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Speech

Draft action programme
for the Swedish language

Summary

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Why do we need an action programme?

Our assignment has been to put forward a proposal for an action programme for the Swedish language. This programme has two intended purposes: firstly, to advance the position of Swedish, and secondly, to ensure that everyone in Sweden has equally good opportunities to acquire the Swedish language. An action programme for the Swedish language is needed because the language situation in Sweden has changed.

- English has won an increasingly strong position internationally, thereby also becoming a more and more important language in our country.
- Sweden has become an increasingly multilingual country, primarily because of immigration but also as a result of the elevation some years ago of five languages to the status of national minority languages.
- There is greater demand in society at large for an ability to use language well both orally and in writing.

The change in the language situation affects linguistic conditions in our country in several different ways.

If we switch to the exclusive use of English in certain connections, Swedish will cease to develop in these areas. In the longer term, this will give rise to domain losses; Swedish terms and concepts will no longer be produced and the position of Swedish in Sweden will weaken. At the same time, it is obvious that in many contexts it is necessary to employ English and that more and more people need increasing proficiency in English. What can we do to ensure that Swedish continues to develop as an all-round language, while not hindering the employment of English in all the connections in which its use is required, and making sure that everyone acquires the knowledge of English they need?

In Sweden today, more and more people speak Swedish as a second or foreign language. This poses a severe challenge to the educational system, as it is essential that everyone has equally good opportunities to acquire the Swedish language. It also has an impact on language matters more broadly, e.g. the view we should take of Swedish that is spoken imperfectly or with a foreign accent. What does a “good command of spoken and written Swedish” mean in a multilingual, multicultural society?

As a result of the increasing demands for an ability to use the language well both orally and in writing, it is becoming more and more important that everyone – irrespective of their linguistic or social background – is given the opportunity to acquire a rich, practical language. Changes in working life, the increasing length of most people’s education and the emergence of an information society in which IT is increasingly vital in most connections mean that a person who lacks a good command of the written language will face serious problems, in both working and private life. There has been a general

intensification of demands for good oral skills. At the same time, the disparities between different social groups in terms of reading habits and consumption of various media have widened over the past decade. These disparities affect the individual's opportunities to acquire the written language. Although the Swedish school system as a whole achieves good results by international comparison, a not insignificant proportion of pupils leave school without adequate reading and writing skills. What can we do to ensure that *everyone* is able to develop a rich, practical language?

Three points to ensure

In the light of the twofold purpose specified for our action programme, we have chosen to aim to ensure three points by the proposals we present:

- Swedish shall be a complete language, serving and uniting our society.
- Swedish in official and public use shall be correct and shall function well.
- Everyone shall have a right to language: Swedish, their mother tongue and foreign languages.

One major part of the report has been devoted to each of these three general aims (Parts II-IV).

A complete language, serving and uniting our society

Swedish has long enjoyed an unquestioned place as Sweden's principal language. Swedish has been used in all domains of society, for example, administration, justice, the political system, all levels of the educational system, working life and culture. Now the use of Swedish is diminishing in some areas, with English taking over instead.

Our measures to ensure that Swedish remains a complete language, serving and uniting our society, aim essentially to promote the employment of Swedish in different sectors of society without hindering necessary use of English and other foreign languages.

Education and research

In the educational field, English is particularly widely used. This is true in the first instance of higher education and research, but even at secondary school level classes in English have become increasingly common.

With respect to *compulsory and upper secondary school*, the action programme contains the following measures:

1. In all schools in which classes are held in foreign languages (content and language integrated learning and teaching, or SPRINT), such programmes shall be monitored closely and evaluated on a continuous basis.
2. In cases where SPRINT is practised extensively, the legal basis of this type of education shall be established by special regulations.
3. The regulatory framework for upper secondary school shall be amended to require schools to teach Swedish in all years of upper secondary education.

With respect to *higher education and research*, the action programme contains the following measures:

4. Universities and other institutes of higher education should augment elements in their students' programmes that promote better oral and written skills in both Swedish and English, and should also, in certain cases, require a more advanced previous knowledge of Swedish.
5. Measures shall be taken to promote parallel employment of English and Swedish in research and scholarship.
6. One objective of educational programmes at Swedish universities and other institutes of higher education shall be that the students acquire a capacity to exchange knowledge in their areas of specialisation in both national and international connections, both orally and in writing, and for diverse target groups.
7. A review shall be undertaken of the requirements for vocational qualifications from institutes of higher education. In relevant cases, a requirement shall be introduced that graduates possess an adequate spoken and written knowledge of Swedish for their profession.

Politics and administration

In the political and administrative area, we pay particular attention to the possible significance of Swedish membership of the European Union, but also touch on the use of Swedish in more purely domestic political and administrative affairs.

With regard to the *position of Swedish in the EU*, the action programme contains the following measures:

8. The Government shall lay down official Swedish guidelines for the position and use of Swedish in the EU, and shall continue its annual assessments and reports to the Riksdag on whether the requirements in the guidelines are being met and whether the necessary resources are forthcoming in the EU.
9. A study shall be made of ways in which Sweden can support the education and training of interpreters *from* Swedish.
10. Studies shall be made of document use and information flows where EU texts are concerned.
11. The development of translation tools for use by Swedish translators shall be closely monitored.

With regard to the *domestic administration*, the action programme contains the following measure:

12. In normal cases, the Swedish language shall be used in public administration.

Working life, market and consumer issues, culture and the media, information technology, health and medical care

Language aspects of working life, the market, culture, information technology and health care are important to Swedish as a complete language, serving and uniting our society. The action programme includes the following measures aimed at promoting the position of Swedish in these areas:

13. The use of Swedish in working life shall be promoted and in certain cases enjoined by regulation. The consequences of using other languages in working life shall be monitored.
14. The use of Swedish in the consumer area shall be promoted and in certain cases enjoined by regulation and the consequences of using other languages shall be studied.
15. The position of the Swedish language in culture and the media shall be advanced.
16. The use of Swedish language software by schools should be supported and encouraged.
17. Individuals educated in other countries who are to work in health and medical care should be given the language knowledge they need to exercise their profession in Sweden.

Swedish terms and expressions

If Swedish is to be a complete language, serving and uniting our society, we must be able to use it in all areas where we want to do so. One prerequisite here is that it is possible to use Swedish terms and expressions. In order to ensure that Swedish terms and expressions are available for use, our programme includes the following points:

18. Measures shall be taken to ensure that Swedish terms and expressions can be generated in all those areas in which we want to be able to use Swedish.
19. Work on terminology should be integrated into the efforts being made to build up “soft infrastructure” in the IT area.

Multilingual Sweden

Many languages are spoken in Sweden today. Apart from Swedish, the languages used include five national minority languages, sign language and a wide range of immigrant languages. Moreover, we learn a variety of foreign languages, primarily English, which are used in varying degree in working life and other areas. In addition, we belong to the Nordic language community. Our knowledge and use of and attitudes towards different languages have great significance for Swedish society and for the future development of language matters. The fundamental position taken by the Committee is that we need a common language – Swedish – to be able to embrace and benefit from the riches that a multilingual, multicultural society has to offer. This means that everyone must have opportunities to acquire the Swedish language, develop their mother tongue and obtain an adequate knowledge of English and other foreign languages. The action programme includes the following measures to promote Sweden’s continued development as a multilingual society:

20. Measures shall be taken to bring about a positive change in attitudes towards the Swedish language and different linguistic varieties.
21. Measures shall be taken to strengthen the Nordic language community.
22. Minority and immigrant languages in Sweden should receive support.
23. Measures shall be taken to support access to media in minority and immigrant languages.
24. The position of sign language shall be clarified. Measures shall be taken to strengthen and develop sign language.
25. Modern languages shall be given a stronger position in Swedish education.

A correct and well-functioning language

A variety of language planning organisations have long been actively engaged in encouraging and facilitating good language use; we may mention, not least, the efforts that have been made to promote clear and simple texts from official sources. However, new challenges have arisen and measures must be taken to ensure that Swedish in official and public use remains correct and continues to function well. Here we discuss three areas: the mass media, public administration and IT.

The language of the mass media

In the course of the last decade, the media sector has undergone radical change: the conditions of production have been transformed and there are now a large number of actors on an increasingly internationalised market. The action programme includes the following measures to promote correct and well-functioning Swedish in the media sector:

- 26. Measures shall be taken to strengthen the position of Swedish in the education and subsequent training of journalists and information officers.
- 27. Measures shall be taken to promote favourable developments in the language used in the media.

The language of public administration

The task of producing clear and comprehensible official documents has been complicated by new challenges arising from Sweden's membership of the EU; texts that have originated in the EU are not infrequently felt to be awkward and difficult to understand. Efforts to promote the use of clear, comprehensible language by Swedish administrative authorities more generally have not reached a satisfactory conclusion either, and need to be pursued further with energy and determination. The action programme includes the following measures to promote correct and well-functioning Swedish in the public sector:

- 28. Every government agency shall be given a clearer responsibility for its own language planning.
- 29. The Government shall continue to report to the Riksdag on the language planning measures taken by central administrative bodies.
- 30. Central support to language planning by official bodies shall be maintained and extended into new areas.
- 31. Sweden shall urge the EU to set up translation departments in the different member states.

32. Sweden shall continue to urge that the EU work to produce simpler, more comprehensible and clearer texts.
33. Efforts should continue to improve the quality of Swedish EU texts.

Information technology

The development of IT affects the conditions for both reading and writing. Documents intended for reading off a computer screen are governed by very different factors than conventional printed texts. Similarly, writing processes have also changed since the advent of computers. IT also provides new tools for normalisation and standardisation of language, in part through the language support functions (e.g. spelling, grammar and style checking programmes) that are available. The action programme contains the following measures in response to the impact of IT on Swedish:

34. The effects of the computer culture on language shall be studied.
35. Swedish computer terms and expressions shall be developed.
36. Language planning organisations shall monitor quality developments in language support software and have the authority to grade and label such programmes.
37. Language quality should be included in the evaluation criteria in public procurement of IT services.
38. Access to IT should be improved, e.g. by further language planning and terminology measures and by language initiatives in popular adult education.

The right of all to language

Our identity and self-image are inseparable from language, and it is through language that we experience and understand our existence, express our thoughts and feelings and interact. Language is also the key to education and a sine qua non for participating in public discussion, working politically and asserting one's rights in various connections. Yet it is clearly not the case that everyone enjoys equally good opportunities to acquire language, and this results in various types of inequality. Not least, disparities in access to language give rise to imbalances in terms of power: as has often been pointed out, "language is power".

We have chosen to base our proposals for promoting the right of all to language on four different types of factors: the fact that there are social differences in reading and media consumption habits, the fact that language is variable and that the different linguistic tasks we perform differ in their degree of difficulty, the fact that for many people Swedish is a second or foreign language, and the fact that various disabilities can cause different types of language difficulties.

Social disparities and language acquisition

There are clear indications that children from different socio-economic backgrounds have different prospects of acquiring the language. One key factor consists of the substantial social disparities observable in the reading and media consumption habits in the home environment. The action programme contains the following measures to combat these types of differences:

39. Efforts should be made to stimulate reading and storytelling in children's home and pre-school environments.
40. All parents should receive information at an early stage about small children's need for linguistic stimulation and about the important role played by parents in this respect.
41. Central government shall continue to support the publication and distribution of books and the acquisition of literature by public and school libraries, and shall support initiatives to promote reading.
42. Newspaper distribution support shall be increased.

Forms of language, language proficiency, and language and gender

The road to public standard language varies in length for different people in that the home language they start out with may be closer to or more remote from national standard Swedish. Similarly, the ability to manage different linguistic tasks varies from group to group. There are also differences between the language and linguistic circumstances of men and women, differences that have an impact in school, working life and elsewhere.

The action programme includes the following measures aimed at combating the linguistic inequality that can result from speaking a *divergent form of the language*:

43. Continuing professional development for teachers shall include issues relating to language variation.
44. The language development of children from environments where a strong dialect is spoken shall be examined and ways shall be studied in which schools can support the development of linguistic proficiency in both dialect and the national standard language.
45. Efforts shall be made to promote a more open attitude towards and tolerance of linguistic variation.

The action programme includes the following measures aimed at promoting the right of all to a *functional language*:

46. A study shall be undertaken of pupils not achieving the knowledge targets in Swedish to ascertain whether the difficulties they encounter are attributable to social and structural reasons.
47. An investigation shall be undertaken to find out why many teachers do not continue in the profession.
48. Central government shall continue to enable the formal and popular adult education systems to operate on a broad basis.

The action programme includes the following measures in the area *language and gender*:

49. Efforts shall be made to encourage gender-based research on the role of language in school and on the linguistic situation of women and men in public life.
50. Measures shall be taken against language use that perpetuates gender roles and makes women invisible.

Second language issues

In Sweden there are more than a million people with non-Swedish backgrounds, and for many of them Swedish is a second language. Obviously, when acquiring Swedish, these people do not start out from the same position as those who have Swedish as their first language. The right of all to language means that everyone must enjoy equally good opportunities to acquire the Swedish language. But the right of all to language must also be seen in terms of the many different mother tongues now spoken in Sweden – how can speakers of these languages be given an opportunity to become proficient in their various languages? The action programme includes the following measures:

51. Further attention should be given to the role of language in school for pupils with non-Swedish backgrounds.
52. Measures shall be taken to strengthen Swedish as a second language.
53. Measures shall be taken to strengthen mother tongue support in pre-school and mother tongue instruction in school.
54. Measures shall be taken to strengthen Swedish instruction for immigrants (SFI).
55. The linguistic and cultural proficiency of immigrants should be turned to better account and their participation in formal and popular adult education promoted in various ways.

Disabilities

It is obvious that various forms of disability can give rise to difficulties both in acquiring and using language. One example would be reading and writing difficulties/dyslexia, another sight and hearing impairments, which naturally affect the ability to take in written or spoken language. The action programme includes the following measures aimed at promoting the access of people with disabilities to language:

56. Children's health services should note all deviations from normal speech and language development as early as possible and more effectively than has been the case.
57. Delays and disturbances in speech and language development should be assessed and treated by speech therapists at as early a stage as possible.
58. Pre-schools and schools should identify children with various forms of language-related disabilities as early as possible, so that special measures can be initiated.
59. A study of disability aids shall be carried out from a language perspective.
60. Measures shall be taken to further improve access to the media and culture for individuals with different types of language-related disabilities.
61. Organisations representing people with disabilities and active in language areas perform important work and should receive continued support.

Language planning: research, policy, legislation and organisation

Our assignment has included the task of considering whether it would serve a useful purpose to introduce legislation on the position of the Swedish language. Our terms of reference have further required us to follow and encourage initiatives in the language technology area and propose measures to promote translation tools and technological language aids. Finally, we have had the task of making proposals regarding the future mission and organisation of Swedish language planning in the light of the action programme we present. Our draft action programme also raises issues relating to research on language planning and language policy. We discuss these issues in Part V of our final report.

Research on language planning

Universities and other institutes of higher education conduct fundamental research on the structure and use of language and on language change, and these institutes educate students to be teachers, journalists, language consultants, language researchers, etc. But also where issues more directly

linked to language planning are concerned, the activities of language departments and the knowledge and skills they possess are crucial. It is therefore important that research related to language planning is carried out. The action programme includes the following measures aimed at promoting research on language planning:

62. A special initiative shall be taken to promote research on language planning.
63. A resource facility shall be built up for Swedish research in the field of terminology.
64. Measures should be taken to safeguard – and in certain cases expand – existing scholarly excellence in minority and immigrant languages and in sign language.
65. Mother tongue teaching methods should be made an object of research and development projects.

Language policy

Policy decisions of various types have consequences for the language sector. Until now Sweden has not had a language policy in the strict sense of the word; language issues have instead been dealt with as part of other areas such as education policy, cultural policy, minorities policy, integration policy, etc. As indicated, the language situation in Sweden has changed in many respects. The action programme includes the following measures concerning language policy:

66. Language policy shall constitute a separate policy area.
67. The objectives of language policy shall be
 - that all people shall have a right to language: Swedish, their mother tongue and foreign languages
 - that Swedish shall be a complete language, serving and uniting our society
 - that Swedish in official and public use shall be correct and function well.
68. A single ministry should be given overall responsibility for language policy.

Language technology initiatives

If we want to be able in future to use Swedish in a diversity of contexts, it is essential that language technology products are developed for Swedish, as for other languages. Language technology, moreover, has much to offer both the Swedish language and its individual users. Computer-assisted translation of texts to and from Swedish could make it easier for many users both to access

and to disseminate information. Language technology also opens the way for us to obtain information from government agencies and other bodies in a radically new manner. The action programme includes the following measures aimed at promoting language technology development for Swedish:

69. Work on building up a national language bank in the form of shared Swedish text and speech databases, lexical resources, etc., shall continue.
70. Research and development in the language technology area shall be strengthened.
71. A language technology secretariat shall be established, with responsibility for coordination.
72. Machine translation for Swedish shall be developed.
73. Language planning organisations should contribute to language technology development by continuing their work on language standardisation.

Language legislation and language consequence assessment

There is no statute declaring Swedish to be the official language of Sweden. The Committee's assignment has included examining whether it would be appropriate to introduce language legislation in Sweden and how such legislation could be formulated. We have also considered ways of conducting a language consequences assessment of official decisions. Our proposals are:

74. A special Act shall be introduced that establishes the status of Swedish as Sweden's principal language.
75. The Committee's Ordinance shall be amended to require a mandatory assessment of the language consequences of proposals made in Committee reports.

Tasks and organisation of language planning

Because of the new language situation in Sweden, language planning faces new tasks. Our terms of reference require us to present proposals for the future tasks and organisation of Swedish language planning. The action programme includes the following measures:

Language planning tasks:

76. Central language planning, with central government financing, should have the following tasks: work on the corpus; status and learning projects; advice and information services; terminology activities; language bank activities; language technology; central support to language planning at government agencies; follow-up and evaluation; and international cooperation.

Organisation of language planning:

77. Central language planning activities, with central government financing, shall be coordinated under a body charged with official government responsibility for the area.
78. A new government agency responsible for language planning tasks shall be formed, to be known as the Language Council of Sweden. The central government shall phase out its engagement in the Swedish Language Council and Finnish Language Council in Sweden.
79. Terminology activities shall constitute a separate area of activity for the Language Council of Sweden.
80. The Government Offices should retain its language planning department. Language planning associated with EU activities should be an important task for the Government Offices.