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**What is the point of studying the history of the Swedish language in philological studies  
in Poland in the twenty-first century?**

**A cross-cultural communication at work in foreign language learning context**

The aim of this article is to show how selected topics traditionally taught in academic courses on the history of the Swedish language can contribute to the development of the linguistic competence of adult learners of Swedish as a foreign language. The issues are discussed on the basis of Polish instructed teaching environments but they may also have some relevance in a broader perspective. The different competences addressed are: translating texts to/from Swedish, assessing such translations and evaluating the suitability of machine translations, as well as treating Swedish as a window to other Nordic languages. Language history is presented as an important part of foreign language learning and intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** foreign languages, historical linguistics, Swedish, language competence, translation

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this article is to show how selected topics traditionally taught in academic courses in the history of the Swedish language may contribute to the development of the linguistic competences of foreign language (FL) learners of Swedish and by the same token prepare them better for their future careers in jobs requiring the knowledge of Swedish as a FL (including in the field of research). In the first part of the article (see Data-Bukowska 2024), such native-speaker-like competences as: acquisition of the deeper meanings of culturally relevant words, grasping deeper regularities within the language system, recognition of dialectical and colloquial forms and their attendant nuances, as well as looking to the future through the lens of past experiences were considered. In what follows, other related issues are discussed: translation of Polish literary texts to/from Swedish, criticism of such translations and evaluating the aptness of machine translations, as well as treating Swedish as a window into other Nordic languages.

Although the issues presented herein may be considered very elementary and primarily concern just two languages (Swedish and Polish, with English also sometimes serving illustrative purposes), they can be seen as part of the more general mechanisms underlying the development of education, both locally and globally. I am aiming to show that asking the

question present in the title of the paper may pertain to other countries where Swedish traditionally has been taught as a foreign language with an important status. Moreover, the presentation of the issues implies a modern, inclusive perspective on a projected reader of a scientific article focused on didactics – a FL university student interested in linguistics and in a more conscious developing of their FL competences prompting cross-cultural communication.

## 2. The art of translation

Clearly, knowledge of the older stages of Swedish facilitates better individual understanding and appreciation of the Swedish literature. In the context of translation, however, such understanding or a lack thereof may entail consequences that are far from trivial. This is demonstrated by numerous examples cited by translation critics, who reinforce us in the belief (often expressed as a truism) that it is best to read works of literature in their original languages. Here (see example (1) below) is one such example, taken from August Strindberg's short story *Naturhinder* (1884) and its only translation into Polish to date, *Przeszkody naturalne* (shown here in conjunction with one of the English translations of the same story, *A Natural Obstacle*)<sup>1</sup>.

Close examination of this Swedish fragment and its Polish and English translations reveals subtle evidence in support of the argument that knowledge of the old stages of the development of the Swedish language is useful for the acquisition of contemporary Swedish by learners of this language, especially abroad.<sup>2</sup> One of the characters in the Polish translation is referred to using such terms of endearment as *dziewczyneczka*, *maleńka* ('little girl'), and *córeczka* ('little daughter'). A glance at the Swedish original, on the other hand, leads us to the opposite conclusion – the child in Strindberg's short story was a boy. What is the reason behind this discrepancy? It seems to be the human mind's tendency to notice mainly what it is already familiar with.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless attributed to another translator, all translations represent the work of the article's author (E.D.-B.).

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the source text is a Swedish language artifact that confirms the old inflection of verbs for the grammatical category of number in the simple past tense (Teleman et al. 1999b: 548).

(1)

Sista månaden tog hon permission. [...] Vilket liv!  
Vilken ömklig lott kvinnan hade fått!

Och så kom **den lilla**!

- Ska vi **skicka'n** på **barnhuset**? Sade jägarn.

- Å **han** hade då intet hjärta?

- Jo då, vad **han** hade!

Och den lilla blev hemma! [...]

Men hon måste skicka en springpojke först två gånger om dan, sedan var annan timme för att fråga hur den lilla mårde. Och när hon fick höra att **han** skriket blev hon alldeles vild och sprang hem. [...]

En dag upptäckte frun att amman sinat och att den maran icke angivit sig, av fruktan att gå miste om sin plats! [...] Å, de voro likadana allihop. Intet intresse för andras barn. [...] Man kunde aldrig lita på dem!

- Nej, sa mannen, i det fallet kan man bara lita på sig själv!

- **Du** menar att jag skall lämna min plats?

- Jag menar att **du** gör som **du** vill!

- Och bli **din** slavinna!

- Nej, det menar jag inte alls inte!

**Den lilla** blev sjuk som små barn blir. **Han** skulle få tänder! (Strindberg 1982[1884]: 142–143)

W ostatnim miesiącu ciąży wzięła urlop. [...] Co za życie!  
Jakież nędzny los przypadł kobiecie w udziale!

A później przysłała na świat **dziewczyneczka**!

- **Oddamy ją do sierocińca**? Zapytał szczęśliwy ojciec.

- Och, chyba **jesteś** bez serca!

- Ależ tak, **mam** serce!

I **córeczka** pozostała w domu! [...]

Musiała jednak posyłać posłańca, najpierw dwa razy dziennie, potem co drugą godzinę, by zapytać, jak się **maleńka** czuje. A kiedy powiadomiono ją, że **dziecko** krzyczało, pędziła do domu jak szalona. [...]

Pewnego dnia odkryła, że mamka traci pokarm i że ta paskudna baba nie zdradziła się z tym, w obawie że straci zatrudnienie! [...] Och, wszystkie były takie same – żadnego zainteresowania cudzymi dziećmi [...]. [...], na których nigdy nie można polegać!

- Oczywiście, że nie – powiedział mąż – bo w tym przypadku można polegać wyłącznie na sobie!

- **Uważasz**, że powinnam zrezygnować z posady?

- Uważam, że **zrobisz** co zechcesz!

- I zostać **twoją** niewolnicą!

- Nie, tak wcale nie uważam!

**Mała** chorowała jak wszystkie małe dzieci. Wyrzywały **jej** się ząbki! (Strindberg 2006: 149)

She stayed at home for the last month [...]. What a life! A woman's lot was indeed a miserable one.

**The baby** was born.

"Shall we board **it** out?" asked the father.

"Had **he** no heart?"

"Oh! yes, of course **he** had!"

And **the baby** remained at home. [...] She must be kept informed of the baby's condition; a messenger boy was despatched to her home, at first twice a day, then every two hours. And when she was told that **the baby** had been crying, she put on her hat and rushed home at once. [...]

One day the young mother discovered accidentally that the nurse was unable to feed the baby, but had concealed the fact for fear of losing her place. [...] But they were all alike; brutal egoists every one of them, who took no interest in the children of strangers. No one could ever depend on them.

"No," agreed the husband, "in a case of this sort one can only depend on oneself."

"Do **you** mean to insinuate that I ought to give up my work?"

"Oh! **You** must do as you like about that!"

"And become **your** slave!"

"No, I don't mean that at all!"

**The little one** was not at all well; all children are ill occasionally. **He** was teething! (Strindberg 1917: 115–116)

Therefore, a mind aware of details related to the history of the Swedish language will more likely notice the phrase *skicka'n* in the Swedish original, including an enclitic form (the attachment of a personal pronoun, here in the old accusative case, to the personal form of a verb), well known in the former stages of the development of the Swedish language (Larsson 1991: 90). The *-n* used as an enclitic here clearly indicates that the pronoun in question is *han* 'he' in its former form *han* 'him'. If the child in question were a girl, the enclitic would have been *'na* (standing for *hona* 'her'), the Old Swedish accusative case of the personal pronoun *hon* 'she' that can still be found in some dialects spoken in rural areas in Sweden. In the Swedish original, therefore, it is clear from early on in the cited passage, from the word *skicka'n* onward, that the characters are parents of a boy. Moreover, this is also reinforced later on in the cited passage, through the use of the pronoun *han* 'he' – which the Polish translator's mind, accustomed to interpreting language structures in its own way, nevertheless also fails to notice. Unawareness of what would seem to be a small historical-linguistics detail here leads to the original being significantly distorted in the Polish translation.

The English translation, on the other hand, manages by avoiding any early identification of the baby's gender – sticking to the forms *the baby / little one* and *it* – but then reveals it as *he* at the same point in the passage that the gender is explicitly reinforced by the pronoun *han* in the original.

In Example (1), we should also note the use of two different forms of addressing the same person in the dialogue: *han* 'he' and *du* 'you' (the woman addressing the man), which is undoubtedly no coincidence in Strindberg's work and affects the interpretation of the relationship between the characters – it can be seen as indicative of a kind of playful banter between them. The Polish translation, which consistently sticks only to the familiar form *ty* 'you' (implied in the verbal forms *uważasz* and *zrobisz*), does not allow us to see this aspect of the world depicted in the short story, so the minds of Polish readers of the translation will form different, probably less detailed impressions of the relationship between the man and the woman. The English translation above, on the other hand, simply mimics the Swedish pronouns, switching from *he* to *you*, and thus fails in another way, verging on incomprehensibility at this point.

In the context of our considerations, however, it is interesting to ask whether a translator conscious of the history of the Swedish language might have had the chance to use a different equivalent of the pronoun *han* 'he' in the dialogue cited above? It is highly likely that, being aware of the existence of a system of forms of address in the older culture of the Swedish language (as reflected in linguistic artifacts) (Wessén 1966), the introduction of the

egalitarian *du* 'you' in the 1960s (*du-reformen*) (Mårtensson 1988: 144), and so on, such a translator would have interpreted *han* as a distanced yet respectful form of address used in Sweden in the old days (Welander 1952), and looked for a way to convey the switch back and forth between the two forms. The Polish translator, in particular, could have had recourse to a similar distinction between familiar/polite forms of address – familiar *ty* 'you' vs. polite *pan* 'you/sir' – which could have reproduced the same kind of joyous banter between characters closely familiar with one another. In the second part of the dialogue, when the conversation between the man and the woman shifts to everyday matters, they use the pronoun *du* 'you' – in Strindberg's time, this signaled closeness yet also prosaic everyday relations between the characters without sophisticated courtesies.

In Example (1), which generally makes use of quite modern, one might even say contemporary spoken Swedish, knowledge of the history of the language also proves to play an important role in interpreting the meaning of the noun *barnhus*, which was translated using the Polish word *sierociniec* ('orphanage'), rather than *dom dziecka* ('children's home') or *ochronka* (a care facility popular in Poland in the nineteenth century). The choice makes it hard to understand why the father, described by the Polish translator as *szczęśliwy* 'happy', suggested that the child should be given to an orphanage. The conundrum arises because the translator translated the word *barnhus* using an equivalent that evokes different associations in the Polish culture.

The word *barnhus* is not listed in the SAOL or SO dictionaries of Swedish. It can only be found in the historical dictionary *Svenska Akademiens ordbok* (SAOB), where it is defined in the following manner:

(...) anstalt i hvilken (l. gm hvars försorg) sådana barn vårdas o. uppfostras som ej hafva några föräldrar l. hvilkas föräldrar ej kunna l. vilja själfva sörja för dem; (...). (SAOB entry *barnhus*)

(...) an institution in which (under whose care) children who do not have parents, or whose parents are unable to or unwilling to care for them themselves, are cared for and brought up; (...)

Since this entry was written in 1900, it retains Swedish spellings that will currently strike readers as unusual, such as *hvilken/hvilkas* (currently: *vilken/vilkas* 'whose'), *hvars* (*vars*, 'whose'), *hafva* (*ha(va)* 'have'), which we will discuss later in the article. The fragment of the entry, however, reveals that *barnhus* was a place for caring for and housing both orphans and children whose parents "are unable to or unwilling to care for them themselves". The ability to draw upon the SAOB, a flagship work of Swedish linguistics that took over a century to

complete, therefore appears an essential component of philological competence, which is based on research carried out to interpret texts. When compared with the Internet as a contemporary source of information, however, such traditional sources (which are nonetheless also available online) may appear a waste of time. Indeed, Wikipedia provides the information:

[b]egreppet "barnhem" uppstod i mitten av 1800-talet. Innan dess var "barnhus" den vanliga benämningen. (<https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnhem>)

[t]he term "barnhem" comes from the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to that, the word "barnhus" was used.

Therefore, from the stylistic perspective, *barnhus* is a word typical of the time in which Strindberg wrote this collection of short stories (the late nineteenth century). Today, it is seen as obsolete and it is no longer used, although it remains understandable and still appears in some proper names<sup>3</sup>. At first glance, the Polish word *sierociniec* ('orphanage') seems an apt translation. It can be regarded as an obsolete equivalent to the modern word *dom dziecka* ('children's home'). However, the established cultural frame that is evoked by Polish word *sierociniec* ('orphanage'), is a place intended solely for orphans, children without any parents, which is at odds with the reality depicted in the Swedish story, potentially leaving the reader of the Polish translation confused. The Polish translator might have considered other options to less confusingly reflect the meaning of the Swedish original – for instance, the now little-known term *ochronka*, defined as "a care center intended not only for orphans, but also for poor children" (see SPWN, *ochronka*) – it should be left to translation critics to decide which route might be best. The English translation, using the now old-fashioned term *to board (a child) out* (to arrange for someone else to take it in and care for it for a period of time),<sup>4</sup> is clear in this respect.

In the context of these considerations, it should only be mentioned that online research into the Swedish word *barnhus* could potentially prove successful without the need to reach for Swedish sources related to the history of the language (which are not always easy in terms of spelling), although they contain the information crucial for the context in question. However, when searching the Internet, we will also find the word *barnahus*, which could be easily confused with *barnhus*, since their spellings differ only by one grapheme <a>. Although the aforementioned dictionaries do not include the form *barnahus* (unlike *barnahand*, *barnamun*, and so on, all of which are built in a similar way), the word *barnahus*

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. *Studio Barnhus*: <http://studiobarnhus.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/board-out>

refers to places of care for children exposed to various types of violence (including sexual abuse) and therefore involved in legal proceedings.<sup>5</sup> There is ample evidence that the contemporary Swedish language has here adopted a unit that retains the old form of the noun *barn* in the plural genitive case. By the same token, we can also notice the differences in meaning that have evolved between the aforementioned language units, corresponding to different social phenomena. Knowledge of the history of the Swedish language prepares us to notice this nuanced spelling and therefore allows us to conclude that the process of the development of the standard Swedish language was characterized by the retention of *-a* in words, as confirmed by the numerous forms from the contemporary general Swedish: *barfota*, *långväga*, and so on (*cf.* Larsson 1991: 65).

Awareness of the history of Swedish thus translates into the ability to determine the stylistic value of words, taking into account the key assumption that old grammatical endings should not be interpreted automatically from the perspective of today's language. It also makes it easier to determine and consequently to remember a unit that is part of the contemporary standard Swedish (an extremely useful skill from the perspective of practical language learning).

The way of thinking outlined here, typical of adult native speakers of Swedish, allows them to approach the reality depicted in original Swedish texts through impressions or intuitions, but it is not equally obvious to university graduates starting their career as translators. By analyzing texts before we translate them and taking the history of the source language properly into account, we are undoubtedly prompted to ask questions that allow us to correctly identify the challenges posed by the source text, for example, by determining the function of the forms used by the author. Were they typical of the language used at the time the text was written? Are they an element of stylization? Or are they expressions that are also preferred in modern times? Answering these questions is crucial for the selection of translation techniques and strategies in interlingual translation. Quite a few outstanding works of Swedish literature are still waiting to be translated (or re-translated) into Polish (or other languages).

### **3. Translation criticism**

Machine translation technologies are certainly on the rise. At the present stage, how well can they cope with the kind of issues outlined here? Perhaps they are capable of handling them, or

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/brott-mot-barn/barnahus/>.

nearly capable, so that in the foreseeable future they might render knowledge of the history of language unnecessary for the purposes of translation?

To briefly consider these questions, presented below are two automatic translations of a few lines from the same passage of the Strindberg short story discussed above (Strindberg 1982[1884]: 142–143) into Polish, performed on 13 February 2023 using what are at present the two top machine translation tools available online: Google Translate and DeepL.

(2)

W zeszłym miesiącu wzięła urlop. [...] Co za życie! Cóż za żalony los spotkała tę kobietę! I wtedy pojawił się **mały**!  
- Czy powinniśmy **go** wysłać do **sierocińca**?  
Powiedział myśliwy.  
- Och, wtedy nie **miał** serca?  
- **No więc, co miał!**  
A **mały** został w domu! [...]  
Translated using the tool [translate.google.com](https://translate.google.com) (13 February 2023).

W zeszłym miesiącu poszła na urlop, [...] co za życie! Jakże żalony los spotkał tę kobietę! A potem pojawił się **maluch**!  
- Czy mamy **ją** wysłać do **domu dziecka**? Powiedział myśliwy.  
- **A on nie miał serca?**  
- **Tak, miał!**  
A **mała** została w domu! [...]  
Translated using the tool [www.DeepL.com/Translator](https://www.DeepL.com/Translator) (free version, 13 February 2023).

Both machine-translated texts leave the reader entirely confused about the gender of the child (switching back and forth between male and female), and both run aground with the issue of why a father might suggest putting his own child into an institution (either a *sierociniec* or *dom dziecka*) for parentless children – in addition to a number of other significant shortcomings. An analysis of these machine translations thus leads us yet again to the conclusion that theoretical knowledge (in the field of not only the history of the Swedish language, but also its modern grammar) as well as linguistic research and interpretation skills, certainly still remain relevant elements of the linguistic competence of Swedish philology students. This knowledge is applicable at the level of the evaluation of the adequacy of translation assisted by new technologies.

Moreover, knowledge of the history of Swedish will prove important to learners of Swedish as a FL who assume the role of translation critics in the twenty-first century in reverse situations, which means translations from Polish into Swedish and the assessment of their adequacy. This time, native speaker of Polish will almost automatically conjure up the “bundle of associations” relevant in this context (*cf.* Kurkowska & Skorupka 2001: 119). The fragment below comes from a statement made by the “Mother” character in Witold Gombrowicz’s widely recognized drama *Ślub* (*The Marriage*), which in Polish bears distinctive characteristics of a dialect used by inhabitants of rural areas, together with the same fragment from the Swedish and English translations. Might the linguistic units used by



the Swedish (or English) translator be regarded as successful equivalents of the original Polish words and phrases?

(3)

MATKA

A to kto mógł świętym przecuciem tknięty przecuć, że coś takiego, **zlotko moje, słonko moje, szczęście moje**, o, że **to ja stara, głupia**, nie **zmiarkowała**, ale gdzie to ja oczy **podziała**, a ja oczy **wyplakala**, a ja **myślala**, że już cię nie zobaczą **oczy moje, słonko moje**, (...) (Gombrowicz 2015[1953]: 120).

MODERN

Å, vem kunde ha en salig aning om **nåt sånt**, mitt **gull**, min sol, min lycka, o, att jag gamla dumma gumma inget varsnade, var hade jag mina ögon, de **vart** väl **bortrunna** med alla tårarna, och aldrig trodde jag **dom** skulle få se **dej** igen, **solen min**, (...) (Gombrowicz 1995:11).

MOTHER

Oh, who could have ever foreseen by a divine premonition that something like this... oh, **my little treasure, my little sunshine, my little sweet pea**, oh, what a **silly old woman** I am not to have recognized you, oh, how could I have **been so blind** and how I used to cry my eyes out for fear I would **never see you** again, my **little sunshine** (...) (Gombrowicz 1969: 32).

Of course, providing an exhaustive answer to this question should be left up to translation critics. What is crucial for the argument in this paper is that it will be important for them to have a good command of Swedish language units that are useful in the stylization of the language of literary characters to resemble the language used by inhabitants of rural areas, in Sweden always associated with dialects. These undoubtedly include assimilation of sounds evident in the word *gull* (standard form: *guld*) chosen by the Swedish translator for Polish *zlotko* ('little gold'). At the same time, as Liljestränd (1983a: 79) notes, the use of the past simple tense form *vart*, for example in *de vart ... bortrunna* ('they became cried out') for Polish *wyplakala*, can be interpreted as a marker of the speaker's lower social status. Similarly, the Old Swedish placed the possessive pronoun after the noun, as exemplified by *solen min* for Polish *słonko moje* ('sun of mine') and attested in the Old Swedish. Constructed in this way, the phrase may evoke the kind of language used by inhabitants of rural areas in Sweden (Liljestränd 1983b: 60–61). Historical linguistics, however, is also interested in the numerous forms representing the expressive general spoken language used in the example above – *nåt* (standard form *något* 'something'), *sånt* (standard form *sådant* 'such'), *dej* (standard form *dig* 'you'), *dom* (standard form *de/dem* 'they/them'). Indeed, determining the scope of use of such forms in writing is an important issue in the diachronic development of Swedish (see, for example, Mårtensson 1988: 129 ff.).

In Example (3), it can be therefore said that a rich set of stylistic techniques employed in the Swedish text are clearly aimed at achieving an effect similar to that produced by the

speech of the characters in the Polish original – they are employed by a translator who is aware of the details of the former stages of Swedish and understands the role they play in creating certain stylistic effects (see Data-Bukowska & de Bończa Bukowski 2022). In the English translation of the same passage shown above, by contrast, precious little, if indeed any, effort in this direction is evident on the translator’s part (perhaps with the exception of the colloquial *my little sweet pea*).

Again we can ask how a machine-translation tool might cope with similar challenges. To illustrate this, we could ask whether the machine translation into Swedish presented in (4a) can serve as an apt translation of passage (4) taken from Dorota Masłowska’s novel *Paw królowej* (2005 – the novel has not yet been published in Swedish or English) – a statement made by a character who uses a dialect that clearly deviates from standard Polish. The machine translation into Swedish is indeed a fully intelligible and grammatically correct statement. However, should the solutions proposed in (4b), proposed based on the knowledge of the history of the Swedish language, be regarded as more adequate? Their assessment should be left to insightful experts on the Swedish language. A native speaker of Swedish will certainly react automatically to both the spoken nature of the fragments in bold in Example (4b) and to such distinctive words as *vart*, *låssas* and *icke* ‘not’, *ja* (standard form *jag* ‘I’).

(4) Polish original

<<**A to już nie miał być zaczął się początek Klanu?**>> – pyta Katarzyna cwanie, patrząc, **że niby to** na zegarek, <<**Ło Jezu a ja nie mam oglądane**>> - krzyczy baba, drzwi trzask i już nie ma baby (Masłowska 2005: 48).

(4a) Machine-translated Swedish

**Var det inte meningen att det skulle vara början på klanen?**>> – frågar Katarzyna listigt och **ser ut** att det ska stå på klockan, <<**Wow, Jesus, och jag har inte sett det**>> – ropar kvinnan, dörren smäller och kvinnan är borta. (Translated using Google.com, 13 February 2023)

(4b) Human-translated Swedish, with sensitivity to language history

>>**Och vart det väl icke börjat Klanens början?**<< frågar Katarzyna tufft och **låssas** snegla på sin klocka, >>**Å Jesses, ja har inte det sett, inte!**<< skriker gumman, dörren smäller och hon är borta.

Therefore, evaluating the presented solutions requires an advanced linguistic competence, which is an important part of the knowledge of translators and translation critics, whose role is always that of ambassadors – presenting great works of Swedish literature to be enjoyed by millions of Polish readers, and conversely making sure that Polish literature is properly translated into Swedish.

#### 4. A window into other Nordic languages

In the most recent and comprehensive grammar of modern Swedish, *Svenska Akademiens grammatik* (SAG), emphasis is placed also on other Nordic languages, namely Danish and Norwegian, which emerged as national languages from the continuum of dialects in the Scandinavian Peninsula and continue to exhibit similarities, especially in terms of syntax (Teleman et al. 1999a: 25). Therefore, in-depth knowledge of one of these languages may facilitate a better understanding of the others (*cf.* Teleman et al. 1999a: 25). In SAG, however, references to the aforementioned languages are extremely rare.

Native speakers of Swedish (L1) show a good understanding of Norwegian and Danish, usually both in writing and speech. Could the same be said about learners of Swedish as a FL (L3 or LX)? Could knowledge of the history of Swedish acquired at some stage of their education and the diachronic study of Swedish serve as a platform for them to reach out to other Nordic languages – for inter-Scandinavian communication (*interskandinavisk kommunikation*), which is another natural method used since the ancient times by the Germanic peoples of the North (Griffiths 2011:21–22)? Is it possible to attain such competence, for example, by reading the artifacts of the Swedish language and analyzing old inflectional forms, phonetic processes, and so on?

Again, the answer to these questions does indeed appear to be “yes,” even if we assume that one of the most effective mechanisms supporting the learning of any LX involves staying for an extended (long) period in the natural environment in which the language is used and interacting with its native speakers.

Studying the history of Swedish makes it possible to see how highly standardized this language is compared with its closest relatives. From the perspective of the history of languages, this fact is not a coincidence, but a manifestation of how the Swedes care for their language as a tool for exploring the surrounding world (see, for example, Teleman 2013). It also reveals its peculiarities, namely typically Swedish and historically motivated ways of perceiving the reality, including even old grievances, as recorded in the structures of the language. It shows the nature of Swedishness, characterized by practicality, innovation, orderliness, and undoubtedly cognitive economy, which facilitates communication.

Numerous similarities of this type are described by Lennart Larsson (1991) in his time-tested textbook on the history of Swedish – *Svensk språkhistoria från urgermansk till nusvensk tid*, based on the canonical works of prominent Swedish scholars in Scandinavian languages but written with philology students in mind. For example, words found in Old Swedish and later texts and spelled with the initial <h>, such as *hviter*, *hvilikin*, *hvat*, were replaced by the modern variants *vit*, *vilken*, *vad* (‘white’, ‘which’, ‘what’) in keeping with the

Swedish spelling reform of 1906, after the consonant [h] in the initial position had ceased to be pronounced (Larsson 1991: 116–117). For this reason, numerous forms of this type are still present in the aforementioned fragment from SAOB from 1900. In contrast, other Nordic languages have retained the consonant at the level of spelling. Hence the words *hvid*, *hvile*, *hvad* in Danish and *hvit*, *hvile*, *hva* in Norwegian (a variant of *bokmål*). This fact, mentioned in the popular Norwegian language textbook for Swedes, *Norsk for svensker* (Fjeldstad & Hervold 1989: 21), therefore comes as no surprise from the perspective of the history of the Swedish language. This perspective also makes it easy to learn the content presented in another subsection of this textbook, namely “‘Stumme’ konsonanter” (‘silent consonants’). The authors note that “[d]et er mye vanligare i norsk enn i svensk at konsonanter som finnes i skrift er ‘stumme’” (‘silent (unpronounced) consonants in writing are a lot more common in Norwegian than in Swedish’) (Fjeldstad & Herold 1989: 22). Numerous examples of the application of this rule include the aforementioned forms (also present in Old Swedish) containing the consonant clusters <ld> and <nd>, for example in the words *holde*, *kveld*, *band*, and *rund*, which in standard Swedish, according to its preferred spelling (*skriftenligt uttal*) are pronounced as [ld] and [nd] (Larsson 1991: 120). In dialects, however, they undergo assimilation and become [l] and [n]. This is also how they are pronounced in Norwegian dialects.

Taking a rational approach to the surrounding reality is a hallmark of Sweden and Swedish culture, as exemplified in the popular imagination by the global popularity of IKEA stores. Acquisition of Norwegian by the Swedes using the same traditional method of learning “from scratch” could be seen as a violation of this approach – as cognitively and financially uneconomical. In this context, the linguistic joke about the replacement of the typically Swedish <a> in the final position with what is referred to as the “Danish” <e> (for example, *flera* → *flere*, *skriva* → *skrive*, and so on) as the first step towards mastery of Norwegian (*flere*, *skrive*) is not merely a joke. Indeed, the vowel [a] in the final position, a feature that distinguishes Swedish from other Nordic languages, is one of the symbols of Sweden’s rejection of Danish dominance following the Kalmar Union. Like many other solutions in the field of spelling, it was introduced into the Swedish culture in a thoughtful, methodical, and consistent manner. Restoring the Danish [æ] to replace [a] in intra-Scandinavian communication, a signal of the current consensus and eagerness to reach agreement, is a simple and effective move. Such skills will not automatically turn our speech into Norwegian, but they do make communication easier. Thus, in this respect they will be based on efficiency that is seen as a “decisive motivating factor” or “the driving force” in bi- or multilingual

language functioning, not only on the level of words, phrases, constructions, but also as pertaining to categorization and memory (Filipović 2014: 207). As Filipović (2014: 219) expresses it:

The efficiency argument says that whenever a *similar-enough* shared pattern is available, it *will underlie verbalization* and possibly also *memory storage of language-mediated information* in proficient bilingual speakers. (italics in original)

## 5. Conclusion

As shown above, even in the twenty-first century, academic courses in the history of the Swedish language may usefully contribute to the development of the broadly understood linguistic competences of Polish and other FL students studying Swedish philology, and by the same token prepare them better for their future careers. Above all, they must be able to use their “mind’s eye” to see, to actually perceive and notice, a variety of apparently insignificant details that together make up the core of Swedishness (*cf.* Åsbrink 2018: 10) and the basis for decisions that can be either helpful or detrimental for a smooth cross-cultural communication.

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