

Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik

Unpacking dominant  
discourses in higher education  
language policy

A critical study of language policy in  
Swedish higher education

av

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## Abstract

- Title: Unpacking dominant discourses in higher education language policy. A critical study of language policy in Swedish higher education
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The overall purpose of the thesis is to investigate dominant discourses operating in the changing of HE concerning questions of language policy. It has been studied at a national level as well as an institutional level in Sweden. The research questions address language ideals and language competences.

The analyses reveal that discourse strands of *economy / market*, *inclusion* and *success*, often entangled, operate in shaping what and how languages are valued, and what expected language competences academics and students need. An overall finding suggests that economic reasons and market values have become more salient in construing 'language', concurrently defining participation and prosperity.

The findings show that it is the parallel languages of Swedish and English that are construed as language ideals. Swedish is constructed as essential for protective and democratic reasons. Academics are construed as protectors of Swedish scientific terminology and as facilitators of Swedish scientific learning. English is created as an essential international language for the interests of a liberalised research and educational market for professional, rational and participatory reasons. However, the findings suggest that the way English is understood has transformed from the 1970s.

Multilingualism, beyond Swedish-English bilingualism, and minority languages and immigrant languages are not valued in HE. The potential linguistic repertoire of multilingual students and academics are not recognised. Transnational students and academics are construed as English proficient, only. English-language students are construed as important for universities. Market values and market forces incorporate success for students, but also for universities through these students.

The constructs of language ideals and competences in language policy of Swedish higher education institutions reveal a parallel Swedish-English language ideal; prevalent ideas of linguistic progress for students and of subject-lecturers as language teachers; impact of the plain language movement; and commodifying processes.

Finally, the educational implications of the findings are discussed in relation to academic work.