

Relating to the “new” Swedish

Questions and answers on multilingualism
at the Language Council of Sweden

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Q: Here, at the Swedish Pensions Agency, we have been using the term "immigrant languages" in our information material. We use the term in a heading under which we list the languages in which we provide information. Is that an acceptable use of the term?

A letter to the editor in The *Falukuriren* [a local, minor newspaper] once accused us of everyday racism.



Agenda

Background: The "new" immigration

Background: The mission of the Language Council of Sweden

The study: method, material, results

Incoming questions

Outgoing answers

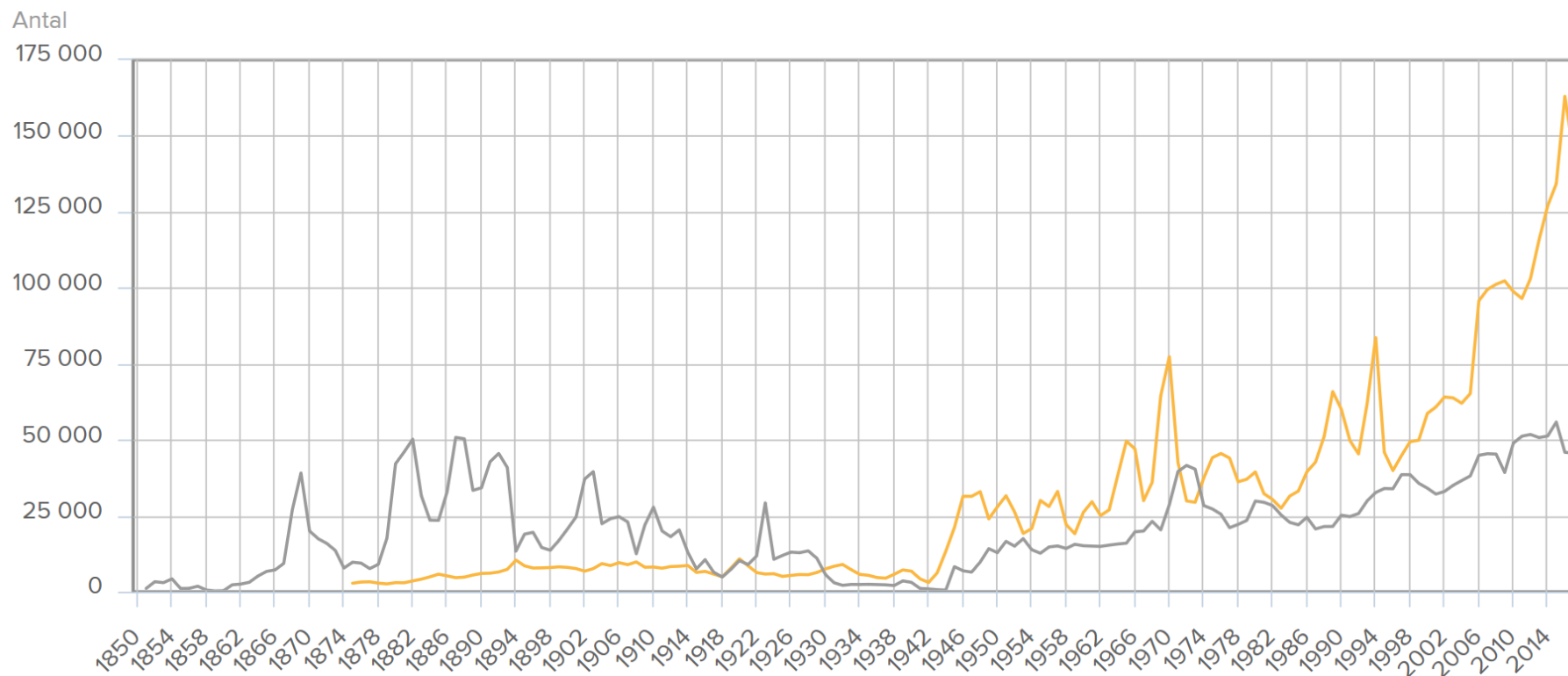
Conclusions





The New Immigration

Immigration to Sweden



Four demographic facts

- 1,9 million Swedes are born abroad (1/6 of the population).
- 25 % of the populations has an L1 other than Swedish.
- Syria is the most common country of birth (outside of Sweden).
- 150-200 languages are spoken in Sweden.



The Language Council of Sweden

The mission of The Language Council of Sweden

- being Sweden's official language cultivating instance
- giving language advice: language advise service to the public
- working for the compliance of The Language Act

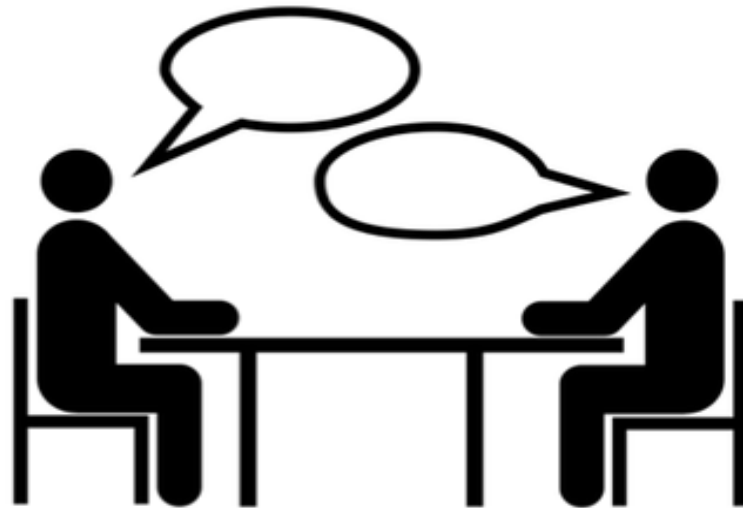
The Language Act

The act aims at protecting Swedish and the linguistic diversity in Sweden alongside with the right for the individual to access language(s).

SVERIGES  
RIKSDAG 

The Advise Service

- The advice service answers 7 600 questions yearly.
- Questions and answers are archived and digitally searchable.





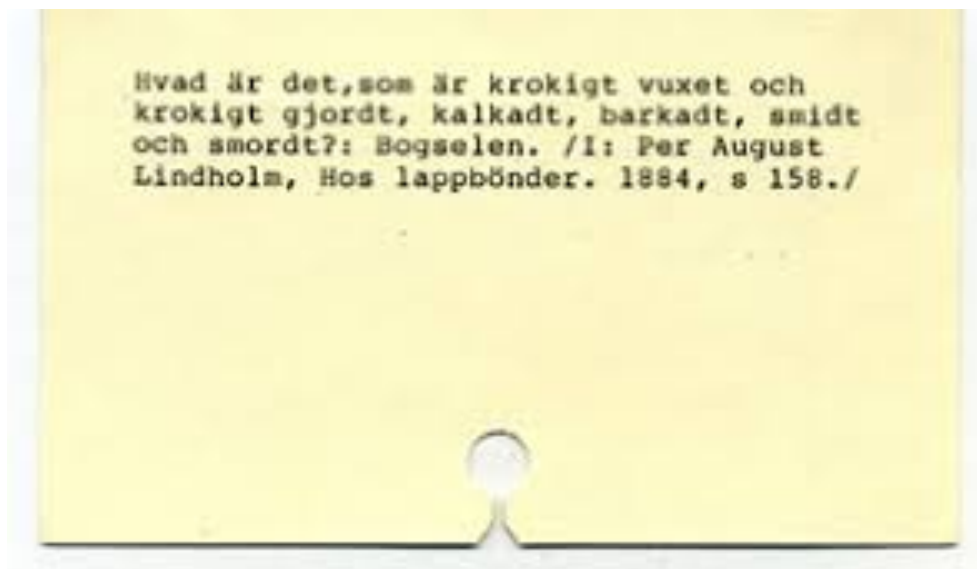
The study

Questions for the study

What/What kind of questions are addressed to the language service 2002-2017?

What answers are provided by the language council?

Material



Archived answered questions 2002- 2017

6 343 sökbara frågor

invandrare = 'immigrant'

197 questions (and/or

answers)

andraspråk = 'second language'

285 questions

flerspråkighet = 'multilingualism'

36 questions

Questions about 'immigrant'; sub grouped

- questions about the word itself
- questions about the L2-field
- questions where immigration is a factor
- questions from immigrants
- questions about the number of speakers of various languages
- questions about compounds denoting ethnic groups (*Swedish-Somalian*)



The word 'immigrant'

I work as a copy writer and am currently producing a printed material in which we wish to use the phrase *new-Swedish design*. Now, we are not sure about the word *new-Swedish*. Does that have any negative connotations or is it standard for a person who recently got a Swedish citizenship?



Questions on the L2-field

I am the headmaster of an educational institute for adults. We discuss whether or not our immigrant students should study English while still learning Swedish.

We think it is better for them to be fluent in Swedish before studying English, since English classes are taught in Swedish.

Is this decision right? Is there any research to underpin our decision?

EXAMPLE

When immigrants are a factor

I find that people overuse the word *talk*. They *talk weather*
And when calling a logistic company you get to speak with their
"talker" (=voice mail).

There is a danger in this overuse of the word *talk*. Our immigrants will
never learn the correct use of the word *speak*!

Questions on Swedish as a second language (285)

- 89% of the questions contain the search word in the heading of a teacher of Swedish as a L2.
- diverse questions – initiated





Second language

Can you advise me on articles about the effects of mother tongue instruction on learning an L2?

Questions on multilingualism (36)

- some questions on multilingual children/families
- some questions on terminology and multilingualism
- some questions about multilingual suburbs



Multilingualism

How should we use languages in our home to promote multilingualism in our children?

The questions: a (tentative) summary

- questions on the multilingual situation
 - questions on how to label the multilingual situation
 - questions that are basically quite irrelevant to that situation
 - relevant questions from language professionals
- no apparent increase in the number of or the quality of questions over time

The counselling service answers...

Does the LCS deal with “the new Swedish”?



EXAMPLE

Yes, the LCS knows about “the new Swedish”



Questions on what kinds of questions the LCS answers:

- “Previously, the LCS was concerned with Swedish only, since the linguistic situation was dominated entirely by Swedish. Today, Sweden is multilingual and we work with other languages as well, including Swedish as an L2”
- “Yes, we answer all kinds of questions relating to Swedish, regardless if they concern Swedish as a first, second or third language.”

EXAMPLE



Yes, the LCS knows about “the new Swedish”

Question about terminology in SLA:

“The term mother tongue usually refers to the language an individual acquires first. The mother tongue is the tool that as child learns to use for symbolic relations in order to code the surroundings. In multilingual families, a child can acquire two different mother tongues simultaneously...”

EXAMPLE

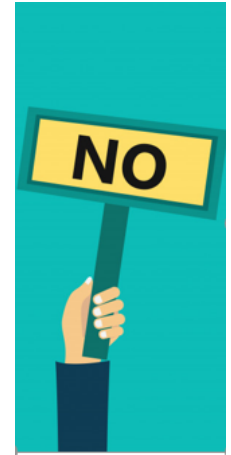


Yes, the LCS knows about “the new Swedish”

Questions on when to use abbreviations:

“the comprehensibility is generally lower when using abbreviations, not least in communication with young persons and persons with Swedish as their L2.”.

EXAMPLE

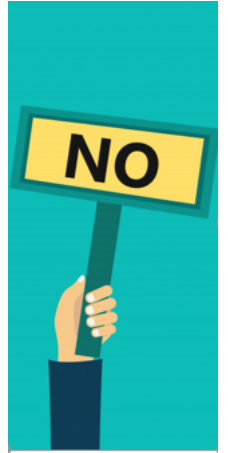


No, the LCS is not concerned with "the new Swedish"

Answer to question from lecturer in Swedish abroad on *the novel's form vs the form of the novel*:

"--- At the LCS, we are not very good at Swedish as an L2, our expertise mainly concerns Swedish as a first language. It is possible that an experienced teacher of Swedish as an L2 knows of rules for this kind of NP. I recommend you to contact ..."

EXAMPLE



No, the LCS is not concerned with
"the new Swedish"

Answer to question on where to turn to for courses in Swedish for
immigrants

"We do not teach Swedish as a second language.

Kind regards NN"

EXAMPLE



No, the LCS is not concerned with "the new Swedish"

Answer to question on whether the word *immigrant* has negative connotations and whether or not to use it

" The word *immigrant* has been used in this context since the middle of the 19th century, at least. The word is formed to the older verb *to immigrate*. I don't see any negative connotations in the word *immigrant*. If anything needs changing, it is the attitudes towards immigration, not the vocabulary.

EXAMPLE



No, the LCS is not concerned with "the new Swedish"

Answer to question on what "correct language" is:

"There are many possible answers to your question. One is that we can draw a clear line between correct and incorrect in very few cases. Those are deviations from standard Swedish produced by those who not yet fully master Swedish, i.e. children and learners of Swedish as an L2. Examples are word orders such as *Igår jag gick* (*Yesterday, I went*). Such deviations are simply incorrect. They are ungrammatical and no adult native speaker of Swedish would produce them. Even native speakers sometimes produce careless mistakes ..."

Summary, analysis, conclusion?

What can we learn from the questions to the LCS?

- The multilingual situation in Sweden does not generate a lot of questions to the LCS.
 - Or does it? (10%)
 - Why so few questions on L2?
 - Language workers are the most frequent customers.
 - Asking a question requires (some) knowledge.
 - Is the LCS not perceived of as an L2-partner?
- Multilingualism perceived as problematic.
- The “best” questions found under the search word SLA.

What can we learn from the answers from the LCS?

- The responsibility for the multilingual situation is ambivalent.
regardless of time and the entering into force of the language Act.
- surprising(?) renunciatory even to questions that are actually "normal" language questions, common for the L1 and L2-fields
- The renunciatory answers need no legitimation.

But: there is obviously competence within the field at all times.

What can we learn from the answers from the LCS?

- There is inhouse competence in the field of multilingualism at all times.
- Questions do not get more frequent och "better" over time – but the answers get better.

