



PLURIDENTITIES

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Work package 4



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Problem statement

Plurilingualism and identity have become key policy priorities in different European contexts, reflecting the understanding that learners develop diverse linguistic repertoires shaping their belonging and participation in schools and society (Council Recommendation, 2018). The Pluridentities multidimensional framework positions formal education as a central arena for fostering, negotiating, or constraining plurilingual identities. It highlights four interdependent components, linguistic capital, learning environments, language policy, and technology, calling for coherence across them. Despite extensive research on multilingual education and identity formation, the interaction of these dimensions in practice remains underexplored. Data from Swedish learning environments will contribute to this inquiry alongside our partner institutions in Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain and Aruba.

Besides Swedish and the 5 officially recognized minority languages spoken in Sweden, the most common minority languages spoken are Arabic, Somali, Persian, Kurdish and English (The Swedish National School Authority, 2023). Though it has no official status in Sweden, English is encountered in almost all sectors of society, its presence having been described as ubiquitous (Mežek, 2024). In a school context, already in 1948, the study of English was established as mandatory by Official Swedish Government Reports (SOU, 1948:27). As a compulsory subject in Swedish upper secondary tuition, English has a central role in the curriculum alongside the study of Swedish. Swedes consistently perform well in the subject of English as compared with their Nordic and European neighbours (Eurostat, 2024).

Education in other subjects may be undertaken via the English language, in so called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Marsh, 2002). Mapping of CLIL programs in Sweden found 27 % of schools use English for subject tuition (Paulsrud, 2016), while more recent mapping conducted by the Swedish National School Authority found 29 schools in 2018. There is a current lack of comprehensive data on how many schools are running CLIL programs but by most accounts, English use for tuition in subjects other than languages is thought to be on the rise (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2025). There is no specific legislation which guides the language of tuition in subject content teaching at

the upper secondary level. All programs must follow the national steering documents which define the central content of tuition and subject aims regardless of the language of study.

While CLIL has been present in Sweden since the 1970s there is not a homogeneous picture of how it takes shape in Swedish classrooms (Sylvén, 2019; Olsson, 2025; Paulsrud, 2016). This means that a language other than Swedish, most often English, may be used in tuition for a specific topic, unit or subject, or that it might be used in all tuition resembling immersion learning scenarios. This variation in CLIL environments is also represented in the data generated here. As in other European contexts where CLIL approaches are practiced, English is the most frequent language of tuition (Sylvén, 2019; Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

Sweden in 2025 is more international and multilingual than when English tuition was initially established as a central part of the school system. Between 2009 and 2018 alone, the number of students with an immigrant background increased sharply from 12% to 20% percent (PISA, 2018). Today, up to a third of upper-secondary students have a first language other than Swedish (PISA, 2018; The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2023). Thus, it may be said that secondary schools in Sweden are multilingual spaces. However, many questions remain about which languages are in use and in what ways. Students encounter English daily in Swedish social spheres and schools are not excluded from this, though the amount of English exposure may vary in terms of teaching approach. In fact, multilingual students may be more likely to choose programs where content and language are integrated (CLIL) and where tuition is occurring through the English language (Apelgren, 2019). In Somers (2017) review of the inclusion of language minority students in CLIL, he finds that CLIL programs may offer significant advantages for students relating to areas such as multilingual proficiency, academic success, valuation of literacy in heritage and other languages, and by strengthening access to socio-economic capital. He thus urges educational policy makers to see CLIL as an equitable path towards linguistic and social integration (Somers, 2017). Of primary interest here is the relationship between learners' language capital, what languages are used, in what contexts, and how these practices are shaping/and being shaped by learners and their learning environments.

There is much left to learn about how Swedish teachers specifically understand and manage language diversity in their classrooms, and how pupils make sense of their linguistic identities within Swedish schooling. The Swedish qualitative dataset provides a lens for examining how teachers and students conceptualize multilingualism and how students experience affirmation, usefulness, and/or marginalization of their identities. This initial analysis aims to explore how linguistic identities are expressed in everyday educational contexts. The study focuses on understanding the circumstances where pluridentities are enabled.

Therefore, the guiding research questions for the Swedish qualitative dataset are:

- 1) How do Swedish secondary school teachers and pupils perceive and negotiate multilingualism and linguistic identities, and language use in everyday classroom practices?
- 2) In what ways do these perceptions and practices differ between CLIL and non-CLIL contexts?

Methodology

The qualitative first phase of the project was conducted in 7 secondary schools in Sweden (non-CLIL=3; CLIL=4). The linguistic landscape of the tuition in these schools varied. In CLIL environments, English was used partially (so called partial CLIL), or completely (full CLIL) to convey subject content knowledge to the students studying there. In data collected at non-CLIL schools in the study, all tuition, except for tuition in English or modern languages is through Swedish. In these settings, Swedish is used as the language of tuition, but it is known that there is increasing linguistic diversity in terms of speakers there as well.

Qualitative data collection targeted school interaction, pedagogical choices, language use and perceptions of identity. Teachers and students were in focus:

Teachers (n = 7)

Secondary school teachers were recruited from Swedish schools. Attempts were made to include participant teachers (and students) of different subjects, backgrounds and

experiences. That said, consenting teachers in the Swedish qualitative dataset were all language teachers who represent variation in terms of their experience with multilingual learners, language policies, and instructional approaches (e.g., mainstream Swedish-medium instruction, vs. programmes with tuition in English i.e. CLIL).

Pupils (n=8 focus group interviews)

Focus groups included adolescents aged 15–18. Participation was voluntary and in accordance with ethical guidelines. A total of 29 students participated in the interviews. Groups consisted of a range of linguistic constellations, including L1 Swedish-speaking pupils, and students who spoke multiple languages, including heritage or home languages. Student interviews highlighted questions of identity development, experiences of recognition or marginalisation, classroom language and school language use practices, insights on learning in English, and perceptions of belonging.

Data was gathered using semi-structured one-on-one teacher interviews, exploring teacher beliefs, practices, and interpretations of multilingualism. Pupil focus groups included anywhere from 1 to 6 participants in the same semi-structured way and were aimed at understanding identity experiences, language use, belonging and policy perception.

Semi-structured question guides were used to ensure comparability across landscapes of study. Questions addressed were the following:

- Which languages are being used in and outside of Swedish classrooms?
- How do teachers and students understand linguistic identity?
- How is the study of languages other than English viewed by CLIL and non-CLIL students?
- What role does school policy play in shaping linguistic practice, if any?
- What does means to be multilingual in a Swedish school setting?

Each interview and focus group was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Teacher interviews and student focus groups were then analysed using NVivo (Lumivvero, 2025) to recognise the initial patterns in the responses. Codes are organised in thematic clusters which make visible participant perceptions of multilingualism, exclusion and/or inclusion of

languages, and the role of the teacher in school/classroom language use. The framework underscores coherence among these components emphasising their interdependence. The results presented here are based on initial analysis. While they offer important early insights, a more in-depth analysis will follow at a later stage.

Results

Preliminary results from the qualitative Swedish data are presented here, divided between the two participant samples, the teachers and students in comparative analysis.

Furthermore, findings are presented in consideration of the primary language of tuition, either English or Swedish depending on the approach to teaching which was used.

Student responses

Students studying in CLIL programs were characterised by varied multilingual backgrounds, where either English, or Swedish and at times English, was the language of tuition. Among upper secondary students who studied using full CLIL, their choice of school was related to the desire to study primarily in English. Students of Swedish National Programs must meet Swedish language requirements to study at the upper-secondary level, so it may be supposed that though the Swedish level of interviewed CLIL students varied, most could have studied in Swedish language programs if they wished¹. Students studying in CLIL environments agreed that English was necessary to facilitate the academic and social practices taking place at school given the varied language backgrounds of the student population. Non-CLIL students also described the inclusion of English in their use of Swedish in terms of socialization with their friends.

Many of the students studying using CLIL approaches had one or more parents from another country. There was also a small subset of the interviewed CLIL students who had moved to Sweden with families due to job relocation. The importance of English as a lingua franca, either at the school, or in terms of its importance for future use by such students was

¹ All primary, secondary and university education is without cost for students in Swedish schools, even that which occurs outside of the public sector as it is subsidized.

not questioned by the students. However, Swedish and other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin and Arabic were also named as being important languages for the future. Use of English as the primary language of tuition was as a communicative bridge, helping to serve the student population, but it was also chosen specifically as some students (often of Swedish origin) desired further academic challenges and the chance to develop their proficiency in English in an environment of near total English language use through subject content tuition in English.

Both groups in the study (CLIL and non-CLIL), underlined the importance of knowing the Swedish language. Students discussed Swedish in terms of their own use and language development, though often from different perspectives as L1 or L2 speakers of Swedish (present in both groups). Non-CLIL students, like their CLIL studying peers, attended mandatory tuition in English and modern languages (e.g. German, French and Spanish). Students in CLIL programs, however, were likely to describe themselves as multilinguals, where fluency in English was considered a significant part of their linguistic capital. This capital included other languages too. Swedish was often one of these languages, and other Nordic languages (e.g. Norwegian, Danish, Icelandic, Finnish) also figured among languages spoken by the interviewed participants. Students in CLIL programs were native speakers of Swedish or learning Swedish as an additional language and were studying at various levels. A few students (L2 speakers of both Swedish and English) also undertook studies in their mother tongue. This tuition was a part of a course in guided self-study.

Discourses present in the responses about the use of Swedish among the CLIL groups, most often surrounded specific domains of language usage. For the partial CLIL group, Swedish was used in tuition of subject content or at home and in social spheres, while for the full CLIL group, Swedish was used outside of the classroom in the lunchroom or the school corridors. Another topic which was discussed by students related to their Swedish development. Full CLIL students spoke of academic and subject specific language gaps in Swedish, often encountered when they struggled to discuss course content learned in English with their Swedish speaking peers or with family. They struggled at times to use appropriate language in Swedish because of their understandings of the concepts in

English. They were also more likely to discuss language use in terms of their identity, both in terms of how they were perceived, or how they perceived themselves. Their language choices were connected to academic and professional goals for the future.

Discussions surrounding language practices, in the non-CLIL group concerned conditions for learning modern languages. Students mentioned that outside exposure to modern languages (e.g. French, German, or Spanish) is comparatively much less than exposure to English. In contrast, music, extramural activities and social media are arenas for natural contact with English which were brought up by students. Students also mentioned the influence of English words on their own use of Swedish discussing language mixing and slang as commonplace.

Students in both partial and full CLIL programs spoke quite positively about learning languages other than English and about learning other languages in the future. They spoke in detail about metalinguistic skills, demonstrating language awareness and discussing challenges of studying grammar. In one exchange, a student discussed the difficulty of shifting from one Spanish class, which had been conducted via an English textbook and through Spanish language tuition supported by English, to one at a neighbouring school where tuition was supported by Swedish. Though she was herself a native speaker of Swedish, she found this shift very challenging as she often did not know terms in Swedish. Students in the focus group discussed the challenges of grammar tuition in various languages, though they never questioned the importance of learning these languages.

Indeed, another difference between the CLIL and non-CLIL groups regarding the study of other languages had to do with the variation of languages discussed where languages, particularly: Mandarin and Sign Language were considered alongside more typical choices like Spanish. Social spaces and friendships in the CLIL environments also had an impact on language use and learning as students described learning words and expressions in other languages (e.g. Hindi or Finnish) from their friends. Much of this informal learning of languages took place outside of the classroom, in halls, the library or lunchroom.

In terms of language in use at schools, there was little mention of policy which guided language practices or official rules about which languages were acceptable. In both CLIL and non-CLIL programs the use of a specific language in language classes was discussed as the norm (e.g. Swedish in Swedish class, English in English class). Students did not report that they often shifted between their languages, either individually through note-taking practices, in conversation with teacher (in Swedish), or with peers. In many cases there was not another speaker of the same home/heritage language in the class to converse with. When this was possible, however, it was acknowledged to be of great benefit. To the students, it appeared to be teachers and their language ideologies that decided when, or if a specific language should be used. Nevertheless, it was also noted by students that they took control of their linguistic choices: for instance, they describe switching between languages when required. If they were told to use a specific language (e.g. English only) they would do so in the moment, to later switch back to Swedish when the teacher left the room. There was, however, a lot of variation in the CLIL environments in the study in terms of the norms of use and practices described by different students and class constellations. Though there was a language policy in two of the CLIL locations, students were not aware of them. In CLIL and non-CLIL programs, language support in the form of specified resource personnel (whose role it was to provide academic support to recently arrived immigrant students) was also discussed, as these individuals provided support in the home/heritage languages spoken by students.

Teacher responses

Interviewed teachers identified primarily as teachers of language in the subjects of Swedish, Swedish as a second language, English, and modern languages such as French or Spanish. Participant teachers taught in both CLIL (n=4), and non-CLIL (n=3) programs and most were trained to teach in Sweden. Like the students, they spoke of the importance of language and linguistic capital, though their perspective tended to focus more on learning as an outcome. Some of the teachers in the study were themselves multilingual with fluency in multiple languages; this was often, though not exclusively, the case of those teachers who taught in CLIL programs.

Specific training and/or theme days at school aimed to highlight students' multilingual identities were organised in CLIL environments. However, while participants expressed an awareness of the importance of languages and culture, they also acknowledged that work done on the language policy and actualising it in the classroom was ongoing. Supplemental teacher training had occurred, but due to high staff turnover, not all teachers had received the same training. Teachers did not mention multilingualism as having been a significant part of the course work undertaken during their original teacher training. Some teachers mentioned certain students receiving pedagogical support in the form of Language Support Specialists whose role it was to provide guidance and help support speakers of home/heritage languages in navigating the linguistic demands of school in Swedish. This appears to have occurred at both CLIL and non-CLIL environments.

Regardless of the language of tuition or teaching approach, the interviewed teachers discussed both the many advantages but also challenges which multilingual learners faced. Advantages related to a heightened motivation to learn, cognitive gains from being able to connect with subject content in different ways through (e.g. notetaking in different languages) and metalinguistic awareness which comes from being able to engage with phraseology and grammar in other languages as a point of departure for knowledge in the classroom. However, at the same time, challenges related to gaps in student knowledge of language structures or fluency in L1, were mentioned. For the study of Swedish, gaps in language fluency represented real challenges for L2 speakers of Swedish with an immigrant background. Thoughts about how these gaps were viewed or might be addressed, varied.

One teacher mentioned the challenge of encouraging students to speak using their home language as a scaffold for subject learning, as they did not understand what the students were speaking about to provide support or correct errors. Another teacher mentioned that students who undertook studies in English might be doing so because of their background and identity; a common identity as a multilingual student might unify students facilitating subject learning in English. English in this way might be acting as a social equalizer in CLIL environments of study as all students, Swedes and non-Swedes, come to the subject content learning environment from the same perspective as a language learner. One

multilingual teacher in the study described having grown up understanding how isolating it can be to identify as belonging to a language group other than the dominant culture where you live. In this way, she said, learning environments where teaching happens through yet another language, can help such students to feel that they have a space where they belong.

As for rules, or policies, regarding the use of specific languages at school, some teachers conveyed that while all languages are allowed, they perhaps were not always appropriate. In particular, some named language classrooms as spaces where students should primarily employ the target language. This perspective was not held by all the participating teachers. A distinction was also made between general use of languages other than English or Swedish between classmates for small talk, and more academically targeted use of a language. Targeted use of languages other than English or Swedish was described as use which related to metalinguistic purposes such as analysing language choices or reflecting on own use. It was also thought that students perhaps did not know they were allowed to use languages other than Swedish or English in class to that end. This idea found some support in the data generated through student interviews as well.

Conclusions

It was clear that the teachers' own language ideologies seemed to define what messages students received about how and when they might use languages other than Swedish or English in the classroom. Though a few versions of local language policies were in place, they are not the norm. Language use in Sweden is regulated instead through the national steering documents which schools are obliged to follow. Local school policies, when they are found, are additions to existing guidelines. Students in any case, are largely unaware of these policies, and teachers were generally not working from them as guiding structures when they were found. Instead, it is rather norms of language use as related to teaching approach (i.e. partial or full CLIL, or non-CLIL) which steered language practices in the classroom, and unofficial norms about when, and what type of language mixing may be appropriate, which seemed to govern language practices in place in schools. Language use seemed to be negotiated locally in Swedish schools based on language practices of

individual speakers, the needs of student populations, and teacher beliefs in specific contexts. When English-Only or Swedish-Only discourses were a part in the student focus groups, it was related to specific named teachers and not general rules. Students and teachers both said there were no official rules which they considered in this matter, the only exception relating to language use in the language classroom (i.e. Swedish tuition, or modern language) or if the use of a specific language was thought to exclude others. Pedagogical translanguaging was discussed in terms of benefits of encouraging students to take notes in other languages, while there were also concerns about being able to support students if teachers did not speak the languages students were using in their content learning. In short, it would seem that language use practices are guided by locally driven factors and practitioners.

Participant teachers in both CLIL and non-CLIL schools actively considered the language use of their students both in and outside of their classrooms. Their opinions about when and how to employ languages other than Swedish or English varied. Multilingual identities were a valuable part of the school environment. However, challenges in terms of the learning of Swedish and supporting all home languages (including Swedish) in continued language and literacy development to support learning in non-language subjects, were also common topics brought up in both teacher and student interviews. No teaching group felt that they had received sufficient teacher training in multilingual matters. However, schools where CLIL approaches to learning were practiced named opportunities for teacher development which aimed at targeting the multilingual backgrounds of students. It was also in these schools where there were local language policies, though there seemed to be room for further anchoring of these policies among the staff and students. It was clear that the teachers' own language ideologies seemed to define what messages students received about how and when they might use languages other than Swedish in the English in the classroom. There was not one clear vision from the participating teachers and students as to best practice in terms of language use. This finding aligns with insights from second language acquisition research, in a field in which multiple theoretical perspectives inform our understanding of language learning (Ellis, 2010).

It is also of further interest to consider the term multilingual itself and what is implied by its use in different contexts within the Swedish data, by teacher participants and students. It was clear that *multilingual* in the full CLIL context also included the use of English and Swedish by the students. Multilingual was defined by CLIL students in terms of cognitive flexibility, different contexts of language use, and levels of fluency, together with the number of languages spoken (more than two). Multilingualism had a positive and inclusive connotation in these environments. In slight contrast, it may be said that *multilingual* was used by students and teachers in non-CLIL contexts to describe students other than the interviewed participants themselves, i.e. not including learned language competencies of modern language students or competencies in English. This perspective on multilinguals/multilingualism may be contrasted with EU 2+1 language directives, as Swedish students' skills may not be fully recognized if they do not see themselves as participating in the development of multilingual competencies when they study English (Fuster and Bardel, 2024). The use of English was contributing to identity development in terms of the language used by students (CLIL and non-CLIL) and the culture they were consuming.

At the same time as the use of English is supporting students' academic development, and potentially their social integration in both CLIL and non-CLIL school environments, it may also serve to distance students from their home/heritage language, subject content knowledge, or peers if pedagogical language supports are not put into place. This makes continued development and support of L1 in tandem with the language of tuition (and the majority language where different) of vital importance. It may also be the case that L1 speakers of Swedish, need more subject specific support in Swedish as a means of addressing domain loss due to subject content study in English. This is also the case as regards students in the Swedish learning environment who have home/heritage languages other than Swedish. Though there are publicly funded and legally mandated mother tongue programs available to students with home languages other than Swedish, these classes are not obligatory, and it is often not the case that upper secondary students continue to partake in them. Arguably they may be of continued importance for students in their subject content development as they age. In this way, the Swedish language and students'

other linguistic resources, may be said to be of strategic importance as a feature of any CLIL program to prevent domain loss and help support students' language identity development and future language use.

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