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Sweden and Informal Language Learning

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the informal learning of languages in Sweden. The country has a long tradition of teaching foreign languages in school, but formal language learning is currently in many ways ‘challenged’ by informal language learning. Research has shown how young people develop aspects of English proficiency thanks to extensive involvement in English-mediated activities: Playing digital games in English, binge-watching English-speaking TV series or films, watching YouTube, and reading news via apps or links shared through social media are some examples. The term *extramural English* (Sundqvist 2009) has been suggested for this learner-initiated, generally voluntary, informal way of learning. While extramural English is very common, extramural Chinese, Japanese, and Korean are on the rise. The chapter begins by describing the case of Sweden, focusing on the present language situation and technological infrastructure, and then provides a survey of informal language learning in this small, but linguistically diverse, country.

Keywords: informal language learning, extramural English, incidental learning, language policy, the Swedish Language Act, mother tongue tuition, manga, Duolingo, multilingualism, formal learning

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Sweden: A Small Multilingual Country

Sweden is a small country in the northern part of Europe. In the year 1900, the population was 5.1 million (Statistics Sweden 2018b) and the great majority spoke Swedish, but minority groups living in the north spoke Sami or Finnish. For a long period before and after the turn of the century, there were very difficult times politically, economically, and religiously. Living conditions were particularly harsh in rural areas after repeated crop failures, and as a consequence about a third of the population ended up emigrating to the USA (see, e.g., Runblom and Norman 1976). A century later, Sweden reached more than 10 million inhabitants (in 2017, see Statistics Sweden 2018b). That is, despite so many leaving the country, the population doubled in a little bit more than a century. In fact, from the 1930s onwards, immigration has been larger than emigration and, with that, the number of languages spoken and learned in formal as well as in informal settings has increased greatly.

In light of the topic of this paper, it is relevant to sum up parts of Swedish history after the Second World War as it led to an increased number of languages spoken in the country and with opportunities for informal language learning. To begin with, Swedish industry and economy flourished in the middle of the 20th century, but the work force was not large enough. For this reason, people from other countries started immigrating to Sweden. During the 1960s, immigrants mainly came from countries in Southern and Central Europe but also from the neighboring Nordic countries, especially Finland, plus there was a baby boom. During this period, Sweden went from having had a majority

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language (Swedish) and a few minority languages (such as Finnish and Sami) to having a majority language and several more minority languages (such as Greek, Serbo-Croatian, and Spanish, only to mention a few). At the end of the 1980s, mainly for political reasons, many immigrants came from Iran, Chile, Lebanon, Poland, and Turkey to Sweden, and at the beginning of the 1990s, due to the war and the collapse of former Yugoslavia, people fled the country and came to Sweden as refugees (Statistics Sweden 2018a), adding to the number of languages spoken.

Over the last decade, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Sweden has increased greatly, especially after 2013 and in particular as regards refugees from Syria and Afghanistan. There was a peak with 162,877 asylum seekers in 2015 and considering the small population of Sweden, this was a very large number in comparison with other countries in the European Union (Cummins 2017, Eurostat 2017). During the same period, there were also many refugees arriving from, for example, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia (Statistics Sweden 2018b). Thus, the number of people with a need to learn Swedish grew rapidly, not least in institutional settings, from preschool to adult education. However, interestingly, the learning of Swedish to a great extent has also taken place informally, which will be discussed in more detail below.

In preparing for this chapter on informal language learning in Sweden, the author contacted ten language professionals, from teachers in primary school to university professors (henceforth *interviewees*), to ask them about the informal learning of whatever target language happened to be their specialty. Some of these interactions

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were formal interviews on the topic (audio-recorded; note-taking), some were email exchanges, and some were informal chats (note-taking). The responses from the interviewees varied greatly. Whereas one professor who could not offer much help at all appeared almost ashamed and simply noted “I’m sorry, I really have not stayed up to date”, a high school teacher was much more knowledgeable about the topic, although he too would have liked to be able to contribute with even more examples of students’ informal learning outside the walls of the classroom. The overall impression was that despite being highly involved in the formal teaching and learning of various target languages at different levels of education, relatively little seemed to be known about students’ informal learning processes that often go on in parallel. Clearly, this handbook as well as this specific chapter appear to fill a gap in the field.

The next three subsections serve the purpose of providing a picture of the role of languages in Sweden to an international audience. Informal learning is then briefly defined and some closely related terms are discussed as well. A survey of the field of informal learning in Sweden then constitutes the main body of text, before the chapter closes with some concluding remarks.

The Swedish Language Act

There was no Language Act in Sweden until in 2009, when ‘the Swedish Language Act’ (Swe. *språklagen*) was implemented, which made Swedish “the principal language in Sweden” (SFS 2009: 600, section 4). According to Källkvist and Hult (2016), the increased use of English in Sweden had begun to cause concerns as regards domain loss

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and this was the main reason for the enactment of a law about an official language (see also Berg, Hult, and King 2001). With this Act, five other languages at the same time became official national minority languages – Finnish, Meänkieli (also known as Torne Valley Finnish, spoken in the far north), Romany Chib, Sami, and Yiddish (section 7), all of which “the public sector has a particular responsibility to protect and promote” (section 8).

This Swedish Language Act was a logic consequence of a language policy that was first noticed as early as in the 1880s, when the then-relevant language policy had turned into “a nationalistic phase” during which the Swedish language and culture should be transmitted to minority groups, so that they would “melt into an imagined homogeneous national culture” (Elenius 2002, 103). Interestingly, as regards the Finnish-speaking people in the Torne Valley, the object for the state was to turn them bilingual; that is, it was not to ban Finnish (Elenius 2002). In 1935, there was even a change in the curriculum that allowed voluntary learning of Finnish in school. However, today there is plenty of evidence from elderly people who bear witness to the fact that when they had used Finnish in school as children, they had been penalized for doing so, despite the official good intentions of the curriculum change (Elenius 2017). However, it is possible that a seed for offering mother tongue tuition in school was planted with the old curriculum in the 1930s. As one of few countries in the world, regardless of their mother tongue, children in Sweden by law have the right to mother tongue tuition in compulsory school (Skollagen 2010). With this type of language education, Cummins (2017, 287) argues that children with a non-Swedish background are given optimal

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conditions for educational development in general and language learning in particular.

A recent register data study of what affects grades in modern languages that included 200,000 upper-secondary students in Sweden (Lindgren et al. 2018) adds strong support to Cummins' (2017) claim. Students' grades in the modern languages were positively affected by, for example, linguistic background, and *having participated in mother tongue tuition* was found to be a *particularly important variable* (as was, somewhat surprisingly, being born late in the year) (Lindgren et al. 2018).

Languages in School

As a member of the European Union, Sweden has signed the European Parliament resolution on *Multilingualism: as asset for Europe and a shared commitment* (Council of Europe 2008). Among other things, this resolution emphasizes “the vital need to provide special attention and support at school to pupils who cannot be educated in their mother tongue, and warmly welcomes the Commission’s proposal to promote ‘mother tongue plus two’ in education” (Council of Europe 2008, 3–4). Among language educators, this is commonly referred to as ‘the 1 + 2 rule’. Thus, multilingualism is viewed as an asset, but it is of course up to each member state to implement this language policy. Sweden has done so, exemplified not least with the right to mother tongue tuition described above but also by offering several other language options in compulsory school.

In compulsory school, which runs from grade 1 (students aged 6–7) to grade 9 (students aged 15–16), English is a mandatory school subject. It has been so since 1962 (Swedish

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Government 1962), which reflects the status English has in Swedish society (see below). Following the implementation of the (most recent) curriculum in 2011, English is taught from the first grade. Thus, it is the ‘first’ foreign language offered and as a consequence the second language (L2) for the majority of students. As part of what is called *the language choice option*, a ‘second’ foreign language is then introduced in the sixth grade, when students are 12–13 years old. That is, for most students, this is their third language (L3). Students generally get to choose from studying French, German, or Spanish (referred to as ‘modern languages’ in the curriculum). There is also a fourth language alternative called ‘Swedish/English’. Students who choose this option study more Swedish and/or English, depending on individual needs. Typically, this alternative attracts students in grade six who may find it difficult to learn languages, but it also enrolls students who later on, over the course of secondary school, drop out of French, German, or Spanish (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009). As part of the language choice option, it should be mentioned that there is also the possibility to choose sign language, or if students have a non-Swedish background, mother tongue tuition or Swedish as a second language (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009). Since the year 2014, it is also possible to choose Chinese as part of the language choice option but only at a small number of secondary schools (www.skolverket.se/laroplaner-amnen-och-kurser/).

For students who are interested in learning more languages, from the eighth grade, they may choose a fourth language (L4) as part of what is called *the student’s choice option*. This is not very common, however. Approximately 2% of students choose this option

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and they generally study either French, German, or Spanish (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009).

Studying at upper secondary school (that is, grades ten through twelve) is not compulsory in Sweden but almost all students choose to do so. There are eighteen so-called national programs to choose between, twelve vocationally oriented and six theoretically oriented. Students who have specific interest in studying languages apply to the Humanities program. Regardless of program, studying another year of English is mandatory for everybody, and many have the opportunity to keep on studying their L3 too if they would like to.

The Role of English in Society

English is viewed as being of high prestige in Sweden, which of course has to do with its status as a global language (see, e.g., Dewey 2007, Bolton 2006). The influence of English in Swedish society has been very strong ever since the end of the Second World War and in relation to informal language learning, American as well as British popular culture, music, the movie industry, and television have been particularly important (see, e.g., Sundqvist 2009).

As some other countries in northern Europe, English-speaking programs and films are not dubbed but subtitled. This means that from an early age, viewers are used to hearing the original soundtrack in English and reading Swedish subtitles, and viewing with subtitles has been shown to be beneficial for learning (Berns 2007, see also Peters and

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Webb 2018, Webb and Rodgers 2009b, a). Nowadays, with streamed video and television, there may not even be subtitles, but viewing is still meaningful for many as the average level of English proficiency is high among the public, not least among Swedish teenagers (European Commission 2012). Further, the public is constantly exposed to English as it appears in commercials on television, in ads in newspapers, on the radio, on signs in stores, and not least, on the internet. The use of the internet is widespread in Sweden, a topic addressed next.

Swedes and the internet

As a rich and technologically-advanced country, Sweden was early in offering internet and broadband access to the general public. Over the years, an independent public-service organization called the Internet Foundation in Sweden has been commissioned to ensure positive development of the internet. This foundation publishes annual survey reports (called *Swedes and the internet*) and in the 2017 report, one of the first headings read “Now everyone uses the Internet” (Davidsson and Thoresson 2017, 5). Initially this may sound as too strong a claim, but the fact is that almost everyone uses the internet up to retirement age, and Swedes are therefore described as “an increasingly digitized people” in the report (Davidsson and Thoresson 2017, 5). In the surveyed group of Swedes between 16 and 25 years old, there was 100% use of smartphones and music via the internet as well as of video online and various chat services – and much of the content is of course mediated in English. In addition, access to the internet in people’s homes was almost 100% in 2017.

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Among the youngest users, that is, two-year-olds, as many as 79% use the internet, as reported by their parents. Television and video is common, but also playing games and using various educational apps. At the age of six, 98% use the internet. By the age of ten (that is, in middle school), basically all have their own mobile phones, from which they go on the internet. The most popular site is YouTube, which is viewed daily by virtually everybody under the age of 25.

Statistics Sweden (2018c) is another important source of information. They report that in the group aged 12–18, on average, about half use the internet more than three hours a day on weekdays. As reported, they mainly play games, watch films on YouTube, or do homework. In the same group, 14% spend at least three hours on playing digital games per day (often in English, see below), boys more so (24%) than girls (4%).

A third important source about Swedes and the internet is the Swedish Media Council. Since the year 2005, the Media Council has published biennial reports on the amount of time children and teenagers spend on the internet and various forms of media, which makes it possible to track changes or developments in media use, sources of input, and so forth. In the first report, the term *high consumer* was introduced in order to illustrate media use among groups of different ages. A high consumer was defined as someone who ‘used a specific medium more than three hours per day’ – again, often with content mediated in English. Interestingly, this definition is no longer relevant as the proportion of high consumers in the most recent report exceeds 50% of all surveyed participants; instead, three hours per day in 2017 corresponds to ‘average consumer use’ (Swedish Media Council 2017). Thus, it is possible to conclude that young people in Sweden

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have easy (and more or less constant) access to the internet. Being digitally connected constitutes a natural part of daily life.

Informal learning

Definition

While *formal learning* takes place in educational institutions such as a school or a university and has a set objective in terms of learning outcomes, *informal learning* generally takes place outside such a context and is, thus, organized differently.

Livingstone (2006, 206, italics in the original) provides the following definition of informal learning:

Informal learning is any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill that occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria. Informal learning may occur in any context outside the established curricula of educative institutions. The basic terms of informal learning (e.g. objectives, content, means and processes of acquisition, duration, evaluation of outcomes, applications) are determined by the individuals or groups that choose to engage in it. Self-directed or collective informal learning is undertaken on our own.

In relation to *informal language learning*, a number of terms and concepts have been suggested.

Informal language learning – frameworks and closely related terms

Benson's framework of four dimensions

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Defining the field of informal language learning is no easy task. However, Benson (2011) outlines some basic parameters that can be helpful when trying to grasp what informal language learning is all about – or “language learning beyond the classroom” (Benson 2011, 9) – as the scope of such learning is so much wider than formal learning in classrooms. He suggests that there are four distinct dimensions of informal language learning, namely *location*, *formality*, *pedagogy*, and *locus of control*, and discusses terms and concepts based on those dimensions. For example, with regard to *location*, he argues that *out-of-class*, *out-of-school*, *after-school*, *extracurricular* and *extramural* learning all focus on where (that is, the location, setting) the language learning takes place. In terms of the dimension of formality, Benson draws on Livingstone’s (2006) work. Thus, while formal language learning would be connected with classroom teaching, set learning outcomes, and so forth, informal language learning would refer to “non-institutional programmes or individual learning projects” (Benson 2011, 10), such as learning languages from popular culture or the internet. The third dimension, pedagogy, comprises terms such as *self-instructed*, *non-instructed*, and *naturalistic* language learning (in contrast to instructed). He points out that ‘instruction’ should be understood as a certain kind of pedagogy (that would encompass, for example, sequencing of material and testing). Watching television in a target language is used as an example to understand the dimension of pedagogy; a TV show may teach learners a target language, but not instruct them. Last, the dimension locus of control is said to refer to who makes the important decisions about language learning. Logically, terms in the field such as *independent*, *self-directed*, and *autonomous* language learning belong to this dimension (Benson 2011, 12).

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Similar to Benson (2011), Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) also draw on some basic parameters in order to understand and explain informal (as well as formal) language learning, but instead of four dimensions, they propose two parameters in a quadrant model: the learner's driving force and the learner's physical location.

Sundqvist and Sylvén's framework: The learner's driving force and physical location

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there is a need for more research on informal language learning, but there is also a need for theoretical frameworks on the topic, such as Benson's (2011). Whereas his framework most certainly is a valuable contribution in that it makes it easier to understand differences between formal and informal learning as well as to understand what makes learning beyond the classroom so special, as highlighted by the author himself, there "appears to be no simple relationship between the location of learning (in or out of class) and locus of control" (p. 12). Partly in response to this problem, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) present their model which, at least to a certain extent, addresses the connection between location of learning and locus of control and attempts to provide additional explanation. Before this model is discussed, extramural English needs to be mentioned.

Sundqvist (2009, see also Sundqvist 2011) introduced the concept *extramural English* in her dissertation, as there was no adequate term in the literature that seemed to match the phenomenon she was investigating (that is, whether the time Swedish ninth-grade students spent voluntarily on English-mediated activities outside of the classroom, often

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in their homes, in any way was related to their oral proficiency and vocabulary in English). The definition provided in the dissertation was later greatly elaborated on together with Sylvén, and together they offer the following definition of extramural English (EE):

In our definition, *EE* corresponds to ‘English outside the walls’ and by that we mean the English that learners come in contact with or are involved in outside the walls of the classroom. This contact or involvement is *not* initiated by teachers or other people working in educational institutions; the initiative for contact/involvement lies with the learner himself/herself or, at times, with someone else, such as a friend or a parent. Thus, in general, contact/involvement is voluntary on the part of the learner, though there is also the possibility that learners engage in specific EE activities because they feel pressured to do so, for whatever reason. (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 6, italics in the original)

Further, they emphasize the similarity between EE and yet another closely related term, *incidental language learning*, defined by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001, 10, cf. Schmidt 1994) as “the learning without an intent to learn, or as the learning of one thing, e.g. vocabulary, when the learner’s primary objective is to do something else, e.g. to communicate.”

The theoretical framework provided in Sundqvist and Sylvén’s (2016) volume on EE in teaching and learning suggests that language learning – both formal and informal – can

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be understood from two central parameters (or variables) involved in the language learning process, that is, the learner's driving force and his or her physical location as learning takes place. The authors describe the two variables (driving force and physical location) as "a two-dimensional continuum" (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016, 11). While there is no space to go into detail of their model here, it is illustrated/explained with the help of one horizontal and one vertical axis. The horizontal axis displays the learner's driving force for learning by indicating the extent to which the learner independently initiates an English activity (from fully other-initiated to fully learner-/self-initiated). The driving force is linked to the level of formality of learning, where informal learning is learner-initiated. The vertical axis illustrates the learner's location when being engaged in (or exposed to) an English activity. One end of this axis is the learner sitting at a desk in a classroom in his or her home country, and the other end is "literally as far away as possible from the desk" (p. 11), which in the case of Sweden would probably be somewhere in New Zealand. The center of the model is when "the degree of learner-initiation is at 50 per cent of its maximum" (e.g., a language activity that may have been suggested by the teacher but where the learner has the opportunity to make independent choices and learner agency is encouraged) and the location is the wall of the English classroom in the home country. To exemplify, a learner who steps outside that wall (from Latin, *extra* = 'outside'; *mural* = 'wall') and decides to go home and listen to Beyoncé's song *Halo* is engaged in extramural English (learner-initiated informal activity, unrelated to school), whereas a learner who steps outside the wall of another classroom and decides go home and do homework that involves translating Beyoncé's song *Halo* into Swedish is engaged in English (other-initiated formal activity, related to

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school), but not in extramural English. Other-initiated activities tend to be examples of intentional learning and learner-initiated activities, generally, of incidental learning (but on occasion also of intentional learning).

Extramural L_n

The model described above is used to describe extramural English, but it needs to be pointed out that it may be applied to any foreign or second (L2) language (*extramural L_n*) (Sundqvist accepted). It also needs to be pointed out that all instances of involvement in extramural L_n are informal by default, but not all instances of informal learning are extramural. This will become clear in the survey of the field of informal language learning in Sweden that now follows. Whereas extramural English is extremely common, there are much fewer examples of, for example, extramural French (or any other language, for that matter).

Survey of the Field

Immigrants' Informal Learning of Swedish

A common way of intentional informal language learning is to use various language learning platforms and learning Swedish in Sweden to a large extent appears to occur via such platforms, or apps. While websites for language learning have been around for a long time, language apps have been introduced more recently. Such apps are easily available on tablets and not least on smartphones. Already in 2011, Godwin-Jones (2011, 2) stressed that “new devices with enhanced capabilities have dramatically increased the interest level” for mobile learning, and since his article was published, the

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app Duolingo (launched at the end of 2011) has become a global success. It is a freemium¹ language-learning platform with about 200 million registered users and offers numerous language courses across several languages, including Swedish (Duolingo n. d.). Recent research about using Duolingo reports positive findings, for example with regard to English vocabulary building among tenth graders in Colombia (Guaqueta and Castro-Garces 2018, for a review of the app, see Nushi and Eqbali 2017).

As described above, Sweden has taken on a substantial number of immigrants over the last few years, who are obliged to take a course in Swedish (Swedish for immigrants, Sfi). It seems as if many of them have turned to Duolingo as well, because Swedish happens to be the most popular language on the app in Sweden, with Spanish in second place (Making Duolingo n. d.). Although it is possible that immigrants have been instructed by their teacher to use the app, self-initiated use (that is, extramural Swedish) is equally possible, at least according to one of the interviewees – who added that “I didn’t really expect that our small language would take over the whole app”. While research involving Sfi-students is limited, one study focusing on communicative development during work placement shows that the world in school and during work placement were perceived as separate from one another, with no mutual relevance (Sandwall 2013). Suggested solutions include, among other things, to integrate

¹ “[A] freemium service is a service, for example on the Internet, with a basic level that is free and a better level that people can choose to pay for” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online n. d.).

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(in)formal learning within and between the two contexts and to use pedagogical tools

(Sandwall 2013) (cf. the Duolingo app).

Informal Learning of English

In a nationwide survey of English among students in the fifth grade, more than 50% reported that they had learned as much or more English outside school as in school (Swedish National Agency for Education 2004). Another large-scale survey among students in the ninth grade yielded almost an identical result with regard to learning in or outside the classroom (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011). A growing concern with English language teaching (ELT) in Sweden after the turn of the millennium has been the fact that students tend to separate the language into two, ‘school English’ on the one hand and ‘spare time English’ (that is, EE) on the other, where school English is viewed as boring and inauthentic (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011). For example, the Inspectorate made observations of students who were not challenged enough in the classroom, which left them demotivated (cf. Sundqvist and Olin-Scheller 2013). While many teachers were struggling to meet the challenge of bridging the gap between in- and out-of-school English, some did so well (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011), and later findings from the MoTiSSE (Motivation in Swedish Secondary English) project provide examples of successful ELT practices where teachers, among other things, draw on (informal) EE (see, e.g., Henry et al. 2018).

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Several studies have been conducted among students in primary, secondary, and upper secondary school in Sweden and they all have one thing in common: There is a lot of informal learning of English going on. Among students in the ninth grade, Sundqvist (2009) found significant correlations between the total amount of EE on the one hand, and English vocabulary as well as oral proficiency on the other. Of the EE activities examined, playing video games, using the internet, and reading were relatively speaking the most important ones (see also Sundqvist 2011). In another study (ninth grade) that focused specifically on the relation between playing commercial-off-the shelf games mediated in English and (i) use of advanced vocabulary in free written essays and (ii) scores on two vocabulary tests, the group of frequent games (defined as playing five hours or more per week) produced the most advanced vocabulary in the essays, followed by the group of non-games and the group of moderate gamer (Sundqvist and Wikström 2015). The results for both vocabulary tests were different in that the frequent gamers scored the highest (again), followed by the moderate gamers, and the non-gamers scored the lowest. Although cause-and-effect cannot ever be claimed in these types of quantitative studies, the correlation between gameplay and vocabulary was statistically significant and, thus, established.

In another project including young learners in the fifth grade, Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) found that gamers who had self-reported playing five hours or more per week (referred to as frequent gamers) scored significantly higher on a test of vocabulary than the moderate gamers did. This latter group, in turn, scored higher than those who did

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not play anything at all. The pattern found for vocabulary scores (frequent gamers > moderate gamers > non-gamers) was repeated in scores on listening and reading comprehension tests. Moreover, in a third Swedish study, Olsson (2011) examined EE and ninth-graders' writing of letters and news articles. Her findings corroborate Sundqvist (2009); the group of learners reporting having the most EE contacts had the highest scores for the writing tasks and they also received the highest final grades. This group consisted predominantly of boys (and many were gamers). Finally, in an international study among students aged 15–16 in fourteen European countries, with regard to measures of English proficiency, the Swedish students were awarded top scores. The scores were compared with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)* (Council of Europe 2001) and many Swedish students performed at the B2 level, some students even as high as at the C1 level. A main explanation for the very positive findings for the Swedish students was their heavy engagement in EE activities (The Swedish National Agency of Education 2012).

In sum, it is fair to say that informal language learning of English is very common in Sweden. As a consequence, as pointed out by Viberg (2000) already at the turn of the millennium, it is meaningless to make a distinction between *English as a second language (ESL)* and *English as a foreign language (EFL)* in this specific national setting. Graddol (2006) argues along the same lines, and Crystal (2003) goes as far as to say that making a distinction between teaching and learning ESL or EFL constitutes a poor reflection of sociolinguistic reality.

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Traditional Modern Languages and Informal Learning

As mentioned, French, German, and Spanish make up the traditional modern languages in schools. Although these languages are predominantly learned formally, some informal learning also occurs. However, according to several of the interviewees, students in general do not seem to see the potential learning benefits from being involved in extramural, or informal learning of, French/German/Spanish, whereas they clearly see such benefits from extramural English activities (a view also touched upon by teachers in Tholin and Lindqvist 2009). This line of argument accords with findings in Henry (2012). He found that L2 English had a negative impact on L3 motivation, partly because students tended to compare their conceptions of themselves as speakers of the L3 in the future with themselves as speakers of the L2 (English) in the future – and these comparisons were generally negative.

French

French is not encountered often in Swedish everyday life and it is therefore rare that students learn French informally, unless of course they have a keen interest and take own initiatives for learning. In terms of the number of enrolled students, French is currently the smallest of the three modern languages in Swedish education. In addition, there is a shortage of in-service teachers of French and also of students who are studying to become teachers of French, which contributes to a rather dim picture of both formal and informal learning of French (Stridsman 2016). However, it can be mentioned that positive findings are reported about the acquisition of French by

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simultaneous and successive bilinguals attending a French school in Sweden (Granfeldt 2016).

There is some evidence of extramural French from motivational research. For example, in his case study research on the impact of L2 English on L3 selves, Henry (2011) describes a learner in upper secondary school called Anton. Although informal learning by no means was the focus of the study, it is mentioned that this specific student deliberately sought out opportunities to project an identity as an L3 French (and L4 Russian) speaker and one way of doing so was “through Internet contact with friends in other countries” (p. 245). Such Internet contacts constitute extramural French and it is likely that Anton learned French informally thanks to this free time activity. While identity formation was important for this student’s L3 (and L4) motivation, according to some of the interviewees, it is common that students of French choose the language because they hold the belief that “French sounds nice”.

German

Tholin and Lindqvist (2009) report that teachers of German find it difficult to attract students to study German. In their study, interviewed teachers argued that in contrast to the sound of French, “people think that German sounds ugly” (translated from Swedish), and that holiday travels to Spain contribute to the popularity of Spanish over German (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009, 68). When Sundqvist (2009) collected data on EE among ninth-grade students, she also collected similar data on other languages. It turned out that several students had watched Austrian television broadcast in German – an

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interview with Natascha Kampusch, a victim of kidnapping who escaped after eight years of captivity – which was a positive finding. However, watching television only occurred once during the period for which extramural activities were reported (in total, two weeks). In a study among fourth-graders, it was not expected to collect any data on extramural German, but one student actually reported playing the video game *The Sims* in German (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2014). In sum, however, there appears to be very little informal learning of German in Sweden.

Spanish

Spanish is the most popular modern language in terms of the number of students (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009). This may be one reason why Spanish is the second largest language on Duolingo in Sweden (Making Duolingo n. d.). Other reasons for the popularity of learning Spanish informally via Duolingo may be that many Swedes enjoy traveling to Spain on holidays and need it for that purpose, plus there is a large community of (often retired) Swedes living in Spain, around 90,000 (Svenskar i Världen 2015).

Sundqvist (2009) found some occasional examples of extramural Spanish in her study, such as listening to music and watching television. One interviewee confirmed that picture a decade later. He reported that on occasion, individual students may mention watching Spanish-mediated series on Netflix, but generally only for the purpose of “being with the language”. Such infrequent viewing is not likely to lead to any significant learning outcomes, because research clearly shows that extensive viewing is

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necessary for informal, incidental learning (of L2 vocabulary) to take place (Webb and Rodgers 2009b, a, Peters and Webb 2018). For very young learners in the fourth grade, there is some evidence of a few being engaged in extramural Spanish (using the internet in Spanish) (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2014). In the previously mentioned study by Henry (2011), there is a learner of Spanish who sometimes logged onto Spanish websites to read match reports about Real Madrid. In fact, football is one important factor why students opt for Spanish (Tholin and Lindqvist 2009), as are travels and food, fascination for South America, and to a certain extent, interest in music (e.g., Shakira). Ricky Martin's monster hit song *Copa de la Vida*, the official song of the 1998 FIFA World Cup, topped the charts in Sweden for weeks. Based on the author's own experiences from teaching lower secondary Spanish at the time, the combination of football and this song 'made' many students (a) choose Spanish within the Language Option, and (b) learn vocabulary informally on their own (through listening and singing) over the summer break.

On the Rise: Asian Languages

Asian languages have been on the rise in Sweden for some time, which appears linked to a general interest in Asian languages and culture. In this section, informal learning of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean is addressed.

Chinese

The left-wing movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s was strong in Sweden and this is one reason why many students taking Chinese classes at university level fifty

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years later consist of senior citizens. For various reasons they used to be very interested in China and after retirement, they study Chinese. There are of course young students too, even though – at present – Japanese and Korean attract more of them. According to two of the interviewees (with experience from teaching Chinese at upper-secondary and tertiary level, respectively), Chinese tends to attract students who have a genuine interest in Chinese culture and aesthetics, not least the signs, and students who know that mastering Chinese may open doors related to their professional career.

Further, with regard to informal learning, the most common activities included watching television series and listening to music. Watching films also occurred, but according to one interviewee, the production of Chinese films is not very extensive, with the exception of films that include martial arts – but such films, on the other hand, are “not particularly ‘Chinese’ in terms of references and visual expressions”. This interviewee argued that Chinese films may be rather ‘difficult’ to watch for westerners who are used to other forms of style or expression. As for informal learning through extensive reading, this was reported as rare. However, there has been a recent upswing thanks to Cixin Liu’s celebrated sci-fi novel, *The Three-Body Problem*. Both formal and informal vocabulary learning with the help of dictionary apps was reported as common, with Pleco (<https://www.pleco.com/>) being the most frequently used app.

In comparison with informal learning of English, where some students routinely chat with friends from all over the world, few students who study Chinese actually reported

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knowing a person from China and, therefore, having contact through social media did not happen.

Japanese

Japanese is a relatively popular language in Sweden and students as young as ten have been shown to take an interest in informal learning of Japanese, sprung from their interest in manga and anime (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2014). Compared with Chinese, it is more common that university students know people in Japan and keep in touch with them regularly. According to several of the interviewees are such contacts often the result of contacts established during study abroad programs.

Bengtsson (2014) was probably the first study ever to focus specifically on extramural Japanese.² It was carried out among university students and he found a positive relation between extramural Japanese and general Japanese language proficiency. The students were involved in a great variety of extramural activities, among which watching video with Japanese speech, listening to music, and reading (especially manga) were the most frequently occurring. According to Bengtsson (personal communication), playing video games is more common today compared to when he collected the data for his Master's thesis.

Korean

² A second study on extramural Japanese set in Saudi Arabia was recently published, involving two very young learners (see Al-Nofaie 2018).

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The influence of K-pop on popular culture worldwide has been great even since PSy's megahit on YouTube with *Gangnam Style*; the song and PSy's signature dance moves went viral in August 2012. Barack Obama referred to the phenomenon at a bilateral meeting at the White House between the US and South Korea in 2013, describing how people around the globe were being 'swept up' by the Korean wave of culture (The White House 2013). What Obama said certainly holds for Sweden, where the interest in both formal and informal learning of Korean has increased greatly over the past few years, or as expressed by one interviewee: "Korean is the new Japanese".

Informal learning of Korean resembles informal learning of Japanese as regards students' commonly reported extramural activities. Listening to music (especially K-pop) is popular, as is watching television series or films. A less frequently occurring activity is communication using social media. Reading in Korean is also rare and in great contrast to how popular reading (manga) in Japanese is.

Other languages

There does not appear to be much research on informal learning of other languages in the Swedish context. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2014) found that a handful of the fourth-graders in their study were involved in extramural Norwegian (mainly watching television programs/films or reading books/newspapers), and a few in Russian (listening to music). Informal learning of Russian was also mentioned in Henry's (2011) motivation study.

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An upper-secondary school teacher of Italian who was interviewed was unable to recall any examples of informal learning of Italian among his students. Instead, the average Italian student was described as unaware of Italian culture and language and holding a stereotypical view of Italy: “It is pizza, pasta, Berlusconi, and the mob”. However, the teacher remembered one student of Italian who had had a specific interest in Latin and, therefore, devoted time to learning Latin informally.

Concluding remarks

Informal language learning is not a new phenomenon in Sweden. Ever since the days of the Vikings, it has been necessary for people from present-day Sweden to learn other languages, not least in order to negotiate good trade deals. In those days, all language learning was informal as there were no schools. In the future, it is likely that the opportunities for informal language learning will increase thanks to technological advancements, increased travel, and not least the effects of globalization. With this in mind, an intriguing question arises: How will formal language learning in Sweden adapt?

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