new minority languages are not found in geographically limited enclaves. Hence, the awareness of the importance of well-planned linguistic and cultural enrichment strategies has increased. Though the trends are similar in all countries, language and integration policies, language learning practices and research on multilingualism and multilingual education have come to differ in focus to some extent in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

It seems that some of the key notions in the field of multilingualism and multilingual communities, such as linguistic minorities and even the central concept of immigrant have received slightly different definitions in the Nordic countries. Therefore, we have applied a sociolinguistic view and define linguistic minorities and minority languages rather in terms of numbers of individuals at the local or national level irrespective of how recently they have become part of the national community. In the case of Norway, Øzerk (in this issue) has, however, made a distinction between national minorities, i.e. “groups with long-standing attachment to the country” and linguistic minorities that are representing all other linguistic individuals, i.e. those who are neither Norwegian L1-speakers, nor people with Sami as their L1, nor people belonging to the group of national minorities. Immigrant, on the other hand, refers to first and second generation migrants (see Table 1, this article). In terms of linguistic rights framework and national policies, we do, however, distinguish between national languages and national minority languages (NML) (see Table 2).

Aims and context of the article

Even though the Nordic countries share many similar features, (a partially common history, a similar educational system and welfare system), there are also differences that have consequences for how the language programmes have been developed in each country. Common to all Nordic countries is the strong need to continuously assess the language education policy, language programmes, language of instruction and the consequences the assessment may have for further development of future language programmes and teacher education all over Europe. Combining the pedagogical strengths of different environments will enrich the language education practices of each country. Since the challenge is multi-faceted and differences between different local communities within and across countries might call for slightly different approaches for a successful multilingual language learning path for young minority language students, this area of study would benefit greatly from a cross-national and -professional approach in the pursuit of adequate best practices.

Various forms of bilingualism and multilingualism in the Nordic countries provide great potential for the development of successful policies and practices for multilingual education. After some decades of a more Europe-oriented interest, as a consequence of many Nordic countries having entered the European Union, there seems to be an awakening trend to reinstate the Nordic dimension within the European framework. In the research area of multilingualism this trend is manifested in various ways e.g. in publications intended for both a Nordic and global audience. One example is the publication *Multilingual Urban Scandinavia* (Quist & Svendsen, 2010) which describes new linguistic practices in Nordic urban areas. During the 1980s new local vernacular languages were developed in urban areas of Denmark, Norway and Sweden and both linguistic performance and identity constructions are comparable due to similar urban organization and development and similar languages in vocabulary and grammar across the Nordic context. Another example is *Literacy Practices in Transition* (Pitkänen-Huhta & Holm, 2012) where similar contemporary Nordic urban mobile societies are studied. Research focuses on literacy discourse and the meeting of local and global practices and argues in favour of literacy as a multiple, multilingual, multimodal and constantly negotiable phenomenon instead of a standardized language and literacy education. The conclusion is that literacy education should be sensitive to the individuals' needs and experiences in all Nordic countries.

In a similar pan-Nordic way, the Nordforsk-funded network for researchers on multilingualism and multilingual education (RoMME) strives to bring together researchers and doctoral students in the field from Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden in order to learn from each other, define strengths and weaknesses within the research field and jointly pursue new and innovative ways of developing well-functioning multilingual paths and clusters. The network is incapable of covering all perspectives of multilingualism and therefore, out of necessity, many interesting and relevant aspects are cut out. The thematic areas of the network have been formed via the contents of the seminars and thus consider multilingual issues within different fields of tension/from different perspectives, namely: Framework and terminology, Policy and practice, Sociolinguistics and social anthropology, Integration of language and content for learning. Seminars have been held during 2012-2013 where these topics have been exploited. In this article we draw upon the experiences gathered during the 2012 seminars. The first seminar was held in Vaasa in January, in Oslo in June and then in Copenhagen in September. The seminars included presentation of papers by doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers in the field and guest lectures by an invited expert in the field of multilingualism/multilingual education in each workshop. The workshop discussions and the positioning of the research questions initially started out from three domains or levels in society: individual, school/university and community (society), i.e. both micro and macro level (Figure 1).

The three domains or levels in society will be further discussed and explored in another section of this article, since they simultaneously form a part of a tentative, holistic framework for research on multilingualism.

In the rest of this article, our presentation draws upon existing Nordic quantitative and qualitative research studies, statistics, and experiences from the current Network for Researchers of Multilingualism and Multilingual Education, RoMME. The aim of the article is twofold. The first aim is to provide a brief presentation of some of the shared and differing trends in the Nordic countries regarding multilingual policies, research on educational policies and practices. We describe some of these similarities and differences in the first part of the article. In the latter part of the article the second aim of the article is addressed. We discuss the need for a cross-professional, holistic

framework of reference for successful multilingual policy-making and research on multilingualism and multilingual education in the Nordic countries. Different aspects within the tentative framework are contrasted with other current frameworks of multilingualism in order to give rise to a more theoretically founded construction of the prerequisites for multilingualism.

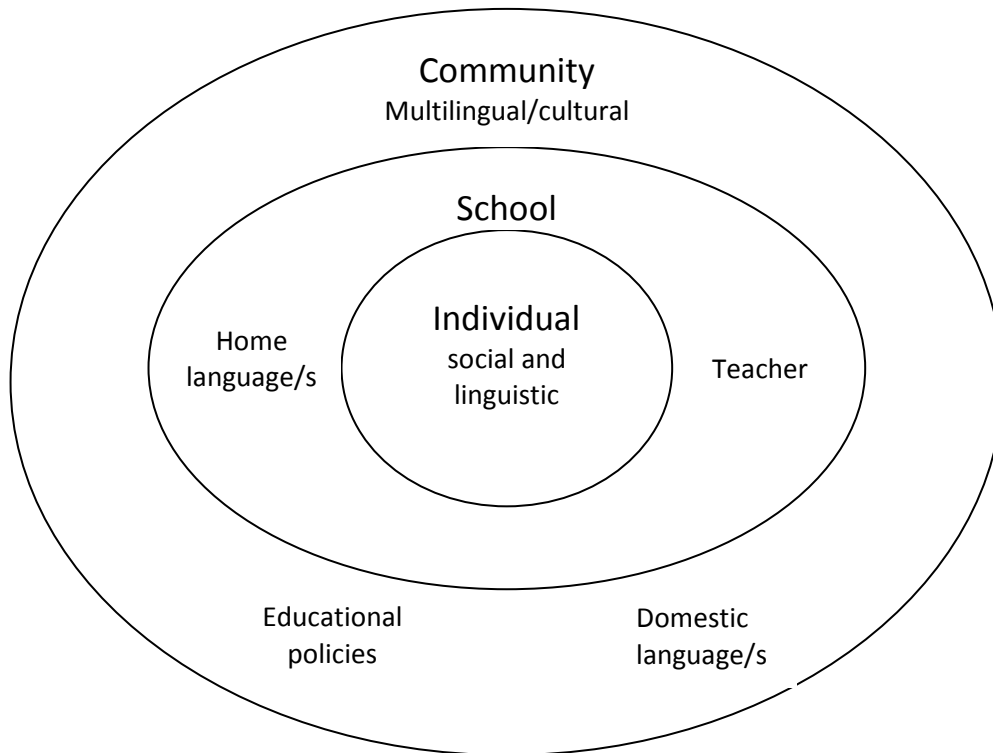


Figure 1. Outline of potentially relevant domains of multilingualism in society.

Some perspectives on Nordic multilingualism

Nordic multilingualism in terms of population and legislative frameworks

The percentage of the immigrant population in the Nordic countries varies from approximately 7 % in Finland to around 20 % in Sweden (Table 1). As stated earlier, Finland differs from the other Nordic countries as it is an officially bilingual country (89.7 % Finnish speakers, 5.4 % Swedish speakers, 0,04 % Sami speakers and 4.9 % other languages). Moreover, even today Finland has a considerably lower proportion and number of immigrants. Exact comparisons are, however, difficult to achieve, since the classification of immigrants seem to differ between the countries. In Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland the concept immigrants is defined by combining two generations, namely those born abroad and those born in the new country by parents who were born abroad. This is not the case in Finland, where only so-called first generation immigrants are accounted for. That is also one reason why it is difficult to compare statistics, as well as policy documents between the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, the statistics provided below point clearly in the direction that Finland still today is a linguistically more homogeneous country than its Nordic neighbours.

Table 1. *The approximate percentage of the immigrant population in four Nordic countries in 2013 (Statistics Sweden 2013, Statistics Norway 2013, Statistics Denmark 2013, Statistics Finland 2013).*

Year	Country	Total population	Immigrants (%)
2013	Sweden	9.596 436	Approx. 20
2013	Norway	5.077 798	Approx. 14
2013	Denmark	5.608 784	Approx. 10
2013	Finland	5.439 741	Approx. 7

The statistics for establishing the size of the immigrant population in Finland is thus different from the one used in other Nordic countries, but it can still be concluded that Sweden is by far the most multilingual and multicultural country. The proportion of immigrants is considerably smaller than in the other Nordic countries, but by using the Nordic definition, the size of immigrant population in Finland is estimated to be nearly 7 % (cf. Martikainen, 2007)

The national statistics centre, Statistics Finland, publishes statistics on citizenship, country of birth and the “mother tongue” of the population in Finland (cf. Latomaa & Suni, 2011). There are no statistics available on number of first generation immigrants and children born to immigrant parents as in the other Nordic countries. The number of people born abroad has, however, increased enormously in the Nordic countries during the last few years, and amounted to nearly 1.5 million in Sweden, but less than 300.000 in Finland in 2013.

These statistics raise the interesting question of whether Finland’s history as an officially bilingual country and its experiences of managing official bilingualism is useful as linguistic diversity increases (cf. Latomaa & Suni, 2011, p. 131). We will not be able to answer this question with the help of the material we have collected in this article, but what we can observe is that both language programmes (see Table 3) and the main focus of research (see Table 5) deviate from a more common Nordic code due to the bilingual point of departure.

For an outsider, the Nordic region may look like a region where most languages spoken are mutually intelligible. It is also the case that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish speakers are able to understand each other if they engage actively in communication. Since almost 80 % of the Nordic residents have Danish, Norwegian or Swedish as their first language the impression may be that this is how communication is conducted in the Nordic countries. The rest of the residents (more than 20%), however, speak languages which are not Indo-European, but belong to either the Finno-Ugric languages (Finnish, Sami languages varieties, Kven, Meänkieli, Karelian) or the Eskimo-Aleut languages (Greenlandic or Kalaallisut). In official inter-Nordic relations the closely related Danish, Norwegian and Swedish languages are often slightly moderated on mainly lexical level to facilitate comprehension (i.e. Scandinavian; Swe. skandinaviska). The consequences of not sharing the same lingua franca, Scandinavian, or having Scandinavian as a second language in the Nordic cooperation has been discussed rather intensely (for a recent summary, see e.g. Martin 2012), especially in terms of replacing Scandinavian as lingua franca with English.

Even if Scandinavian is a unifying characteristic of the Nordic countries, each of the participating countries in RoMME has a distinct major language (Table 2). In Denmark, Danish is the official language but the cultural and linguistic rights of the German-

speaking minority in southern Jutland and the corresponding Danish-speaking minority in southern Schleswig are stated in official declarations from the 1950s. On the Faroe Islands Faroese is the main language but Danish must be taught in school and should be used for official purposes, whereas Greenlandic is the official language in Greenland and Danish has not been mandatory in school or for official purposes since 2009.

In mainland Finland, the national languages are Finnish and Swedish, whereas the Åland region is Swedish-speaking. In fact, the League of Nations recognized Finland's sovereignty over the Åland islands in the early 1920s, but Åland was granted a semi-independent status with a constitutionally supported protection of the Swedish language (see McRae 1999, pp. 322-30). Speakers of Sami language varieties, Romani and Finnish sign language have the right to maintain and develop their language and culture and also the Karelian language has received status as a minority language by the Finnish government. Geographically, the national language Swedish is predominantly used in the southern and western parts of Finland, whereas the Sami language only has official status in four municipalities in the north of Finland.

Like Finland, Norway in a sense has a bilingual orientation regarding the national languages, since the official language, Norwegian, has two different language standards (Bokmål and Nynorsk). Approximately 10-12 % of the Norwegian population use Nynorsk as their written standard. Sami is an official language in eight municipalities in Norway and also Kven, Romani, Romanes and Norwegian sign language have different degrees of official status in the country (Øzerk, in this issue). In Sweden, the main language and the common language in society, Swedish, is accompanied by six official minority languages; Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Yiddish, Romani and Swedish sign language.

Table 2. *Presentation of the linguistic rights frameworks in the Nordic countries, exemplified by official language/s, recognised national minority languages (NML), and national minority languages recognised in education policy*

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Linguistic rights framework	Danish official language; NML: Faroese; Greenlandic Inuit language: Bilingual schools in German border communities	Finnish & Swedish national languages; NML: Sami varieties, Romani, Karelian language, Finnish sign language	Norwegian official language (with two separate written standards); NML: Sami, Kven, Romani, Romanes	Swedish main language; NML: Finnish, Sami varieties, Torne Valley Finnish, Romani, Yiddish, Swedish sign language

Although a long tradition of linguistic diversity exists in all the four countries that participate in the RoMME network, the pattern is that there is one language that dominates over others in each country. This has been seen as such a self-evident fact that Swedish was not explicitly mentioned as the main language of the country in Swedish legislation until the Swedish language law of 2009. At the other extreme, we have officially bilingual Finland, where Finnish and Swedish are the national languages

of the country, but where Swedish in most respects has a minority position in society. In all four countries there are linguistic frameworks that also include languages other than the dominant language spoken in each country (see Table 2). A recent trend within all four participating countries is that an action plan for the language(s) of each country has been undertaken and politically supported during the 2000s (Kulturdepartementet, 2002; Forskningscentralen för de inhemska språken, 2003; Kultur- og kyrkjedepartementet, 2008; Kulturministeriet, 2008; Kotimaisten kielten tutkimuskeskus, 2009).

Similar and differing trends in the Nordic countries regarding the language education system and some outcome results

The language education system is very similar in all four countries. All four countries extended their compulsory education to nine years in the 1960s and 1970s and since 1997 Norway has even added a tenth year. English is the predominant first foreign language introduced in all countries (see Table 2). In all Nordic countries it is possible to teach English as a first foreign language from grade 1 or grade 3. At least in Sweden English is typically taught from grade 1. In Denmark English is generally introduced in year 3 and in Finland usually no later than in grade 3 in the Finnish-medium schools, and usually no later than in grade 4 in the Swedish-medium schools. Even if it is mandatory to study the other national language during the compulsory education period in Finland, the vast majority of the Finnish-speaking students choose English as their first foreign language and do not start their learning of the other national language until the lower secondary school level. In 2009, 90.2 % of the Finnish students had English as their first foreign language in school. It is also possible for Finnish students to have another optional language from grade 4 on, but in general a second optional foreign language is introduced in lower secondary education in all four countries. In the Swedish-medium schools in Finland, however, Finnish is usually introduced in the lower grades, and English is studied as an optional language as indicated below (cf. Björklund, 2011).

Table 3. *The general national frames of foreign language education*

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Foreign language education in comprehensive school (in general)	English (grade 3) + another language (grade 7)	English (grade 3 or 4) + the other national language (grade 7 or 3) + 1 optional language (grade 8)	English (grade 1 or 3) + another language (grade 7)	English (grade 1) + another language (grade 6)

In addition to the foreign language programmes, all Nordic countries have recently developed syllabi for the teaching of NML as mother tongue (see Table 3), and the national language/s as a second language (see Magnusson, 2013, in this issue). In Europe, the Nordic countries are often considered being a region that shares several common characteristics. The Nordic model of welfare state is associated with individual autonomy and universal provision of basic human rights such as education free of charge. In turn, tuition free education has been seen as a key factor in order to offer all children and youngsters of the Nordic countries an equal opportunity of successful

academic achievement regardless of their socioeconomic background. This aim has in a way been achieved, the Finnish PISA evaluators (Program for International Student Assessment, 2006) claim that results obtained in all Nordic countries indicate that students' interest in reading is a better predictor for success in PISA than students' socioeconomic status. In the same report, the authors also conclude that there is a tendency for the Nordic countries to form a cluster of their own, as regards their relative strengths and weaknesses, in terms of their performance in PISA. This cluster is distinct from e.g. the German and the Anglo-American clusters. Some more in-depth analyses of the commonalities shared by all Nordic students in education are highlighted in the recent report *Northern lights on PISA 2009- focus on reading* (Egeland, 2012), where results show an overall Nordic gender difference between girls and boys in favour of girls in reading skills. Another result shows that there is a general decrease of reading for enjoyment in all countries, whereas online reading has increased rapidly. Both strong and weak readers seem to orient towards more online reading, but readers identified as weak share the same kind of (negative) attitudes towards reading. Likewise the teacher-student relation index of weak readers is below the average OECD index. In all Nordic countries, more than 60 % of the students identified as weak readers are boys. Multicultural and multilingual backgrounds of the Nordic students involved in the PISA reading results from 2009 are shown in light of how students from different generation backgrounds perform in comparison with native speakers. Generally speaking, students with immigrant background are claimed to achieve lower scores in the cognitive domain than native Nordic speakers, whereas first-generation immigrant students obtain a lower score than second-generation students in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The authors of the report discuss explanatory factors such as the impact of the language of instruction (which is not the same as the students' home language), parents' social, economic and cultural background and the peer effect at schools with a large percentage of linguistic minority students.

The commonalities found in Nordic education, as described above through the lenses of the most recent PISA tests for reading, can equally well indicate differing trends. To illustrate this difference one can point out that weak readers seem to be similar across the Nordic countries but on the other hand, in this respect Finland differs most from the other countries since only 8 % of the Finnish students are identified as weak readers, while 17 % of the Swedish and Icelandic student population are weak readers (PISA 2009).

Emerging research objectives in Nordic countries

The focus in this article has until now been on the linguistic frameworks of the Nordic countries and on typical patterns of learning paths of Nordic students illustrated via the language education system offered in each country and via some comparable results from the most recent PISA study of reading. However, the discussion has not so far taken into account the many new languages that migration has brought into the Nordic countries during the last few years. The presence of new languages has today clearly some influence on national education systems and on the outcomes in terms of multilingual and multicultural competencies as well. There is an obvious growing trend towards more globalized Nordic regions where national and indigenous languages are now accompanied by new languages from a great variety of language families. The speakers of these languages are also present in the education systems of all Nordic countries and during the last decades their presence have slowly started to become acknowledged in society and school. This is true especially of the metropolitan areas around Stockholm, Copenhagen and southern Sweden, as well as Oslo and Helsinki,

where the percentage of residents with an immigrant background has increased a great deal during the last few years.

Sweden was the first country to receive a lot of migrants during the 1950s, while both Denmark and Norway had a remarkable wave of immigrants in the 1970s. Finland still has a very low percentage of immigrants (see table 3) in comparison with e.g. Sweden and it also opened up its migrant policy a decade later than Denmark and Norway. The implications of the immigrants' residence in Nordic societies is clearly visible also in school, where mother tongue instruction for immigrants of different languages is introduced accordingly, starting with Denmark in 1976 and most recently in Finland in 1987. Even if the time of introducing mother tongue instruction varies considerably in the different countries the number of different languages spoken today in all four countries is more or less the same. It is difficult to get comparable statistics but the number is estimated to be approximately 140-150 different languages in each country. The variation in number is e.g. dependent on how language vs. variety/dialect is defined. The relatively wide representation of different languages in each country per se does not guarantee any visible role in the education system. Only the largest populations of students with minority language backgrounds may have a right to receive official mother tongue instruction (included as a part of a regular school day) or semi-official mother tongue instruction (included as extra-curricular activity after the school day). In Denmark and Norway there has been a recent move towards less official recognition of some national minority languages as mother tongues taught at school.

Table 4. *The year of introduction of national objectives for immigrant introduction and mother tongue instruction (in NML) as well as the estimated number of languages spoken in each country.*

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Objectives for immigrant introduction	1970s	1980s	1970s	1950s
Objectives for mother tongue instruction	1976	1987	1978	1977
Number of languages spoken today	100-140	150	200	140 (within schools)

In A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism (Commission of the European Communities 2005), EU member states are encouraged to develop multilingual policies which include both minority and majority speakers in society. With this document in mind, it is interesting to identify what kind of research objectives each country listed as their main research area when the RoMME network met for their first seminar in 2012 (table 4).

In Sweden, a lot of research has been done to develop a working system for teaching Swedish as a second language that includes all levels of education. In Denmark, research emphasis has been to study the roles of the children's home languages within the school system to ensure the development of the mother tongue of the immigrant children. In Finland, quite a lot of work has been done in developing multilingual school programmes where several languages are used in subject teaching, but not with the emphasis on minority language students, rather on majority language children. In Norway, strong emphasis has been put on developing the national curricula for the schools and on developing internet-based self-study programmes for teaching Norwegian to immigrants.

Common to all Nordic countries is research conducted within second language acquisition (Danish/Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish as L2), which indicates that the learning of the national language is regarded as crucial for successful school achievement and targets mostly students with first languages other than that of the majority school population. In addition, second language acquisition is not merely seen as a separate language object in school; there is a visible trend to embed language learning within content areas and subject-related learning such as academic development in Swedish research, teaching material development in Norway and immersion and CLIL research in Finland. Another orientation is an interest in identity and socialization where research on one hand focuses on literacy practices and on the other hand on multilingual and intercultural policies and practices, e.g. polylinguaging in superdiverse schools. (for definition of concepts see Møller & Jørgensen, in this issue).

Table 5. *Multilingual research foci as presented within the RoMME network.*

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
Research focus as mentioned within RoMME	Danish as a second and a foreign language in language use; two-way socialisation; poly-linguaging	Immersion and CLIL education; first language Swedish education; Swedish as a second language; intercultural and multilingual learning processes; identity formation	Challenges posed by the multicultural society; child learning and development in the light of new digital media; teaching material for students with Norwegian as second language	Swedish as a second language in mainstream schools; bilingual learners and literacy; academic development in Swedish as second language and mother tongue

Another example of slightly differing trends within research among researchers of multilingualism and multilingual education is illustrated by the mind map constructed during a discussion of relevant terminology for different types of integration between language and content in bi- and multilingual education.

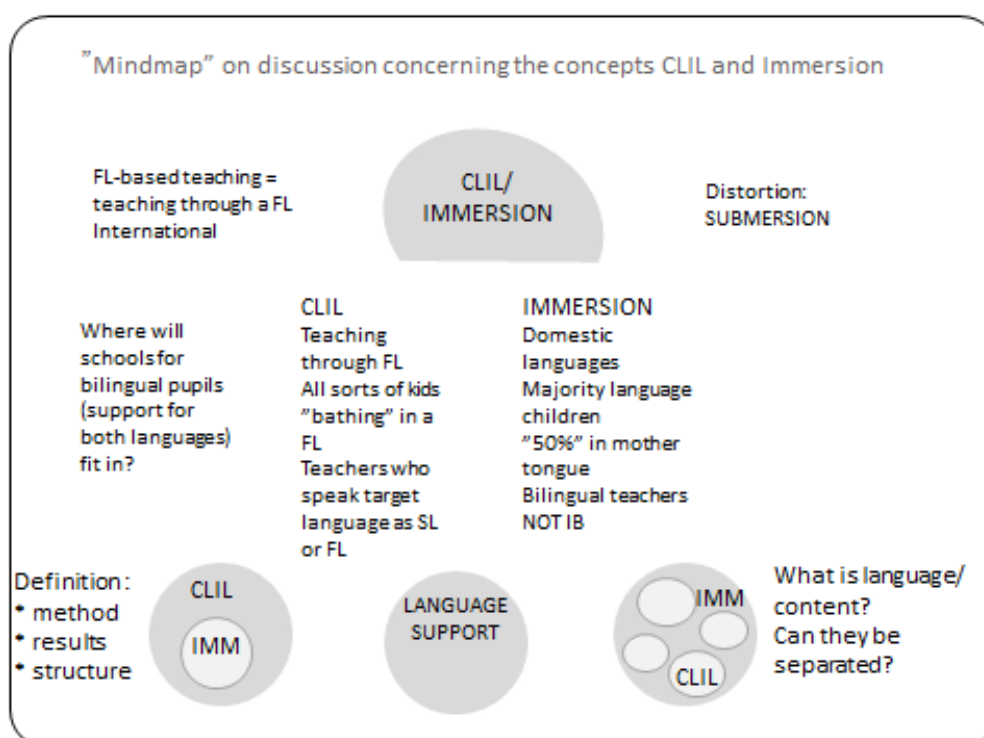


Figure 2. Mindmap made of terminology discussion during RoMME-network meeting.

Even among researchers within the field of multilingual education in the Nordic countries these definitions tended to vary to some extent. It was also noted that there is a lack of mutually intelligible concepts for some varieties of language and content integration, such as FL-based teaching, which is not to be confused with CLIL, since CLIL implies an adaptation of methodology as well. There also seems to be a lack of common terminology for a type of school embracing and supporting the development of simultaneously bi- and multilingual individuals. As is illustrated in the mind map above, also the well-known concepts CLIL and immersion were subject to different interpretations, depending on the perspective of the researcher. The participants noted that definitions tended to vary depending on whether one chooses to emphasize the method, (expected) results or the structural level. Hence, there is an urgent need for clarification on terminology within the field to enhance the cross-professional and cross-national use of research results and to enhance the research dialogue, and application of results.

In summary, the need for a cross-professional, holistic framework of reference for successful multilingual policy-making and research on multilingualism and multilingual education in the Nordic countries is emphasized. This will be discussed in the next section, with the tentative holistic framework developed by the RoMME-network researchers as a point of departure.

The need for a holistic research framework

One major corner-stone of successful academic and personal enrichment is an efficient language learning path. Recent research within this field clearly points towards the importance of focusing not only on the immigrants' opportunities to learn the language of the new community, but also stresses the importance of maintaining and developing their competence in their home language/s and to give them the opportunity to learn

foreign languages in order to make their entrance into e.g. higher education possible. This presupposes that teachers and schools possess linguistic, cultural and pedagogical readiness to provide minority language children with education in their home language, in the official language/s of the country as well as in foreign languages according to the guidelines from the EU. However, this awareness is fairly recent and has not yet been consistently taken into consideration in the language learning programmes of minority language students in the Nordic countries, but rather, slightly different strategies have been emphasised and developed in different countries, as previously mentioned.

In traditional language teaching, a monolingual and -cultural bias has been in evidence. The school curricula in most Nordic countries are also based on monolingual assumptions. Teachers tend to treat minority language students from the perspective of the language of the school rather than from the perspective of the individual multilingual. According to ecological/holistic theories of language teaching, foreign- and second-language teaching is a highly complex linguistic and cultural phenomenon in the sense that there is always more than one language involved, and that it is always a question of a number of cultural perspectives that relate to differences in national, ethnic and social history.

Those were the main motives for embarking on an analytical framework related discussion as one of the first network activities. The purpose of this was, if possible, to reveal a common platform from which to describe the multilingual learning and educational processes in the Nordic countries. The point of departure was the three-level model illustrated as consecutive circles (individual, school, community, see figure 3). Based upon the different areas of research into multilingualism that were represented among the group of cross-professional researchers and doctoral students the following tentative holistic framework of reference emerged.

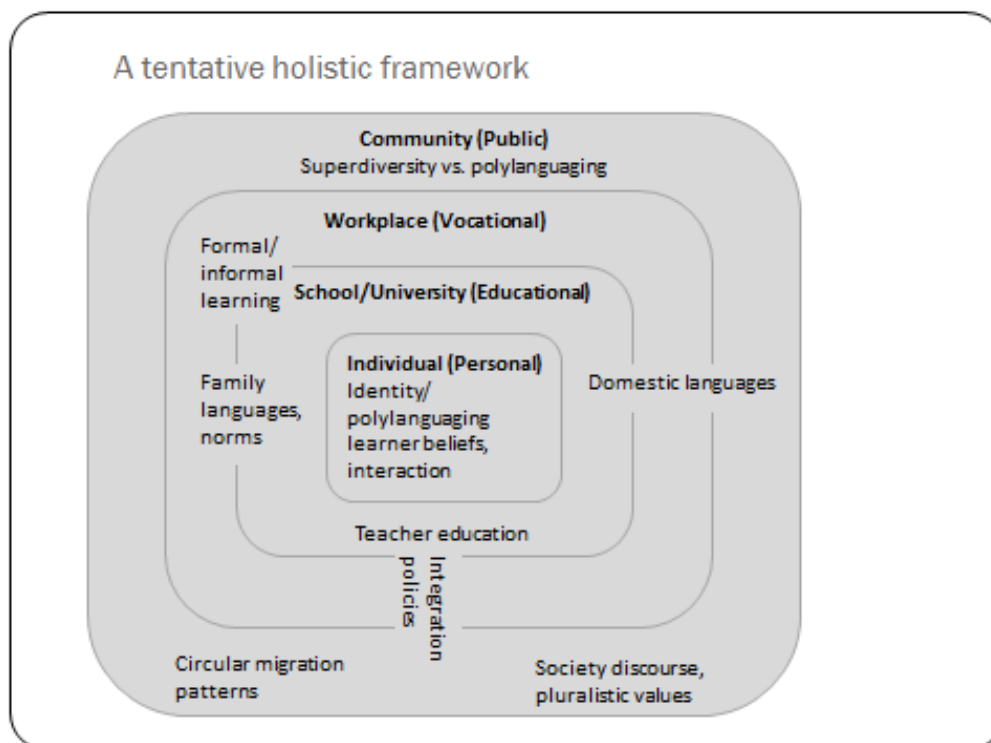


Figure 3. A tentative holistic, cross-professional framework of reference for research on multilingualism developed during RoMME-network meeting.

This tentative framework recognizes the field of research into multilingualism and multilingual education in the Nordic countries as a complex and multilayered field. The necessary framework levels were identified as Community (public), Workplace (vocational), School/University (educational) and Individual (personal)". At the community level, you will find different patterns of polylinguaging and superdiversity in some contexts, and the two most prominent trends stressed were the increasingly circular patterns of migration as well as society discourse, which is often characterized by dichotomized and pluralistic values. It was also considered important to separate the workplace, the vocational sphere, from both the public and the educational spheres. Within the educational sphere teacher education was pointed out as an aspect of crucial importance. At the core of the framework we find the individual, with her/his personal identity/ies, polylinguaging, learner beliefs and interactional patterns.

Some aspects were recognized as central at several levels, the most central ones identified as: formal and informal learning, family languages, domestic languages and integration policies. Both formal and informal learning are core processes in the development of multilingual identities and skills. Especially from an educational point of view both of these modes of learning ought to be taken into account in order to support efficient language learning and social integration paths. Family languages and norms are often used as explanatory factors in current research and educational practices. However, there is a risk that these are studied and thus also referred to in a very general or superficial way, which does not help identify the core processes involved. For instance, it might easily be taken for granted that immigrants from Turkey are native speakers of Turkish, which might not necessarily be the case. In relation to languages and prevalent norms, family backgrounds might be more complex than they seem at a first glance. It is also worth noting that this complexity might sometimes be very difficult to find, if one does not know what to check for, for instance because of the political, value, or status label attached to different languages. Domestic languages and the practices of using them play an obvious part in multilingual research and integration processes at several levels in society. As a concrete example, Finland's official bilingualism can be seen as an additional obstacle when immigrants are to join the workforce. However, depending on the linguistic policies, needs and practices in companies and institutions knowledge of other languages might on the contrary be regarded as an asset. Finally, integration policies affect educational policies and practices as well as official norms. These policies, or lack of them, at different levels in society need to be taken into account when interpreting empirical data on sociolinguistic, multilingual and interactional practices in e.g. the work place. This is by no means a new insight, but for a further pursuit of the field it is important to stress the fact that e.g. domestic languages play a part - and probably slightly different ones - at all levels in the framework model.

It is also worth noting that for some individuals, the vocational and educational contexts for example might overlap, but this kind of a framework will assist the researcher/educationalist in the process of inquiring into both dimensions. It was also conceived of as a useful framework for positioning one's own field of research/current study in relation to other research in the field and the different components of potential importance. In our opinion, even this first attempt at a framework model confirms the need for a specially tailored, holistic framework for identifying multilingual processes in the Nordic countries. In the following section, some previous, more ambitious models of second language acquisition will be briefly presented and discussed in relation to the tentative framework presented above.

Current models of second language acquisition and multilingual acquisition

In the following, an attempt will be made to give a brief overview of some current and relevant theoretical models of multilingualism, multilingual acquisition and multilingual education. This will be done in order to provide researchers in the field, as well as teachers, with a better understanding of the complex and diverse processes underlying multilingual acquisition. The overview will hopefully contribute to the development of a theoretically founded instrument or a platform on the basis of which adequate multilingual practices and multilingual policies can be developed for the Nordic countries. It is assumed that such an instrument in the long run can be validated against the activities in the RoMME network. Examples of such activities are exchange of ideas and experiences in common seminars, exchange of research and publications, and embarking on new common research projects and publication of common research reports and articles etc.

Spolsky (1989) was one of the first to propose a general, overarching theory of second language learning (or second language acquisition). In his definition, the term second language referred to the acquisition of a new language once a first language has been learned, without any technical separation between learning and acquisition (cf. Krashen, 1976). Spolsky summarized what second language acquisition is about in one question: *Who learns how much of what language under what conditions?* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 2). He argued that the task for a general theory of second language learning is to account for second language acquisition, which also includes a theory of first language acquisition, and in addition he also saw the need for this kind of theory to account for the fact that people can learn more than one new language. Spolsky's summarizing question of the essence of second language acquisition is, in fact, in many respects still valid and also relevant for the description of multilingual acquisition.

Many of the more current models of bilingualism and multilingualism have, however, focused on certain areas of language acquisition/learning or have focused on particular contexts (cf Marx 2001). In fact, the most recent theoretical research on applied linguistics and multilingual acquisition maintains that the proper area of research should center on the multilingual speaker as a norm rather than the monolingual individual (Herdina & Jessner, 2002, p. 1). Thus Cenoz (2000) maintains that multilingual acquisition is a very common phenomenon, and that although second language acquisition has much in common with multilingual acquisition, there are some differences regarding complexity and diversity. When two languages are involved as in second language acquisition, we have only two possible acquisition orders: the second language can either be acquired after L1 or at the same time. As soon as three or four languages are involved, the situation will become more complex, and the number of possible acquisition orders will naturally multiply (Cenoz, 2000, p. 40).

Aronin and Ó Laoire (2004) argue that multilingualism is most adequately studied within the scope of disciplines related to language and society, with a foundation in identity theory. In the analysis of globalization, language maintenance as well as the change of identities has become one of the major issues, both on societal and individual levels. They also argue that multilingualism and multilingual acquisition is, not only quantitatively 'bigger' and more complex than second language acquisition, but also qualitatively different (cf. Cook, 1995).

A central concept introduced by Aronin and Ó Laoire is the notion of multilinguality, or the linguistic identity of the multilingual. Multilinguality is the multilingual's individual or personal set of characteristics and intrapersonal dynamics, the inherent, intrinsic characteristics of the multilingual, which is far from being strictly language-related. It comprises most aspects of identity such as emotions, attitudes, preferences, anxiety,

cognitive aspect, personality type, social ties and influences (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2004, p. 18).

Aronin and Ó Laoire's model of multilingualism and multilingual acquisition implicates that "every multilingual individual possesses a real concrete multilinguality of his or her own" (2004, p. 19). Yet, this implies that groups of people, i.e. immigrants may have typical sets of languages for their survival that are common for the majority of that population. As an example they give the Russian immigrant to Israel whose most essential languages are Russian (L1), Hebrew, which is the official language of the country they have moved to, and finally English, the language of academic studies and academic careers, promotion and social prestige. They call these constellations Dominant Language Constellations (DLCs). It has been found, however, that the sociolinguistic environment or cultural context plays a decisive role in the development of multilinguality. Since multilinguals are qualitatively different from monolinguals, and even bilinguals, it may, therefore, be plausible to assume that teaching/learning the very same languages in two distinctly different cultural contexts would yield different results. Yet, in all probability, it is also assumed that the teaching/learning of multilinguals in similar cultural contexts, but with different or slightly different DLCs may have much in common (Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2004, p. 25).

As mentioned earlier, Aronin and Ó Laoire's term multilinguality stresses its individual character and entity, incorporating various aspects into the concept, not only the language ones. Thus they propose to describe multilinguality in terms of a biotic system, i.e. where sets of languages operate together in a single entity. Their use of the term biotic system is, in fact more or less consonant with the term ecosystem that has been used by Bronfenbrenner (cf. Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1993; van Lier, 2004). By interpreting multilingualism in terms of an ecological unity, Aronin and Ó Laoire pave the way for new explorations in multilingual acquisition contexts, where they endeavor to put forward a holistic perspective on multilinguality.

Another good candidate for an overall theory of language development is the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) approach put forward by Herdina and Jessner (2001, 2002). The DST approach is especially suitable to account for complex systems and processes such as multilingualism and multilingual development. A major assumption underlying a lot of L1 and L2 acquisition research is that the acquisitional process has a clear beginning and an end state, i.e. a linear path of development for each individual. In fact, one of the major properties of the development of multilingual systems is its non-linear character where the individual's language system with its numerous subsystems is in a constant flux. Another property of a dynamic system is its change over time.

De Bot et al (2007) argue that a DST approach differs fundamentally from the information processing approach that has dominated the psycholinguistic aspects of bilingualism for the last few decades. They use two metaphors for the process of communication to pinpoint this difference, the fax machine and a dance. The DST approach views communication in a multilingual context as a dance. The basics of DST is comparable to the complex patterns that emerge from the interaction between two dancers and in fact, "even increasingly more complex and unpredictable patterns will emerge over time when one pair of dancers interacts with other pairs of dancers on the dance floor" (see De Bot, Lowie and Verspoor, 2007, p. 9). This approach is in sharp contrast with the information processing approach to communication which implies the transmission of information between a sender and a receiver. This can, in fact be compared with the exchange of information between two fax machines, i.e. one of them sending and the other receiving a message by using the same coding system.

Another aspect that has been focused on in DST is that a language system needs not only to be learned, it has also to be maintained. The non-use of some of the language systems leads to automatic decline, which is not expected to occur linearly or similarly for each individual. In a similar way as Aronin and Ó Laoire, DST adopts a holistic view of multilingual acquisition, as the essential tenet of holism is that the whole (multilingual competence) is more (and different) than the sum of its parts (competences in separate languages, L1, L2, L3, ...).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of developmental research seems to be especially well-suited to account for multilingual acquisition in multicultural educational contexts. (1979, 1993). In fact, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model shares many of the characteristics we find in Herdina and Jessner's and Aronin and Ó Laoire's models. According to Bronfenbrenner, we can characterize the context of education as a set of ecosystems, each one nested inside the next. The hierarchy of ecosystems can be divided into microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (see van Lier, 2004, pp. 208-209). The great merit with Bronfenbrenner's model lies not in the nested set of systems, but rather in the focus on the relationships among them.

Common to most of the current models of multilingualism and multilingual acquisition depicted above is the assumption that language learning and multilingual acquisition is to be seen as a complex, social process. On the whole these models share many features with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) but show similarities also with various ecological and holistic approaches (see Vygotsky, 1986; van Lier, 2004). A typical feature is that they all argue that meaning only emerges in context. Other terms that have been used in relation to SCT include *sociohistorical* and *social constructionist* (Lantolf, 2000, p. 155) and *social interactionist* (Nystrand, 1992; van Lier, 1996).

Concluding Discussion

In the first part of this article we briefly addressed the issue of multilingualism in the Nordic countries by presenting some facts and data on immigrant population, linguistic rights frameworks, language education programmes and implementation of objectives for mother tongue instruction in each of the countries participating in RoMME. We discussed these topics with both an outside and inside perspective on the Nordic countries in mind. The outside perspective, i.e. viewing the Nordic countries as a homogenous entity, is easily manifested in the comparative data chosen for this article. In all four countries approximately 140 different new languages/varieties are reported to be used, even if all countries have only one dominating language widely spoken within the country. Alongside the dominating language all countries have recognized the presence of other (indigenous) languages within their territories and have granted national minority status and/or regionally based official status for these languages. The presentation of language programmes reveals a language path that is very similar in terms of language choice. English is very dominant as the first foreign language introduced in the primary grades. An additional language is usually taught from lower secondary education onwards. In addition, school systems in each country have identified a growing student population with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and have implemented mother tongue instruction and second language teaching accordingly. As for general outcomes of education, researchers within PISA conclude that results from Nordic students' performance tend to form a cluster of their own. General tendencies across countries are e.g. a performance gap between genders and lower achievement in reading among students with immigrant background compared with native speakers.

When focusing on an inside perspective in the light of the same data discussed above, some differing factors can be noted. Sweden was the first country of all four countries to welcome a first wave of immigration during the 1950s, whereas Finland experienced a similar wave three decades later. In the same way, Finland implemented mother tongue instruction for minority language pupils approximately a decade later than the other three countries. Also the language learning path within the obligatory education period for students in Finland deviates somewhat from that of the others due to the coexistence of two national languages, which implies that all students in Finland must have some studies in both Finnish and Swedish language during the obligatory education period. This fact, in turn, provides a possibility for Finnish students to learn more languages in school than their Nordic neighbours. The minimum criterion is, however, three languages, as in the other countries.

As a whole, the contrastive analysis we have performed in the light of an outside or inside perspective on Nordic countries shows that there are more similarities than differences in the field of multilingualism. Thus, there is a great potential in sharing experiences and developing the field together. This will be needed since the commonalities found in our analysis also undoubtedly pose great challenges. Facts presented in the analysis indicate a potential for multilingualism that has not yet been optimized in the Nordic area. There is no easy answer to why this potential remains underused and how it could be better promoted. The complexity of the issue is evident and is indicated clearly even in the small identification process of research interest among researchers within the RoMME network (table 4). We cannot go into detail here, but mention just some research characteristics that may function both as a restriction and a possibility. One example is the necessity of offering second language teaching for students with non-native linguistic background. The importance of second language teaching has been recognized in all four countries and is thus a research area common to all. But we also know that second language lessons as an isolated school subject are easily associated with status factors that may have negative effects on student motivation and attendance. In addition, second language acquisition per se is not the only predictor of how well students will succeed in school; other crucial factors are e.g. mother tongue instruction, academic achievement, trained teachers and well-developed teaching materials. It is therefore positive to observe an orientation towards more cross-linguistic research and focus on content and language integrated learning and teaching in table 4. Furthermore, multilingual and multicultural identity is gaining ground as a research area of interest. Another example of the state-of-art of research interest within multilingual education in Nordic countries is the clear focus on students speaking a minority language. At the same time, e.g. immersion programmes have shown how crucial it can be for endangered languages to involve majority speakers for multilingual effects in societies. Regardless of the potential embedded in the existing linguistic variety in the Nordic countries, the language programme of an “ordinary” student in all four Nordic countries is today best described as static with a very narrow language profile.

The complexity of the multilingual field in Nordic countries is depicted in another way in the tentative holistic framework, jointly created by RoMME researchers, in figure 3. This framework is thus primarily to be seen as a practical reference frame for coming to terms with the identification of shared and differing trends in the multilingual and globalization processes going on in the Nordic countries. On the other hand the holistic framework that emerged during the RoMME session is, in several respects, similar to other current theoretical frameworks and lends itself readily to comparison. With the language learning process in mind, the comparison shows that research in the field today is based on the assumption of language learning as a social process, where

aspects such as experienced need and authenticity, interaction with the social context and relevant actors need to be considered in order to build up a successful language learning path for each individual, i.e. the ecology of language learning. In addition to this general social emphasis, different socio-constructivist theories on first language acquisition, second language acquisition, multilingual education and multilingual societies together constitute the theoretical frame of reference. This basis also involves research on the prerequisites for the development of functional multilingualism in immigrant children, historical and traditional ways of managing multilingual students at school in different contexts and research on processes of enrichment from educational, linguistic and sociological points of view.

Within the field of language acquisition more and more interest has been put on theoretical constructions of multilingual acquisition processes. The focus has shifted to studying the roles of different languages in production and to the factors (e.g. capability in general, environment, experiences and strategies in general and within language learning, motivation, aptitude, first and second language and learning type) involved in multilingual acquisition. New theories explaining multilingual acquisition as a complex system, which emerges and develops over time both as a social instrument in groups and as a private tool in individuals, have been introduced. Hence, the view on language education and methodology does not rest upon the promotion of any particular method, as was popular within educational research during the 20th century. On the contrary, the socio-constructivist view of language learning and language education is based upon the assumption that language learning is a complex context-dependent process where different individuals need slightly different kinds of support to find their own voices and optimal paths of development. This position calls for a well-developed teacher professionalism and sensitivity to individual learner needs, rather than the application of pre-set methods. Furthermore, it is also obvious that frameworks which aim for all-inclusive description of contributing variables in multilingualism, regardless of whether they are more theoretically or praxis-based, become very complex and extremely difficult to operationalize in individual studies. We need a lot of individual pieces, focusing on the different core areas, to be able to compile a puzzle and get the overall picture.



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