



## **UNIT 2. EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND (E2U) LANGUAGE**

### **ELEMENT 2. LEGISLATION, STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

#### **INTRODUCTION TO THE SITUATION IN SWEDEN**

##### **Video Lecture Transcript**

### **Slide 1**

Hello and welcome to Unit 2, Easy-to-understand (E2U) language. Element 2. Legislation, standards and guidelines. This is an introduction to the situation in Sweden. I am Ester Hedberg, from the Swedish National Association for Dyslexia.

### **Slide 2 - Overview**

In this lecture I will briefly talk about languages in Sweden, planning and policies, the Swedish Language Council, the Swedish Language Act, and plain language and easy-to-read language in Sweden.



## **Slide 3 - Languages in Sweden**

Sweden has more than 10 million inhabitants, most of whom speak the official language, Swedish.

In Sweden there are also five official national minority languages:

- Finnish
- Meänkieli
- Romany Chib
- Sámi
- Yiddish

Swedish sign language also has an official status, though it is not considered a national minority language.

## **Slide 4 - Swedish in Finland**

Swedish is also an official national language in Finland. The Statistics Finland (Statistikcentralen) inform that around 275,000 Finnish citizens speak Swedish.

## **Slide 5 - Immigrant languages**

From World War II and onward, immigration to Sweden has exceeded emigration. Immigrants have mainly come to find work or as refugees. They come from countries all over the world. The Swedish Language Council says that no one knows exactly how many languages are spoken



in Sweden, but it is estimated to be around 200. Some major immigrant languages are Arabic, Kurdish and Persian.

## **Slide 6 - English as second language**

In general, Swedes speak some English since it is compulsory in elementary, secondary and upper secondary school. It is also common to learn a third language, referred to as modern language. According to The Swedish National Agency for Education, popular modern languages are German, French and Spanish.

## **Slide 7 - A national language**

Swedish has been the main language in Sweden since 1500. The Lutheran reformation and the translation of the bible into Swedish were important in the process of establishing Swedish as a national language, as language researcher Olle Josephsson explains in his book on language policy, "Språkpolitik" (2018).

For hundreds of years, Swedish had competition from Latin, French and German, which were used among influential people such as royalty, aristocrats and the well-educated.

## **Slide 8 - The Swedish Academy**

In 1786, King Gustav III founded the Swedish Academy. The main purpose of the Academy was to strengthen the Swedish language. From then on Swedish became more established as a national standard language.

The Academy is still a very strong institution in Sweden. They are probably most known for choosing the laureates of the Nobel Prize in Literature. They also publish The Swedish Academy Dictionary, covering Swedish written language since 1521 until today.

## **Slide 9 - Swedish Language Council**

The Swedish Language Council is the official institution for advancing and cultivating languages in Sweden. On their website they explain that “The Council's mission is to monitor the development of spoken and written Swedish and also to monitor the use and status of all other languages spoken in Sweden. Primarily, that means promoting the use of Swedish sign language and our five official minority languages, Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Romani and Yiddish.”

The council was founded in 2006, when the government decided to merge the former Swedish Language Board, the Swedish-Finnish Language Board and the Plain Language Group within the Government Offices. It is a department within the Institute for Language and Folklore government agency.

## **Slide 10 - Promotes PL**

On a national level, The Swedish Language Council coordinates plain language efforts. It promotes and inspires all public agencies, institutions and organizations in working with plain language.

The council has experts to advise agencies and the public and to answer questions on linguistics. The council publishes books, such as handbooks, style guides and dictionaries. Among other tasks, it also conducts research.

## **Slide 11 - Striving for clear language**

Olle Josephsson writes in his book that current work with plain language in Sweden began in 1965 when the Language Board started publishing a periodical on language cultivation (Språkvård) in which linguistic matters were discussed. Two years later the first guidelines for language usage in laws and statutes were sent out from the Prime Minister's Office (2018, p. 51).

## **Slide 12 - Further progress**

In 1976, the Prime Minister's Office hired their first language expert. The 1986 Administrative Procedure Act states that, "The authority shall aim to express itself in an easily understandable way. The authority shall also, by other means, make matters easy for the people with whom it deals."

In 1991, the Prime Minister's Office published the first edition of a style guide for public authorities (Myndigheternas skrivregler). And in 1993, a Plain Language group was appointed by the government with the purpose of promoting plain language efforts in public.

## **Slide 13 - A threat to democracy**

We learned before that the Swedish language had competition from Latin, French and German for long periods. Much later, Swedish would again face competition – this time from English.

The Swedish Language Council writes on their website that, “During the last decades, English has started to compete with Swedish in a growing number of fields in Swedish society – in large, international companies, in the educational system and in the media industry. This poses a threat to democratic values as many Swedes have insufficient knowledge of English.”

## **Slide 14 - Recent language planning**

As a consequence, the government mandated the Language Council to draft an “Action Program for the Promotion of the Swedish Language”. The draft was presented in 1998. Two years later, the government appointed a new committee with the purpose of investigating the status and future of the Swedish Language. In 2002, a report containing proposals was presented.

## **Slide 15 - A new language policy**

In 2005, the Swedish Parliament decided on a new Swedish language policy. It has four goals, which The Swedish Language Council has translated into English on their website:

- Swedish is the majority language in Sweden.
- Swedish should be a complete language, i.e., be possible to use in all areas of society.
- The language of authorities should be correct, simple and understandable.

- Everyone has a right to language: to learn Swedish, to learn foreign languages, and to use one's mother tongue or minority language.

## Slide 16 - The Swedish Language Act

On July 1, 2009, the Swedish Language Act came into force. It was largely based on the four language policy goals adopted by the Parliament in 2005. It is a framework law and only consists of 15 clauses. The primary purpose was to establish Swedish as the official language in Sweden.

## Slide 17 - Plain Language Clause

The 11<sup>th</sup> clause is of great interest to anyone with a stake in Plain Language. The clause is named the Plain Language Clause. It says that the Swedish language used in all public activities should be:

- cultivated
- simple
- understandable

The Swedish Language Council clarifies that **cultivated** means it should be written in proper Swedish following official language recommendations. **Simple** means using words that are easy to understand and with a clear and easy grammatical structure. **Understandable** means that the language should be written or spoken in a manner that the intended receiver can understand.



## **Slide 18 - Both written and spoken**

And yes, the Language Act covers both written and spoken language. That means that all communication in all public activities should be in plain language.

## **Slide 19 - No regulation for E2R**

Unlike having rules for using plain language in public situations, there are no national regulations on the use of easy-to-read language.

The official guidelines for web development state that written texts on public websites should be written in a way that is easy to understand for the widest range of people possible. And then they say that the website, or parts of it, should be made accessible through easy-to-read language, if there is a need for it. The developer should conduct a target group analysis to discover if it is needed.

## **Slide 20 - E2R is used**

Nevertheless, easy-to-read language is, and has been, used since the 1960s, especially in literature for children, second language learners and readers with cognitive disabilities. And you will find that it is used in both printed and digital public information.

## **Slide 21 - Center for Easy-to-Read**

Between 1997 and 2015, there was a national foundation for easy-to-read text (Centrum för lättläst). It was publicly funded and its mission was to publish news and literature in easy-to-read language. The target group was people with cognitive and reading difficulties. The foundation started





a publishing house for easy-to-read literature (LL-förlaget) and an easy-to-read newspaper (8 sidor). The foundation also offered counseling and training.

## **Slide 22 - The Agency for Accessible Media**

In 2014, the Parliament decided to close the foundation, and in 2015 the newspaper and publishing house were moved to the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media. The main function of the agency is to ensure that persons with reading impairment can access literature and daily newspapers, i.e. with audio, E2R, braille and other tactile. Though under the responsibility of the agency the magazine "8 sidor" is an independent publication and the newsroom is separate from the agency.

## **Slide 23 - Easy language publishers today**

In addition to the publishing house at the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, there are a number of other publishing houses on the market, specializing in easy-to-read literature.

For broadcast news in easy language, a Swedish public service radio station broadcasts an easy-language program (Klarspråk) and Swedish public television broadcasts news in easy Swedish (Nyheter på lätt Svenska).

## **Slide 24 - UN Convention**

In 2008 Sweden ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It came into effect in Sweden in 2009. Articles 2, 4, 9 and 21 deal with information. In short, the convention says that the convention



states “shall take appropriate measures” to ensure that information is accessible for citizens with disabilities.

## **Slide 25 - Summary**

In this lecture, we have talked about languages in Sweden, planning and policies, the Swedish Language Council, the Swedish Language Act, and plain and easy-to-read language in Sweden.

## **Slide 26 - Thank you**

Thank you for listening!

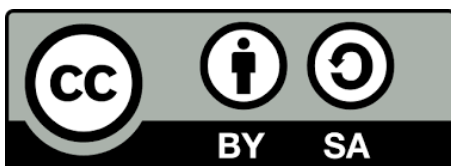
## **Slide 27**

This video lecture was prepared by Ester Hedberg, the Swedish National Association for Dyslexia.

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