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Polarisation and marginalisation – discourses on Sami as L1 mother tongue instruction in syllabus, and media debate

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ABSTRACT

In Sweden, curricula and syllabi for education are politically determined after public consultations. Thus, these educational documents are discursive trade-offs reflecting research, traditions in the educational system, and political ideologies. This study maps the discourses in the syllabus for Sami as L1 mother tongue for preschool class – Year 9, and mother tongue instruction in media debate 2016–2022. It problematises the educational implications of the language ideologies and tensions in the material. While Sami is accorded the status as mother tongue, it does not have the same status as Swedish or even Modern languages. Mother tongue instruction is promoted as the foundation for learning other languages, and multilingualism as an asset for Sweden as a country, and for the individual. The quality of mother tongue instruction is criticised by Sami and other minorities, as well as by those perceiving mother tongue instruction as a threat to assimilation.

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Introduction

School regulations and political debate in Sweden reflect the power structures and power struggles in society and have a bearing on the indigenous Sami peoples whose language varieties are to be legally preserved, revitalised, and protected (Regeringskansliet Kulturdepartementet 2022; Sametinget 2020). The need for revitalisation became part of a minority policy during the 2000s.

Since 1977, pupils with a mother tongue other than Swedish have the right to mother-tongue instruction. The governmental aim was active bilingualism. From 2000, Sami is one of five languages with the status of a national minority language (Ganuza and Hyltenstam 2020; SFS 2009:600). In school, Sami as L1 can be studied at a beginner's level, unlike other minority languages where pupils must have prior linguistic knowledge (SOU 2017:91 2017). Pupils can

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study Sami as L1, if the pupils and legal guardians consider themselves Sami, even when the pupil has no prior knowledge of the language.

In 2020/2021, 458 pupils received Sami L1 mother tongue instruction (Sametinget, & Samiskt språkcentrum 2022). As Sweden does not allow ethnic registration, the number only includes pupils whose parents applied for Sami as mother tongue instruction. There is no guaranteed quota of teacher-led mother tongue instruction in the timetable for the compulsory school, unless the pupils take Sami as Modern languages, or are pupils in the Sami school (SFS 2011). Finally, the certificate requirements are less strict for mother tongue instruction than for most school subjects.

Since the 1990s, mother tongue instruction – which does not include Swedish – has been questioned politically (Ganuza and Hyltenstam 2020). Research shows that there are issues. Mother tongue instruction falls outside of the regular timetable and does not give the pupils any credits, unlike Swedish and modern language, and there is a lack of qualified Sami-speaking teachers, and a lack of updated teaching materials in the Sami languages (Svonni, Hetteima, and Outakoski 2020). The difference in educational level between the subjects of Swedish and Sami is to the detriment of Sami pupils (Belančić and Lindgren 2020). Furthermore, complete bilingualism is not supported (Outakoski 2015). Deficiencies concerning too few hours, mixed groups due to no tracking of pupils, and no Sami teacher training in Sweden have been debated. Different arguments have been raised, pointing at language ideologies towards Sami as mother tongue. Simultaneously, the syllabus is ‘leaking’ language ideologies.

Aim and purpose

In order to discuss how articulations in school regulations and the political debate contribute to polarisation and marginalisation, this study maps the discourses and problematises the field of tension within and between the discourses that are distinguished in the syllabus for Sami and debate articles focusing on mother tongue instruction. The study discusses the educational implications for Sami as L1, mother tongue.

The research questions are:

- Which main discourses can be distinguished in the data?
- Which language ideologies and tensions can be found in the syllabus regarding Sami as mother tongue instruction and the media debate on mother tongue instruction?
- Which educational implications can be discerned in the discourses?

Despite the monolingualism of the Swedish school (Hyltenstam and Milani 2012; Flyman Mattsson 2017; see also Jørgensen 2008; García 2009, on monolingualism), instruction in the minority language as L1 mother tongue at a beginner's level is an exclusive right of the national minorities in Sweden. However, the European Council, the United Nations and scholars have criticised the Swedish educational policies as being insufficient concerning instruction in national minority languages (cf. Lainio and Pesonen 2021).

Sami as national minority language in Sweden

The Sami language has been established as a home language in the curriculum for the Sami school. National minority languages must be taught in school for the languages to either be revitalised or continue to be viable, and there must be a long-term plan for revitalising these languages (Lainio and Pesonen 2021). Schools must provide teaching in national minority languages if 'one pupil' wishes to study the language. For other minority languages, there must be a minimum of five pupils within the municipality.

Belančić (2020) investigated the use of Sami in Sami schools in Sweden. Positive language ideologies from the environment and a willingness to use Sami are motivating factors (Belančić 2020; Belančić et al. 2017). The language ideologies of individuals are not the only decisive factor. An exclusively historical perspective on Sami peoples marginalises Sami perspectives, which is not in accordance with international policy documents (Svonni 2015). Cultural characteristics that are essentialised can generate problematic dichotomies between indigenous and the West, or the traditional/modern but the dichotomies are also needed and used for indigenous to acquire formal rights and recognition (Gjerpe 2018).

The touchstone for assessing the mother tongue instruction is the level of linguistic prowess. The syllabus for Sami does not give pupils the conditions to develop a functionally equivalent language level in comparison with Swedish (Belančić and Lindgren 2020). Unlike the syllabi for the other national minority languages, and for minority languages, the syllabus for Sami cannot be found in *Lgr22*, the general curriculum (Skolverket 2022a), only in *Lsam22*, the curriculum for the Sami school (Skolverket 2022b). In the printed version of *Lgr22*, the syllabi are on pages 203–217, that is, separated from the other minority language syllabi.

Materials and methods

Materials

The analysed materials include the Swedish syllabus for Sami as L1, mother tongue (Skolverket 2022b) school years 1–9, and 22 media texts from Swedish

newspapers, magazines, and radio, published between 2016–2022. The media texts were written by politically active debaters, journalists, teachers, or researchers. The school in Sweden is politically governed, but there is also input from research and the teacher profession impacting the curricula. The time frame for data collection was set to include the debate after the decision that national minority languages can be taken as L1 at a beginner's level.

The articles are in Swedish and focus on mother tongue instruction (which, in Sweden, does not include Swedish). They reflect both Sami and non-Sami perspectives.¹ The media materials were collected using the search words 'modersmålsundervisning samiska skola debatt' [mother tongue instruction Sami school debate].

Table 1 lists the analysed articles. Additional selection criteria were 1) no documents from Skolverket, the National Agency for Education, since texts from that source would fall into the same category as the syllabus for Sami as mother tongue, 2) no documents outlining the mother tongue education policies of

Table 1. The media debate material on minority languages and mother tongue instruction.

Year	Title	Source
2016	['Sweden betrays the language rights of minority and indigenous children'] https://www.svt.se/opinion/sverige-sviker-minoritets-och-urfolksbarnen	Sveriges Radio Authors are representatives of the five national minorities in Sweden.
	[A school in total disrepair] https://www.liberaldebatt.se/2016/05/en-skolasom-verkligen-ar-i-forfall/	<i>Liberal Debatt</i> Author is Editor-in-Chief of the Liberal magazine.
2017	[The European Council addresses Sweden: You must do this in order to save the minority languages] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/europaradet-till-sverige-det-har-maste-ni-gora-for-att-radda-minoritetspraken	Sveriges Radio Author is a bilingual journalist (Finnish/Swedish) Interview with Sweden's representative in the Council of Europe's expert committee for the minority languages charter
	[Abolish home language – teach the children Swedish] https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/vvdJw/avs-kaffa-hemsprak-lar-barnen-svenska	<i>Aftonbladet</i> Authors are Conservative politicians.
	[You defy research on language learning] https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/n55Ko/nigar-emot-forskning-om-sprakinlarning	<i>Aftonbladet</i> Author is a researcher.
[Critical of debate regarding the abolition of the right to mother tongue instruction] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/6801985	Sveriges Radio/Rádio Sápmi Author is a Sami journalist. Interview with Sami researcher.	
[Twice as many children get mother tongue instruction] https://www.svd.se/a/7IK13w/dubbelt-sa-manga-barn-far-modersmalsundervisning	<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i> Author is a journalist.	
2018	[Debate: Let the mother tongue instruction take place in the classroom] https://spraktidningen.se/2018/10/debatt-lat-modersmalen-ta-plats-i-svenska-klassrum/	<i>Språktidningen</i> Author is a linguistics pupil.
2019	[Few pupils are taught Sami in high school] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7240911	Sveriges Radio/Rádio Sápmi Authors are journalists; one Sami, one of undisclosed ethnicity.
	[The Minister of Education: Mother tongue in Sami at high school is a question of tradition and history] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7246835	Sveriges Radio/Rádio Sápmi Author is a journalist of undisclosed ethnicity. Interview with Minister of Education

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Year	Title	Source
2020	[The mother tongue is the foundation for developing a new language] https://www.bl.t.se/debatt/modersmalet-ar-grunden-for-utvecklingen-av-ett-nytt-sprak/	<i>Blekinge Läns Tidning</i> Author is a researcher in Swedish and Education
	[Major deficiencies in the mother tongue instruction] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7394446	Sveriges Radio Authors are journalists; one Sámi, one of undisclosed ethnicity.
	[Do not silence the minority languages, you Social Democrats and Liberals] https://www.expressen.se/kvallsposten/debatt-kvp/tysta-inte-minoritetspraken-s-och-l-/	<i>Expressen/Kvällsposten</i> Authors are Swedish Green Party politicians
	[The Government lets down children with another mother tongue] https://www.gp.se/debatt/barn-med-annat-modersmal-sviks-av-regeringen-1.24291274	<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i> Author is the chairperson of Lärarnas Riksförbund, a teachers' union
	[“Inaccurate mother tongue research”] https://www.lararen.se/nyheter/modersmalsundervisning/politikerna-behover-fact-checking-om-modersmal	<i>Läraren</i> Authors are researchers, teachers, and PhD students
	[The KD/Christian Democrats/want to scrap the mother tongue education – criticised objective] https://www.lararen.se/nyheter/modersmalsundervisning/kd-vill-skrota-modersmalsundervisning	<i>Läraren</i> Interview with the chairperson of a teacher union
	[KD is/The Christian Democrats are not altogether wrong about mother tongue instruction] https://www.dagensarena.se/opinion/kd-har-en-poang-om-modersmalet/	<i>Dagen</i> Author is program manager at Arena Idé and a PhD students
	[Rethink your politics regarding mother tongue instruction, Christian Democrats] https://www.dagen.se/debatt/2020/11/03/spraket-ar-en-nyckel-till-integration/	<i>Dagen</i> Authors are Christian Democrat politicians
	[Mother tongue instruction has never worked properly] https://www.dagen.se/debatt/2020/11/04/modersmalsundervisningen-har-aldrig-fungerat/	<i>Dagen</i> Author is a Christian Democrat politician.
	2021	[One-sided political debate on mother tongue] https://www.su.se/nyheter/ensidig-politisk-debatt-om-modersma1.546579
[Let's talk about mother tongue instruction] https://sola.kau.se/cslblog/2021/11/24/gastbloggare-nihad-bunar-lat-oss-tala-om-modersmalsundervisning/		Karlstad University Author is a researcher.
2022	[The dangerous shortcut taken by the school: The pupils do not have to take Swedish] https://www.expressen.se/debatt/skolans-farliga-genvag-eleverna-slipper-svenska/	<i>Expressen</i> Authors are an academic and Conservative ex-politician, and a researcher

school principals, since the analysis would include 290 municipalities, 21 regions, and a vast number of independent school principals. Consequently, those documents need to be analysed separately from other articles, and 3) a maximum of three texts from any source.

Method

In this study, discourse theory (DT) is used methodologically and analytically to identify discourses in the materials and to map and problematise language ideologies and tensions within and between these discourses concerning Sami as L1 mother tongue instruction. Discursive approaches focus on language, and text studies become central. Discourse concerns understanding and interpreting the world, and refers to a set of metaphors, representations, stories, images, and statements that together produce a certain version of the world (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Within a certain area or domain, parallel discourses compete to define reality, whereupon antagonism between the discourses can be observed within that area. Discourses are never finished in the sense that meanings are finally fixed, but they are constantly negotiated and renegotiated, and characterised by antagonistic relations (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

Discourses are largely compelling, but also productive and interpretable both in terms of societal phenomena and historical traditions. In discourse theory, the prevailing view is that discourse is constitutive and represents different ways of understanding the world. People are influenced by the discourse, especially if it is a hegemonic discourse. It reshapes the way the world is interpreted or a section of it, for example mother tongue instruction.

The following concepts serve as DT tools for the analysis of the material: *nodal points*, *elements*, and *subject positions*. Nodal points are privileged signs that construct a core, which relate to other signs, gives the other signs meaning and significance, and which can be seen as more important than all other signs (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Around the nodal point, meanings gather and form the discourse. Elements are signs, whose meaning has not been fixed. They are thus ambiguous (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). These moments form a temporary closure and consequently a discourse can be distinguished. Elements are 'sorted and linked together in chains of equivalence' (Jørgensen, Marianne, and Phillips 2002, 51). Central to this study is also the concept of subject positions. The subject acquires identity through the way it is identified with or ascribed to a subject's position in a discursive structure (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). By identifying how the discourses position the pupils, educational implications can be discerned.

Data analysis

For triangulation reasons, the researchers collected data individually and then checked the others' collected data. Initial analyses were performed individually before the team made the final analysis. While working on the final analysis, the team met regularly to negotiate and renegotiate the analysis.

Table 2. Illustration of how Sami as mother tongue emerged and formed discourses in the syllabus, related to the concepts used from DT.

Elements	Tradition
Nodal point	Cultural heritage
Chains of equivalence	Sami cultural heritage – approach to nature – change of seasons – traditional use of land and water – games – music – handicrafts – other aesthetic expressions
Discourse	Culture and tradition
Subject position	Culturally anchored individual

A discourse order was set, which sets the framework for the analysis, and points to conflicts and agreements. Here, the discourse order is *Sami as L1 mother tongue*. By establishing the discourse order, power becomes clearer and ‘the game between the discourses [...] becomes an important focal point for the analysis’ (Jørgensen, Marianne, and Phillips 2002, 138). Bearing articulations were sorted based on the discourse order. The articulations form patterns that produce and express the struggles that take place within and between discourses. Preliminary discourses of importance for the aim and purpose of the study could be discerned. The articulations were analysed in detail by using the concepts from discourse theory to establish regularities, similarities, and contradictory patterns. Table 2 shows an example of coding.

Literary texts should be used to ‘shed light on Sami conditions, traditions, and Sami cultural forms of expression’ (Skolverket 2022b). The permeating element is tradition. This element is associated with Sami conditions and Sami culture (see Table 3), which in turn form the more closed moment cultural heritage. The chain of equivalence can be described as Sami cultural heritage – approach to nature – change of seasons – traditional use of land and water – games – music – handicrafts – other aesthetic expressions. The subject position in *Culture and tradition* is the culturally anchored individual. The approach shown in this coding example has been used in the result section to illustrate how the discourses were discerned by the articulations.

The mapping of discourses was set through analysis of the syllabus and debate respectively due to differences in purpose and authorship. Then, an analysis focusing research questions 2 and 3 was conducted.

Ethical and methodological considerations

Discourse theory shows how discourses are loaded with meaning and how they produce antagonistic relationships across political boundaries. Transparency in terms of approaches and quoted sections illustrates the substantiation of the analyses. We have carried out similar studies before and are familiar with the methodological framework and the text types analysed. Furthermore, we are aware of the importance of taking a reflexive attitude to our own role as

Table 3. Overview of discourses in the syllabus for Sami as L1 mother tongue.

Discourse	Nodal point	Element	Chains of equivalence	Subject position
<i>Language development and culture carrier</i>	language learning	words and concepts from Sami environments	reading – writing – speaking – listening – conversation – texts – language use	functional language user
<i>Culture and tradition</i>	cultural heritage	tradition	Sami cultural heritage – approach to nature – change of seasons – traditional use of land and water – games – music – handicrafts – other aesthetic expressions	culturally anchored individual
<i>Society and culture</i>	contemporary Sami society and culture	different lifestyles – culture today	history – cultural heritage – different lifestyles today	contemporary Sami

researchers in the field (e.g. Taylor 2001). As individuals, we are to some extent affected by the phenomenon, given connections to indigenous peoples and minorities. This is considered an asset in the analysis but presents a risk of bias.

Guided by the recommendations of the Swedish Research Council (2017), we have not retrieved informed consents from the debaters, since the articles were published on public sites.

Limitations

Some limitations of the study should be addressed. The findings are based on a rather small sample of debate material. The sample are based only on Swedish search words, and therefore materials in other languages have been neglected. However, for reasons of delimitation, only materials in Swedish were collected. Finally, the definition of debate has been that it is oriented towards convincing and persuading the reader.

Results

Six discourses were discerned in the empirical material.

Mapping of discourses

The discourses from the empirical material are presented in the following tables. The first table presents an overview of the discourses in the syllabus for Sami as L1 mother tongue.

Language ideologies and tensions

The distinguished discourses are too different to be merged, even though two discourses focus on language. The differences are apparent in the nodal points and the subject positions. The nodal point 'language learning' (What? How?) reflects another point of view than 'benefits of language acquisition' (Why?) and constructs different expectations on the language learner.

The discourses *Culture and tradition*, and *Society and culture* contain the word culture. In the first, the chain of equivalence shows that the focus is on historical aspects of culture, whereas the chain of equivalence for the latter reveals a potential discrepancy between historical and contemporary aspects of Sami culture.

The subject positions distinguished in the discourses contribute to the differences. In *Language development and culture carrier* (Table 3) and *Developed mother tongue instruction for integration* (Table 4) respectively, the subject positions centre around the pupil as a language learner. There is, as previously stated, a difference resulting in different subject positions. The instruction is to help the pupils develop their functional linguistic skills. The discursive element 'words and concepts from Sami environments' does not define what is a typical Sami environment or not. The articulations in *Developed mother tongue instruction for integration* does not specify how the mother tongue instruction will 'improve school performance'. It places a value on multilingualism, stating that 'pupils who learn Swedish and develop their mother tongue will become bilingual faster, which is a sought-after competence in today's globalised world' (Fransson 2018). The knowledge of one's mother tongue is also important for the individual, as it 'contributes to better grades in the other school subjects' (Reath Warren et al. 2020).

The differences between the elements of these discourses testify to different language ideologies. *Language development and culture carrier* lists basic linguistic skills for language learners, such as mastering 'syntax, spelling, inflection, and word classes', or 'vocabulary and concepts specific to the Sami culture'. *Developed mother tongue instruction for integration* never specifies the linguistic skills to be acquired, only that the instruction must 'ensure that mother tongue instruction in the minority languages gives the pupils the opportunity to achieve proper literacy in the minority languages' (Vuonokari 2017). The syllabus, and the media debate seem to presuppose a consensus on what is meant by proper literacy. The dividing line seems to be the goal of language acquisition: becoming *a functional language user*, primarily for oneself, or becoming *a valuable multilingual pupil*, to be an asset in a globalised world.

Culture and tradition (Table 3) and *Abolished mother tongue instruction for integration* (Table 4) might seem worlds apart. The nodal point in the former is cultural heritage, whereas in the latter it is threats to assimilation. The elements

Table 4. Discourses in media material.

Discourse	Nodal point	Element	Chains of equivalence	Subject positions
<i>Developed mother tongue instruction for integration</i>	benefits of language acquisition	importance of mother tongue improve school performance resource for language and knowledge development promote family cohesion and cultural identity voluntary participation	basis for the development of multilingualism – individual linguistic competence – developed mother tongue for integration – value in pluralistic and democratic societies – multilingual and multiculturally competence in a global world	valued multilingual pupil
<i>Abolished mother tongue instruction for integration</i>	threats to assimilation	Swedish as a common language low-level literacy in Swedish low grade of literacy in selected mother tongue unqualified mother tongue teachers inadequate teaching materials	integration the objective – learning Swedish important – poor mother tongue education an obstacle – mother tongue a family matter	assimilated pupil
<i>Mother tongue instruction in its own right</i>	rights to one's linguistic heritage and identity	violation of agreements, conventions, and laws mother tongue instruction a basic prerequisite for children's continued learning requirements for certification of mother tongue teachers deficient organization lacking conditions extensive knowledge requirements limited and restricted teaching materials	structural deficiencies – minimum commitments – no opportunities to acquire higher degree of literacy in mother tongue – lack of incentives and financial prerequisites for bilingual teaching	disenfranchised pupil

and moments include a 'Sami approach to nature', as well as 'music, handicrafts and traditional clothing from the area where the pupils' varieties are spoken'. The literary texts, whether narrative or poetic, are to 'shed light on Sami conditions, traditions, and Sami cultural forms of expression'. These articulations position the pupils in a Sami community, partaking in traditional cultural heritage, literally and figuratively. The discursive moment cultural heritage occurs more often than the element culture.

The change of seasons is mentioned in the section on Sami culture, but unspecified. The syllabus and the discourse do not consider whether Sami people work in traditional industries or not. Sami as mother tongue is, according to the Minister of Education, 'also a matter of tradition and history' (Lundmark 2019). *Culture and tradition* and *Abolished mother tongue instruction for integration* acknowledge the connection between language and culture, but there is a tension between the language ideologies. The former underscores the

importance of mother tongue for the cultural anchoring of the individual, whereas the latter depicts mother tongue instruction as an obstacle for cultural integration or assimilation. Both discourses assert that the cultural anchoring is for the good of the individual. However, the latter discourse implies that cultural integration, or assimilation, is for the best of Swedish society, and that cultural anchoring in Another Culture (than whatever can be perceived as Swedish) is purely a private matter. The latter cannot explicitly claim that multiculturalism is harmful. Such a claim would open to accusations of devaluation of other cultures, or xenophobia.

Anchoring the pupil in the Swedish language and culture through integration (and assimilation) is the aim of *Abolished mother tongue instruction for integration*. The articulations stress the importance of the Swedish language, for example that 'whoever wants to understand and become part of a country's culture or at least criticise it, must learn to speak, write, and understand the language that the country's inhabitants speak' (Heberlein and Wyndhamn 2022), and language immersion in Swedish as a tool for creating equality. The articulations might pay a rhetorical homage to research findings, stating that 'good knowledge' of one's mother tongue facilitates the learning of a second language. The criticism of mother tongue instruction might express a target, as in the articulation that 'integration must be the goal, especially as Sweden is becoming increasingly segregated' (Kullgren 2020). In this discourse, the school should invest in teaching Swedish, not the mother tongues: 'We are positive about a multilingual Sweden, but mother tongue instruction should not be part of the basic undertakings of the school but can instead take place outside school hours and be a private matter' (Wutzler, Brunsberg, and Wengholm 2017). In this discourse, there are no references to L1 mother tongue instruction in the national minority languages, like Sami.

The third discourse distinguished in the syllabus for Sami as mother tongue has been called *Society and culture*, as it is centred around the nodal point contemporary Sami society and culture. The focus is on cultural heritage, in the form of Sami history, Sami trade and industry, but also 'different lifestyles of the Sami people today'. Pupils are to learn about 'Sami institutions and organisations. The Sami Parliament, its function, and responsibilities'. The nodal point of *Mother tongue instruction in its own right* (Table 4), is the right to one's linguistic heritage and identity, as expressed in 'the subject is set up in its own right, to develop the pupil's mother tongue, not as a support for Swedish' (Stockholm University 2021). The discursive articulations address the structural deficiencies of mother tongue instruction in the Swedish school system: no guaranteed hours of teacher-led instruction, 40–60 minutes of mother tongue instruction per week, less strict requirements for certification, heterogenous pupil groups, and incorrect interpretations of laws and ordinances (Bunar 2021). The

articulations claim that Sweden does not secure the rights of national minorities, does not fulfil the requirements of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and that the passivity of the Swedish government ‘threatens the preservation of the national minority languages because far too few pupils are given the opportunity to acquire a higher level of literacy’ (Rajala et al. 2016). The subject position in this discourse is that of disenfranchised pupils, deprived of their right to their linguistic heritage and identity. In comparison with *Developed mother tongue instruction for integration*, no particular attention is paid to the subject of integration.

Final remarks

While the right to mother tongue instruction for national minority languages such as Sami are officially recognised, they are also politically challenged, which might impact the implementation of instruction. Pre-service teachers, teachers and parents must actively search for the syllabus for Sami as L1 in *Lgr22*. The educational implications of making Sami virtually invisible cannot be disregarded. It is not explicitly stated anywhere that the relative invisibility of Sami is deliberate. It is not obvious that the media on purpose focus non-national minority languages, but unless the debaters themselves represent national minorities (Kuhmunen 2017; Rajala et al. 2016) they rarely mention national minority languages. The media discourses primarily focus on what knowledge of Swedish entails for the pupils, and the benefits of multilingualism for Swedish society. Other benefits of intercultural education are generally overlooked. The debaters target large immigrant groups. Whether these debaters do not consider national minority languages a threat, or want to avoid accusations of discrimination, cannot be determined. However, the polarisation between non-national minorities and national minorities also contributes to the marginalisation.

Furthermore, the debate tends to flare up before general elections in Sweden (see Table 2). Electoral propaganda does not have a direct impact on education until a particular political agenda is implemented. However, there might be some reluctance in local politics to invest in mother tongue instruction, including for national minorities like Sami. The analysis of the syllabus underscores other tensions. The syllabus resembles other language syllabi, emphasising oral and written production as well as the reading of fiction, and other texts. Simultaneously, the syllabus distinguishes cultural and historical elements, traditional industries such as reindeer husbandry and crafts as part of learning the language. Arguably, the definition of contemporary Sami life potentially essentialises, and puts the Sami peoples into dichotomies, such as indigenous/Western, or traditional/modern (cf. Gjerpe 2018). In the media material, the consequences of dichotomies between Swedish Sami and other Swedes are addressed, indirectly, only by the debaters who are Sami. Sami as L1 is made an

issue exclusively for Sami people. The consequence of making it an issue of interest for Sami people is that the burden of its visibility, execution and quality lies entirely on the Sami Education Board, the authority responsible for *Lsam22*.

There is a polarisation between the school subjects of Swedish and Sami. The syllabus and the debate material emphasise language as a central factor for social well-being. The well-being of individuals and society depends on access to language, and culture. However, there is no equality between Swedish, with a guaranteed number of instruction hours devoted to language (and not, for example, crafts) and Sami as L1, where the language instruction must include history, crafts, business, and use of land. It is impossible for pupils to achieve linguistic depth under such conditions. The syllabus does not – cannot – state the mother tongue instruction is substandard, as do media discourses, albeit reluctantly in some instances. Regardless of whether they represent national minorities, research (e.g. Stockholm University 2021) or assimilatory politics, the media debaters agree that minority language instruction in Sweden is not up to par. However, the solutions advocated are radically different. Representatives of linguistic minorities (e.g. Bender 2020; Kuhmunen 2017; Rajala et al. 2016) address the need for deepened, improved, more differentiated instruction, better training for teachers, guaranteed instruction time, etc., while the advocates of assimilation emphasise the benefits of a monolingual Swedish school. The objective of debaters criticising mother tongue instruction might not be to promote monolingualism in the Swedish school, but the general criticism might be used as a political pretext to abolish or restrict the right to mother tongue instruction – even mother tongue instruction for national minorities.

Tradition and culture are, in other words, key elements and distinctive and important for what can be defined as Sami. The syllabus highlights the knowledge of Sami culture as a way of enabling participation in 'both Sami and Swedish society', implying a tension between the Swedish majority and the Sami minority. The Sami have long lived in vastly different areas geographically and environmentally, so it is difficult to determine what the expression 'Sami environments' in the syllabus refers to. The fact that the syllabus does not explicitly include contemporary Sami lifestyles in different parts of the country, and in different positions in society, might be seen as an implied tension. The dichotomy between an inclusive syllabus and safeguarding Sami languages or culture seems indispensable (cf. Gjerpe 2018). The monolingual Swedish-speaking school system produces monolingual national minority students or bilingual speakers of national minority languages. Thus, the system produces unification and equality – at least on the surface.

To conclude, polarisation is created between Swedish as the majority language and minority languages. Furthermore, the analysis shows that there is a secondary polarisation between non-national minority languages and national minority languages, prejudicing the first and privileging the

latter. We have endeavoured to show a third polarisation between the other four national minority languages and Sami as L1, organisationally cemented by the placement of the Sami syllabus in the curriculum. What is, then, to be done? Perhaps, as Eriksen (2018) suggests, it is time to 'locate fields of opportunities for resistance and change' (p. 31) in the research community and school system.

Note

1. Translations into English by authors.

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