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THE SWEDISH LANGUAGE

Sweden is a multilingual country. However, Swedish is and has always been the majority language and the country's main language. Here, Catharina Grünbaum paints a picture of the language from Viking times to the present day: its development, its peculiarities and its status.

The national language of Sweden is Swedish. It is the mother tongue of approximately 8 million of the country's total population of almost 10 million. Swedish is also spoken by around 300,000 Finland Swedes, 25,000 of whom live on the Swedish-speaking Åland islands.

Swedish is one of the two national languages of Finland, along with Finnish, for historical reasons. Finland was part of Sweden until 1809.

There has been a Swedish-speaking population in Estonia since the Middle Ages. Today, only a fraction of it remains.

Since the mid-19th century and up to the present day, more than a million people have emigrated from Sweden, primarily to North America.

It is estimated that Swedish is spoken by several hundred thousand people worldwide.

Despite the dominant status of Swedish, Sweden is not a monolingual country. The Sami in the north have always been a domestic minority, and the country has had a Finnish-speaking population ever since the Middle Ages. *Finnish* and *Meänkieli* (a Finnish dialect spoken in the Torne river valley in northern Sweden), spoken by a total of approximately 250,000 people in Sweden, and Sami all have legal status as domestic minority languages. *Romany*, *Yiddish* and *sign language for the deaf* also have a form of legal minority-language status.

As a result of immigration and the influx of refugees in recent decades, at least 150 languages are now spoken in Sweden. Arabic is the most widespread, with at least 150,000 speakers. No official statistics are kept on language affiliation in Sweden.

Swedish and related languages
Swedish is a Nordic language, a Germanic branch of the Indo-European language tree. Danish and Norwegian are its siblings, while the other Nordic languages, Icelandic and Faroese, are more like half-siblings that have preserved more of their original features. Using this approach, English and German are almost cousins.

The relationship with other Indo-European languages is particularly clear when we encounter so-called *native words* that we have from our shared origin. These are words such as *fader* (father), *moder* (mother), *hus* (house), *mus* (mouse), *hund* (dog), *ko* (cow), *öga* (eye), *öra* (ear), *näsa* (nose), *blod* (blood), *dag* (day), *natt* (night), *sten* (stone), *ben* (bone), *jord* (earth), *vatten* (water), *ung* (young), *ljuv* (sweet), *äta* (eat), *dricka* (drink), *leva* (live), *dö* (die). ▶

THE SWEDISH ALPHABET

The Swedish alphabet has 29 letters and ends with å, ä and ö. V and w are pronounced in the same way, as are s and z.

A	B	C	D	E
F	G	H	I	J
K	L	M	N	O
P	Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X	Y
Z	Å	Ä	Ö	
a	b	c	d	e
f	g	h	i	j
k	l	m	n	o
p	q	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y
z	å	ä	ö	

INDO-EUROPEAN HERITAGE

The Indo-European heritage is visible in the Swedish *syster*, Danish *søster*, Icelandic *systir*, English *sister*, German *schwester*, Dutch *zuster*, Russian *sestra*, French *sœur*, Latin *soror* and Sanskrit *svasr*.

CLASSIC SWEDISH TONGUE TWISTERS



**Sju sjösjuka
sjömän
på skeppet
Shanghai,
sköljde sju
skjortor i sjön.**

(Seven seasick seamen on the ship Shanghai washed seven shirts in the sea).



PHOTO: KELSEY MCNEAL/ABC VIA GETTY IMAGES

Its many long vowel sounds and falling and rising pitch mean that Swedish is considered a melodic language, as parodied in *The Muppet Show*.

► How does Swedish sound?

The characteristic immediately apparent to a foreign ear is that Swedish is a melodious language with falling and rising tones and varying pitch accents: /'hunden/, /'ra:dhu:s/, /'å:terställa/, /pro'ble:m/, /problem'a:tisk/, fotograf'i:/.
A sequence of letters such as *buren*

can be pronounced in two ways. The noun *buren* (the cage) has accent 1, with the full emphasis on *bur-*: /'bu:ren/. However, the participle form *buren* (carried), of the verb *bära*, has accent 2, with partial emphasis on the second syllable: /'bu:ren/.

A particular characteristic of the sound of Swedish is the many vowel sounds, a, o, u, å, e, i, y, ä, ö, which can be both long and short.

Vowel length often determines meaning in Swedish: *mat* (food) pronounced with a long a, *matt* (dull) pronounced with a short a, *ful* (ugly) pronounced with a long u, *full* (full) pronounced with a short u.

Foreigners also notice the special Swedish u sound. *U* is pronounced not as in the German word *Buch* (or the English word *boot*), but as a sound somewhere between the vowels in *Buch* and *grün*. The u can be short, as in *hund*, and long, as in *hus*.

The letters å, ä och ö are more visually than aurally distinctive. Å represents the same vowel sound as in the English words *more* and *hot*. Ä is equivalent to the vowels in *care* and *best*. Ö represents

the same sound as in the French words *bleu* /-ö/, *bœuf* /-öff/ and *chauffeur* /-ö:r/.

Swedish also contains combinations of consonants that can be difficult for many foreigners to pronounce: *vrak*, *sprängts*, *östgötsk*.

The combinations of letters *sj*, *skj* and *stj* are pronounced /ʃ/, for example as in the English word *she*. For example: *sjö* (sea), *sjuk* (sick), *skjorta* (shirt), *stjärna* (star).

The same is true of *sk* before the front vowels e, i, y, ä, ö: *skepp* (ship), *skinn* (skin), *sky* (sky), *skämmas* (be ashamed), *sköld* (shield).

The standard Swedish r sound is an apical r, as in Spanish and Italian (but not as clearly articulated). In the southern parts of the country, a velar r is used, as in French.

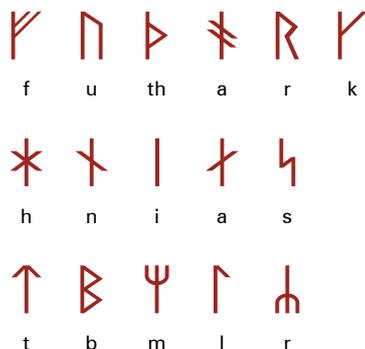
Grammatical peculiarities

The hardest feature of Swedish for foreigners to learn is the inverse word order in sentences that start with something other than the subject. The verb always comes second in the sentence. For example, 'Anna kommer i dag' (Anna is coming today) but 'I dag kommer Anna' (Today, is coming Anna) (not 'Today, Anna is coming').

A peculiarity of Nordic languages is the postpositive definite article: *man-mannen* (the man), *hus-huset* (the house), *hundar-hundarna* (the dogs). Swedish can also have a double definite form: *det lilla huset* (the little house). ►

RUNIC SWEDISH

The runic alphabet is called *Futhark* after the six letters in the first group. The 16-character Viking era Futhark in its commonest form is shown here. These are the so-called Swedish-Danish runes or normal runes.



Bokstav (the Swedish word for letter) means 'line carved in beechwood'. Wood was the commonest material, but stone has been better preserved.



PHOTO: BENGT A LUNDBERG/RIKSANTIKVARIAMBEITET

The rune stone at Gripsholm Castle in Södermanland recounts a famous Viking journey to the east in the 11th century. The leader was called Ingvar. The journey ended badly – everyone died in Serkland, the land of the Saracens or Muslims, whose capital was Baghdad.

The text begins "Tola had this stone raised, mother of Harald, (travel) brother of Ingvar". This is followed by a verse in an Old Norse metre with alliteration. The text should be read like this:

Thair furu trikila They travelled valiantly
fiari at kuli far for gold,
auk austarla and in the east
arni kafu gave to the eagle.
tuu sunarla (They) died in the south
a sirkianti in Serkland.

Give to the eagle means 'give the eagle food', that is, to 'slaughter enemies'.

► The Nordic languages can form a special passive form with *-s*: 'brevet *skrevs*' (the letter is written), 'brevet har *skrivits*' (the letter was written).

The old system of three grammatical genders, *han, hon, det* (he, she, it), has been reduced to two in standard Swedish: *den* and *det*. We now have *båten* (the boat) – *den*, *huset* (the house) – *det*.

However, where the gender is important, masculine and feminine pronouns are used: *mannen* (the man) – *han*, *kvinnan* (the woman) – *hon*, *hingsten* (the stallion) – *han*, *stoet* (the mare) – *hon*. References to time are a relic: *Hur mycket är hon? Hon är halv två* (What time is it? It is one thirty).

In recent years, people have also started to use a new gender-neutral pronoun, *hen*, partly to replace the combination *han eller hon* (he or she) and partly for people who do not want to be categorised as either man or woman.

In modern Swedish, the verb has the same form in the singular and plural: *jag är* (I am), *vi är* (we are); *jag tar* (I take), *vi tar* (we take). The old plural forms are now found almost only in hymns and in Swedish drinking songs: 'Vi äro små humlor som ta oss en geting' (We are small bumblebees which take a wasp).

However, Swedish has retained the various plural forms of nouns: *kyrka*–*kyrkor* (church–churches), *hund*–*hundar* (dog–dogs), *gäst*–*gäster* (guest–guests), *äpple*–*äpplen* (apple–apples), *hus*–*hus* (house–houses), *man*–*män* (man–men), *mus*–*möss* (mouse–mice).

When Swedish became Swedish

In the period from the birth of Christ to the 9th century, the language in the Nordic region was roughly the same, and was called *Primitive Norse*. The linguistic documents from the period consist of a small number of runic inscriptions.

During the Viking era (800–1050), the language spoken was still generally a shared language, often called 'Danish tongue'. However, at the same time, certain characteristics began to emerge that distinguished between Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. We have several thousand rune stones from the 11th century that demonstrate the development of the language.

The inscriptions are often very similar, such as 'Holmfast raised this stone in

memory of Holmbjörn, his brother, a good young man. Öpir carved this inscription'. However, many stones talk about deeds at home and journeys and voyages to the east and west. The language of the rune stones is called *runic Swedish*.

The runic Swedish period was followed by the *Old Swedish* period, which includes the entire Middle Ages and ended with the Reformation in the 16th century. Runic characters were then replaced by the Latin alphabet. The language we find in the very oldest records in provincial law-rolls from the early 13th century shows that Swedish and Danish had become separate languages.

Influence from other languages

Swedish has always been open to loans from elsewhere but has still survived as a separate language. The arrival of Christianity in the 11th century brought with it a number of words of Latin and Greek origin such as *kyrka* (church), *präst* (priest), *mässa* (mass) and *paradis* (paradise).

The influence from the rest of Europe continued in the Middle Ages. Romances of chivalry in verse and propaganda such as rhyming chronicles emerged as literature around the king and the court. The monastic system started translating religious literature. Vadstena Abbey became a spiritual centre where many texts were produced. Towns grew up as a result of trade and crafts. Words were borrowed and words were created in Swedish to cope with all these new elements. The complicated sentence structure and long-winded phrases of Latin left their mark on the written language and this has remained to the present day.

However, the biggest influence of all on the Swedish language came from German via the Hanseatic league. The old *vindögat* (window) in the roof was replaced by a *fönster* in the wall. *Eldhuset* became *kök* (kitchen), *mön* (maiden) became *jungfru*, *börja* became *begynna* (begin), *gälda* became *betala* (pay), *mål* and *tunga* became *språk* (language). In the new towns, there were *rådhus* (town halls), *borgerskap* (citizens), *väktare* (watchmen), *fängelset* (prisons), *fogde* (sheriffs) and *bödel* (executioners). *Köpmän* (merchants) ►

WORDS LOANED TO OTHER LANGUAGES

During the Viking era, several Nordic words were loaned to English.

Window (fönster in Swedish), *vindue* in Danish and Norwegian, from an older Nordic word *vindauga*, Swedish *vindöga*, (opening in the roof).

Starboard, from *steer* and *board*, from the Nordic *stýrbord*, the side of a ship on which the steering oar is attached.

A couple of Swedish words in other languages are *ombudsman* and *smörgåsbord*, the latter becoming *smorgasbord* in English.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LANGUAGES

Björken, a tree with Indo-European roots, is *birk* in Danish, *bjerk* in Norwegian, *björk* in Icelandic, *birch* in English, *Birke* in German, *berk* in Dutch, *bereza* in Russian, *brzoza* in Polish, *bērzs* in Latvian, *beržas* in Lithuanian and *bhurja* in Sanskrit.

The missionary Ansgar came to the trading place *Birka* in Lake Mälaren, Sweden, in the 9th century. The island itself is now called *Björkö*.

SAINT BRIDGET OF SWEDEN

Saint Bridget is writing down one of her visions here.

She wrote ceaselessly, was politically active, travelled widely (she died in Rome in 1373) and founded Vadstena Abbey, which became a text and translation workshop of great importance to the development of written Swedish.



PHOTO: ELISABET OMSÉN/TT

Church painting of Saint Bridget.

► handled *varor* (goods), *vikter* (weights), *mynt* (coins) and *räkenskap* (accounts). Occupations included *skräddare* (tailor), *skomakare* (shoemaker), *slaktare* (butcher) and *krögare* (innkeeper).

The borrowing of German words continued throughout the Middle Ages and the Reformation in the 16th century, when Sweden adopted the Lutheran doctrine, and it continued during the Thirty Years' War in the 17th century.

The language of science and higher education had long been Latin, the international language. However, in the 17th century, when France under the 'Sun King' Louis XIV became the leading nation of Europe, French started to become a status language and even more so during the 18th century, the century of culture and the Enlightenment.

The loan words show what sort of culture was being borrowed: *möbel* (furniture), *balkong* (balcony), *garderob* (wardrobe), *salong* (salon), *mustasch* (moustache), *parfym* (perfume), *sås* (sauce), *kastrull* (saucepan), *balett* (ballet), *ridå* (curtain), *pjäs* (play), *journalist*, *roman* (novel), *modern*.

In the 19th century, *English* began to flow in with the vocabulary of industrialisation, travel and sport: *jobb* (job), *strejk* (strike), *bojkott* (boycott), *råls* (rail), *lokomotiv* (locomotive), *turist* (tourist), *sport*, *rekord* (record).

When, at the start of the 19th century, the Nordic countries ended their last war with each other, a strong sense of solidarity emerged, giving rise to the *Scandinavism movement*, followed in the second half of the century by the *Modern Breakthrough* in literature. Authors and artists mingled freely across borders and borrowed words from each other. During this period the following words arrived from Danish and Norwegian: *hänsyn* (consideration), *spydig* (malicious), *underfundig* (sly), *förälskelse* (love), *rabalder* (tumult).

The 20th century was the century of English more than anything else. Since the Second World War, English has been about the only language from which words have been borrowed but there have been a great many such words. Immigrants' languages have had little impact on Swedish, although *kebab*, *pizza* and *couscous* are now everyday Swedish words.

Standard Swedish and dialects

Standard Swedish developed out of the language spoken in Mälardalen and around the capital, Stockholm. This was the seat of the administration and where the upper class lived. The first translation of the Bible in 1541 (Gustav Vasa's bible) also contributed to the stabilisation of the written language and was of great importance to standardisation of the language and to literature. Another contributing factor was that a higher proportion of the population were able to read. From the end of the 17th century, ministers were obliged to ensure that people knew important passages from the Bible and Luther's catechism.

The 18th century saw the emergence of an educated middle class and with it the start of the journalistic Swedish we have today. A scientific Swedish was also created and Sweden's success in this field, with representatives such as *Carl von Linné* and *Anders Celsius*, was also shared with the people.

The development of standard Swedish continued in subsequent centuries with inward migration to the cities, the growth of the press, public education (compulsory primary school was established in 1842 with Swedish as a separate subject), literature for the educated public (*August Strindberg*, *Selma Lagerlöf*, etc.), folk high schools and popular movements (where generations of politicians learned to speak and write in public), standards for the written language in the Swedish Academy Glossary and eventually the broadcasting media.

Standard Swedish and its regional variants essentially have the same vocabulary and inflections. The differences are primarily in pronunciation and intonation. The most distinctive variants are Southern Swedish and Finland Swedish (which also has a number of variant words). However, people raised in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Gotland and Norrland are also usually easy to identify. The way a person speaks often reveals which part of the country they come from.

Pure dialect is spoken less and less. The few people who speak a genuine local dialect in their home district usually switch to a variant closer to standard Swedish when they encounter people from elsewhere. ►

PLACE NAMES IN FINLAND

Finnish form	Swedish form
Helsinki	Helsingfors
Turku	Åbo
Vaasa	Vasa
Tampere	Tammerfors
Tammisaari	Ekenäs
Porvoo	Borgå
Oulu	Uleåborg
Pori	Björneborg
Savonlinna	Nyslott



FOTO: TINA TAHVANAINEN/ISTALAND.COM

The official language of the Åland islands is Swedish, as can be seen on these signs.

IMMIGRANT WORDS

Established everyday words that arrived with immigrants include *tjej* (girl) and *jycke* (dog) from Romany and *kola* (die) and *kul* (fun) (from Finnish).

Guz (girl) from Turkish and *jalla!* (hurry up!) from Arabic are two of the more widely known words used in the Swedish spoken in immigrant areas.



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The film Jalla! Jalla! from 2008.

► A special variant of Swedish is spoken in the districts of cities that are dominated by immigrants. This is sometimes sweepingly called Rinkeby Swedish after a suburb of Stockholm. This suburban Swedish is a variable youth language with local differences and contains elements of several different immigrant languages and its own intonation, constructions and translated phrases.

There are socially determined language variations but they are small compared with many other countries.

Finland Swedish

The Swedish used in Finland is not a separate language, but it has features that differ from standard Swedish, above all in speech. Like the Swedish used in Sweden, it also has a number of different dialects. Swedish is spoken on the Åland islands, which are Swedish-speaking, in the coastal areas of southern Finland and further north in Österbotten.

A characteristic feature of the Swedish used in Finland is that it does not distinguish between accent 1 and accent 2. Speakers of standard Swedish think that Finland Swedish sounds 'singsong', while speakers of Finland Swedish say the same about standard Swedish.

In general, Finland Swedish is pronounced more literally than standard Swedish. The last two letters of *Helsingfors* (Swedish for Helsinki) are pronounced by many as a separate r and a separate s, and not as a 'sh' sound, as in standard Swedish. *Djup* (deep) and *djur* (animal) retain the d when pronounced, where standard Swedish says /ju:p/ and /ju:r/. The u sound is also different.

Some words that are now more or less obsolete in standard Swedish are still in use in Finland Swedish, such as *kännspek* (characteristic, easily recognisable) and *menföre* (bad weather in winter). Other differences in vocabulary are due to the influence of Finnish, such as *skyddsväg*, which is *övergångsställe* (pedestrian crossing) in standard Swedish.

Finland Swedish is under great pressure from Finnish in terms of both loan words and syntax, which is a problem. The condition for the Swedish used in Finland to be considered a valid language is that it can be used in Sweden as well.

Many Finnish places have both Swedish and Finnish names: *Helsingfors/Helsinki*, *Åbo/Turku*, *Vasa/Vaasa*. When writing or speaking Swedish, the Swedish names are used. This is also true if the person speaking or writing has Finnish as their mother tongue.

Swedish in the 20th century

Over the past century, the written and spoken forms of the language have undergone a process of equalisation. As the proportion of the population able to read has increased, the written language has influenced the spoken language, and genuine spoken forms are increasingly disappearing: *å*>*av* (of), *tappa'*>*tappade* (tapped/dropped), *hunn*>*hunden* (dog), *massäck*>*matsäck* (packed lunch), *körrgårn*>*kyrkogården* (cemetery). The polished spoken language used in the broadcasting media also contributes to this development.

At the same time, the spoken language has influenced the written language, which has become increasingly infor-

*Sveær egho konung at taka ok
sva vrækæ.*

'Svearna äga taga konung och
likaså vräka (avsätta)
(The Swedes are entitled to
appoint and dismiss the king).

From Äldre Västgötalagen
(the Elder Westrogothic law),
around 1280.

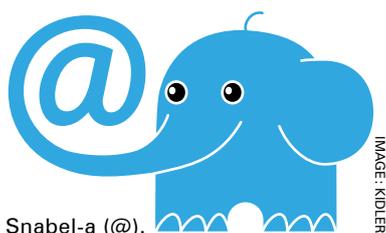


PHOTO: ANN-SOFI ROSENKVIST/IMAGEBANK SWEDEN/SE

The word *lärare* (teacher) is gender neutral.

► mal, with shorter sentences, simpler sentence structure and more everyday vocabulary. This development has been led by both literature and the media. Many words that would have been considered to belong to a less elevated style 50 years ago can now be used in neutral, informal prose. The words *tjej* och *kille* are now normal alternatives to *flicka* and *pojke* (girl and boy) for younger generations, while they remain slang or at least very everyday terms for the oldest generations.

Similarly, there is now no longer an elevated style with archaic words and word forms and complicated syntax. Both new laws and the official new translation of the Bible from 2000 are written in polished contemporary Swedish.

Great efforts are being undertaken to make the language used by the public administration less bureaucratic in order to make it accessible to ordinary Swedes. Complex EU language is seen as a threat to democratised public Swedish, and linguists at the Swedish translation unit at the EU Commission in Brussels have fought hard to ensure that translations are in good, comprehensible Swedish and do not bear the mark of the source language (which is usually French or English).

English is the language from which most words are borrowed, in Sweden and in many other parts of the world. English enjoys high prestige, especially in the business community, IT and youth culture, and many words are borrowed more or less as they are: *management*, *outsourcing*, *e-mail*, *techno*, *wannabe*.

However, there is also widespread resistance to the direct incorporation of

too much English. Language planning takes a two-pronged approach, either replacing loan words: *computer*>*dator*, *airbag*>*krockkudde*, *e-mail*>*e-post*, *web site*>*webbplats*, or adapting them: *mejl*, *mejla* (email), *sajt* (site), *hackare* (hacker), *mobba* (bully), *mobbning* (bullying).

New words continue to be created largely on the basis of existing domestic word forms. Compounds are a familiar feature of Swedish. Many words have been created with Swedish roots, such as *föräldravandring* (parents' watch), *kretsloppssamhälle* (sustainable society), *avknoppning* (hiving off), *båtluffa* (go island hopping), *svartbygge* (building built without a permit), *snabel-a* (@).

Others are created with Swedish roots but the concept itself has been borrowed (a translated loan): *kärnkraft* (nuclear power), *såpopera* (soap opera), *hemsida* (home page), *frosta av* (defrost), *skogs-död* (Waldsterben – death of forests).

Gender equality in linguistic usage

Sweden is one of the countries in the world in which gender equality work and the attitude to gender equality have advanced most. In linguistic usage, this work is expressed in the fact that previously very masculine derivative endings are now gender neutral, while female derivative endings have gradually become uncommon. As a result, the previously masculine ending *-are* now designates both genders. *Lärare* (teacher), *författare* (author) and *bagare* (baker) have replaced *lärarinna*, *författarinna* and *bagerska* for women who have these occupations. The same is true of *konduktriser*, *direktriser* and *ambassadriser*, who are now *konduktörer* ►

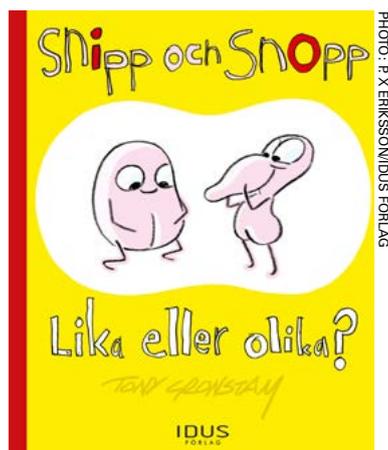


PHOTO: P. X. ERIKSSON/IDUS FÖRLAG

"Girl and boy: the same or different?" – a children's book about us all being equally good even if we look different.



IMAGE: RUBEORG.ORG

In 1733 Olof von Dalin started the weekly *Then Swänksa Argus*.



PHOTO: NORSTEDT'S FÖRLAG

The fourteenth edition of the *Swedish Academy Glossary* contains about 126,000 entries.

► (conductors), *direktörer* (directors) and *ambassadörer* (ambassadors). However, the transition has not been fully completed. We still have *servitriser* (waitresses), *skulptriser* (sculptresses) and *aktriser* (actresses).

The suffix *-man* is replaced in some cases. A female *riksdagsman* is called *riksdagsledamot* (member of the Riksdag) and a female *forskare* (researcher) is known as that and not as *vetenskapsman* (literally man of science). *Talesman* is sometimes *talesperson* as in English (spokesperson). But *ombudsman* and *nämndeman* (lay judge) are unchanged, and they are often women.

Women are no longer given a title according to their husband's occupation. *Överstinnor* (colonels' wives) and *professorskor* (professors' wives) are now an extinct species.

The female sexual organ has been given a respectable new name after not having had one for a long time. *Snippa* is the word, and it is used in particular by children. (The word *snopp* has long been used for boys' sexual organs.)

Does the Swedish language have a soul?

The contrast between Swedish and other European languages becomes clear in the translation of EU legislation. Where French and German official language excels at producing complicated long sentences, Swedish prefers short sentences with simple subordinate clauses. Of course, it is possible to produce incredibly complex sentences in Swedish, and they are produced, but the Latin influence on Swedish legal style has always been counterbalanced by the Nordic heritage from the provincial law-rolls, with their oral narrative style. Some users of foreign languages find this Swedish syntax rather basic, at least for argumentation, while others love its directness and simplicity.

The Swedish word formation system, with its wealth of potential compounds, creates long words that are sometimes hard to understand and may replace entire sentences or phrases. Words such as *resursallokering* (resource allocation), *ståndpunktstagande* (standpoint), *kvittblivningsproblematik* (problems getting rid of something), *känsloidentifikation* (emotional identification) are favoured in official and specialist language.

On the other hand, compounds are able to create new terms with their own expressiveness: *fulöl* (bad beer), *kramgo* (cuddly), *skåpsupa*, (indulge in secret drinking), *strulputte*, (messer-upper), *räknenisse*, (bean-counter).

Much of Swedish poetry consists of unique compounds. And translation fails to do justice to the tone of something as everyday Swedish as *solvarma smultron med kylskåpskall fil* (wild strawberries warmed by the sun with sour milk fresh from the fridge).

Language planning in Sweden

Swedish language planning has a long tradition, from the first Bible translators to those who create Swedish IT terms today.

The tasks of language planning are and have always been to create stability in spelling, inflection and grammar, to counteract complicated language and to replace or adapt loan words to make them good Swedish words.

Two autocratic kings, Charles XI and Charles XII, ordered their civil servants to write pure, comprehensible Swedish. Georg Stiernhielm, 'the father of Swedish poetry', wanted to see the many French vogue words replaced by purely Nordic ones, and, to the delight of posterity, he revived old Nordic words such as *alster* (product), *fräck* (impudent), *gladlynt* (cheerful), *söjd* (handicraft) and *tryta* (run short).

In the 18th century, the provocative writer and scholar Olof von Dalin laid the foundations of informal journalistic language and influenced his pupil, the future King Gustav III (who still mostly spoke French), to work for a purer Swedish. The result was the *Swedish Academy* (1786), which is behind the major *Swedish Academy Dictionary* and still issues the standardising *Swedish Academy Glossary*. In 1999, the *Swedish Academy Grammar* was published. With the Dictionary, it makes Swedish one of the best described languages in the world.

The Language Council of Sweden (at the *Institute for Language and Folklore*) is responsible for planning the standard language. The Language Council of Sweden publishes style manuals, dictionaries and guides and provides the general public with extensive advice free of charge. The Council also works ►

LIST OF NEOLOGISMS

faktaresistens (resistance to facts)

An attitude that involves not permitting yourself to be affected by facts that contradict your own opinion, which is based instead on conspiracy theories, for example (2001).

klickokrati (clickocracy)

A society in which journalism and politics are controlled by what internet users prefer; for example, by clicking on like and share buttons online (2007).

svajpa (swipe)

Control a device such as a computer or mobile by swiping a finger across the screen (2010).

SOURCE: EXTRACT FROM LIST OF NEOLOGISMS 2015

Every year, the Language Council of Sweden and the magazine Språktidningen compile a list of Swedish neologisms.



PHOTO: ULLA MONTAN

The Swedish Academy has eighteen members. Membership is for life.

► with its sister organisations in the other Nordic countries. The Language Council of Sweden also has the task of monitoring how well the *Swedish Language Act* (see right column) is complied with.

Technical terminology is managed by TNC, *the Swedish Centre for Terminology*, which is also responsible for Sweden's so-called term banks, above all *Rikstermbanken*, Sweden's national term bank. Other terminology bodies are *Svenska datatermgruppen* (Swedish IT term group) and *Svenska läkaresällskapets kommitté för medicinsk språkvård* (Swedish Society of Medicine's committee for medical language planning).

The complex Swedish used by public agencies is currently opposed by the *Plain Swedish Office* at the Language Council of Sweden. Sweden is a pioneering country in this regard. The Swedish methods have spread to several other countries and to the EU administration, with campaigns like 'Plain language' and 'Fight the fog'.

Sveriges Radio-TV (the Swedish national public broadcasting service), has its own language planners, and several large daily newspapers in Sweden and Swedish-speaking Finland have language planning employees responsible for linguistic guidelines.

They all work with each other in *Mediespråksgruppen* (the media language group).

All the language planning bodies confer with each other in *Språkvårdsgruppen* (the language planning group), where a consensus often prevails.

call *domain loss*, which entails one language losing terrain to another. The other language is, of course, English, and the domains at risk are primarily scientific language and some other areas of specialist language. Many companies with subsidiaries abroad now have English as their corporate language. Most scientific dissertations are now written in English. Some university teaching even takes place in English as part of globalisation.

However, the situation is serious if those who are in charge of the development of society are unable to take part in public debate in their mother tongue because they lack Swedish words. This presents a risk to the Swedish language, which is not universally fit for purpose, and it presents a risk to democracy.

This risk has been taken seriously and resulted in 2009 in a *Language Act* establishing that Swedish is the primary language of Sweden, and its official language in an international context. Swedish is the language that it must be possible to use in all areas of society. This means that everyone resident in Sweden has a statutory opportunity to learn Swedish. Swedish must be the common language not only for Swedish natives but also for the 20 percent of residents who were born abroad.

The Swedish Language Act also establishes that Swedish must be a complete language that supports society; that is, it must contain all that is required, in particular specialist terminology, for it to be possible for the various functions of society to be discussed in it. The language of public agencies, public sector Swedish, must be cultivated, simple and comprehensible. ►

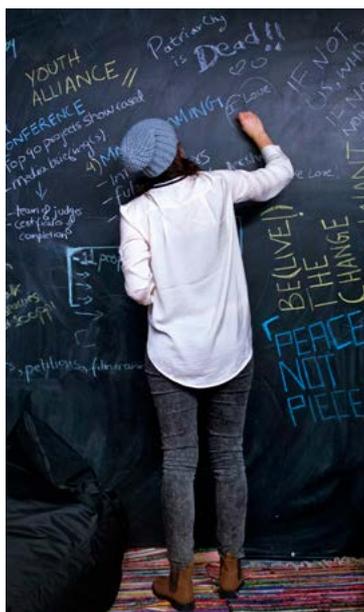


PHOTO: ALINE LESSNER/IMAGERANK.SWEDEN.SE

English is now used as a corporate and teaching language.

Does Swedish have a future?

The Nordic language planning bodies today express concern about what they

- The Swedish Language Act also establishes the right of every individual to language, to develop and acquire the Swedish language, to develop and use their own mother tongue and their own national minority language and to have the opportunity to learn foreign languages.
- However, whether you fear or hope that English will one day replace Swedish, you will have to wait. Despite internationalisation, most Swedes have their roots in a society that English cannot cover. They live in a rich linguistic tradition, with literature on all levels and with stories and songs, jokes and figures of speech. And most of those born abroad do not come from an English-speaking culture either. Even if young people today intersperse their language with phrases and expressions in English, it is Swedish they speak and write in their daily lives. The influence of English is growing, but the Swedish language will still continue to exist in the foreseeable future.

TEN AUTHORS WHO HAVE TAKEN THEIR PLACE IN THE HEARTS OF THE SWEDISH PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR USE OF LANGUAGE

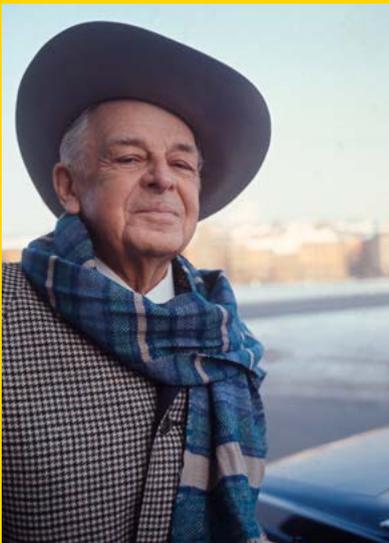


PHOTO: ULF STRÅHL/STTT

Evert Taube – one of our most popular songwriters.

Carl Michael Bellman (1740–1795). A vivid 18th century poet. Most Swedes can sing something he wrote.

August Strindberg (1849–1912). A linguistic pioneer in the 19th century and still modern today. 'My fire is the greatest in Sweden,' he said, and the same can be said about his linguistic energy.

Hjalmar Söderberg (1869–1941). A turn of the century author with a clear, minimalist style and an undertone of melancholy. Stylistically ideal for many, but inimitable.

Selma Lagerlöf (1845–1940). No one can tell a story like her.

Evert Taube (1890–1976). Troubadour and author. A romantic and a realist. He created the summer in Swedish hearts.

Harry Martinson (1904–1978). A wordsmith for both the barren countryside and the spacecraft Anïara.

Sara Lidman (1923–2004). Opened people's ears to the Västerbotten dialect in her novels *Tjärdalen* (The Tar Still) and *Hjortronlandet* (Cloudberry Land). Followed up with *Järnbaneeposet* (The Railway Epic).

Tove Jansson (1914–2001), A Finland Swede, creator of the words and images for the Moomins. Caused speakers of standard Swedish to embrace Finland Swedish pronunciation and Finland Swedish words such as 'råddig' (woolly).

Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002). Linguistic ingenuity with her own colloquial narrative tone. Both very funny and very sad.

Lennart Hellsing (1921–2015). Rhymes, jingles and wordplay. Read and sung by all ages. Creator of the characters 'Krakel Spektakel' and 'Kusin Vitamin'.

Author **Catharina Grünbaum**
Translated by **Stephen Croall**

The author, **Catharina Grünbaum**, has been a language planner at Svenska språknämnden (one of the predecessors of the Language Council of Sweden) and subsequently at the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter.

Her books on language include *Strövtåg i språket* (A Ramble through the Language), *I sällskap med språket* (Accompanied by the Language) and *Språkbladet* (The Language Sheet).

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