



Language Instruction at the Margins of Education

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In this paper, I present the research design for the ethnographic study “Language Instruction at the Margins of Education” (LIME). The study takes a comparative approach to the investigation of language management in education across Norway and Sweden. Scandinavian countries are characterised by a multilingual population due to recent immigration (Statistics Norway, 2019; Statistics Sweden, 2020). Both Norway and Sweden have long histories as multilingual nation-states, with both national minorities and an indigenous population. Hence, it is highly relevant to explore how different languages are managed in education, from the partial integration of Sámi instruction into Norwegian and Swedish mainstream education and heritage language instruction into Swedish mainstream education, to the heritage language instruction offered in community-initiated afternoon or weekend schools in Norway. To address these issues, this project will investigate the following research question:

How does the management of indigenous, national minority, and heritage languages in education across Norway and Sweden influence students’ social positioning, linguistic identity, and sense of school belonging?

In order to investigate the tensions and possibilities in the management of different languages in education across Norway and Sweden, this research project will explore the instruction of Sámi and Arabic in Norway and Sweden. Sámi is a recognised indigenous language in Norway and as a national minority language in Sweden. Finally, both Norway and Sweden have a high percentage of students speaking more recent, migrant minority languages, such as Arabic.

I propose linguistic ethnography as an appropriate research method because it is suitable to investigate questions related to language use in local and particular settings and their relationship to larger societal discourses. I plan to conduct fieldwork in four instructional settings in three institutions: 1) a Norwegian mainstream school where Sámi is taught; 2) a Swedish mainstream school where Sámi and 3) Arabic are taught; and 4) a community-initiated afternoon or weekend school offering instruction in Arabic language in Norway.

Through this study, I expect to be able to describe how the management of minoritised languages at a policy level in Norway and Sweden influences the linguistically minoritised students’ social positioning, linguistic identity, and sense of school belonging in local educational contexts in the respective countries. A preliminary hypothesis is that there will be great convergence between Sámi students’ social positioning, linguistic identity, and sense of school belonging in Norway and Sweden because of the similarities in the management of Sámi in education across Norway and Sweden. For the heritage language students, I expect that there might be greater divergence between the heritage language students’ social positioning, linguistic identity, and sense of school belonging in Norway and Sweden due to the differences in the management of such languages in education across Norway and Sweden.