TO LEGISLATE OR NOT TO LEGISLATE?
LANGUAGE POLITICS AND LEGITIMATION CRISES
IN GERMANY AND SWEDEN

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Abstract
Since the late 1990s the question of whether to ratify the status of Swedish as the "principal" language by means of a language law has been subject to considerable public dispute in Sweden. Drawing on Blommaert's (1999a) concept of a "language ideological debate", we explore how and why this particular debate recently appeared to reach a dead end without achieving any kind of tangible "closure". In order to do so, we introduce Habermas's (1975, [1973]) notion of "legitimation crisis", as recently applied by Johnson (2005a, 2005b) in her discussion of language ideological debates surrounding the 1996 reform of German orthography. We describe how, according to Habermas, legitimation crises are underpinned by one or more "rationality deficits", i.e. discursive paradoxes that typically emerge in a given historical, cultural, social and economic context. We propose that the concept of "legitimation crisis" not only helps to explain why some language ideological debates seemingly reach a stalemate as in the Swedish case, but also constitutes a theoretical framework that could be productively incorporated into the study of language politics more generally.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of a "language ideological debate" (Blommaert, 1999a) has emerged as a key theoretical focus for a range of sociolinguistic investigations which, concentrating on public disputes around *representations* of linguistic practices, explore the ways in which what often appear to be purely language-related contentions are typically indexical of wider aesthetic, economic, moral and political concerns (Blackledge, 2004, 2005; Jaworski et al., 2004; Johnson, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Milani, 2006, 2007, in press; Stevenson, 2006; Stroud, 2004). But as Blommaert acknowledges (1999b, 1999c), language ideological debates are necessarily messy affairs such that the analyst is almost always likely to encounter difficulties in specifying the points in time at which a given debate begins or ends. Thus sometimes a debate will be sustained thanks to prolonged public interest and intense media involvement, whereas others fizzle out more quickly. And while some debates have clear consequences insofar as they are palpably central to the sedimentation of particular language ideologies, others do not appear to result in any tangible form of "closure". Of course, Blommaert reminds us (ibid) that the exploration of this kind of "fuzziness" is analytically crucial and our understanding of any language ideological debate therefore needs to be informed by in-depth investigations of the multiple contexts – discursive, cultural, social, technological, economic, political and historical – in which such debates are variously embedded.

Although the notion of "closure" in relation to a language ideological debate is in itself problematic, such concepts as "hegemony" and "normalisation" are key here. This is because we are generally concerned to understand how views of language that are *particular* in origin eventually come to be perceived as *common sense*, thereby

achieving a normalised, hegemonic status (Blommaert, 1999b:9; Bourdieu, 2000). In the specific context of language politics,[1] possible indicators of at least some form of "closure" could include the codification of language preferences through the production of grammars, dictionaries, etc., or even the introduction or amendment of legislation. However, in this paper, we do not want to imply that such formal outcomes are inevitable, desirable or, indeed, entirely tantamount to closure, since even codification and legislation may be subject to further contestation. Instead, our particular focus will be on the exploration of a recent debate where the state-induced pursuit of legislation with respect to its majority language has so far failed to achieve any kind of tangible outcome and has, as a result, seemingly ground to a halt – at least for the time being.

The debate in question took place in Sweden between 1997 and 2006, and developed around attempts to introduce new legislation on three related issues: (i) the role of Swedish as the "principal" (i.e. official) language of Sweden; (ii) the specification of "correct" Swedish for use in public administration; and (iii) the official endorsement of Sweden as a multilingual nation-state. We want to emphasise that it is not the aim of this paper to provide either a defence or critique of this particular proposal for language legislation. Rather, what we want to do here is to describe and analyse the debate surrounding the proposal, situating it in its broader contexts. At the same time, our discussion aims to shed new theoretical light on how and why debates such as these sometimes reach an impasse. In order to do this, we will draw upon Jürgen Habermas's notion of *Legitimation Crisis* (1975, [1973]), an important but, we believe, somewhat neglected theoretical concept that deals with the changing relationship between notions of "public" and "private", thereby developing a number of ideas first postulated in his earlier and more widely known text, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989 [1962]).

The remainder of this paper will be divided into four sections. The focus of section 2 will be a description of the Swedish debate in question. This will be followed in section 3 by a detailed examination of Habermas's notion of the public sphere and its relevance for the idea of "legitimation" together with a brief summary of how this theory was recently applied to a different language ideological debate, namely the disputes surrounding the 1996 reform of German orthography (see Johnson, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). In Section 4 we will then return to the Swedish context in order to explore how and why the apparent failure to achieve any kind of tangible closure in recent language debates might also be usefully interpreted in terms of a Habermasian crisis of legitimation, itself underpinned by a series of so-called "rationality deficits". The paper ends with a brief discussion of the reasons why we believe that this particular aspect of Habermas's oeuvre not only has much to contribute to an appreciation of the issues raised by the language-related disputes discussed here, but might be productively incorporated into the study of language politics more generally.

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[1] In the sociolinguistic literature, language policy and/or language planning are typically applied in relation to the overt and covert "mechanisms" (Shohamy, 2006:50), respectively, through which languages are managed and used within a polity. We prefer, however, to use "language politics" as a superordinate term under which to subsume both policy and planning. This is insofar as "politics" emphasises the *dynamics* of the processes underlying deliberations over, and uses of, languages in society. Needless to say, our use of the term "politics" here is not taken in its restricted meaning as tantamount to the behaviour of politicians only, but more broadly, in the sense of all discourses (academic, media, etc.) that have a bearing on particular debates/decisions relating to language.

2. Historical Background

As has already been pointed out in a growing body of sociolinguistic work on what might be broadly referred to as the "politics of Swedish" (Milani, 2006, 2007; Oakes, 2001, 2005), the beginning of the 1990s can be considered something of a turning point insofar as this was the period when the status of the Swedish language vis-à-vis English first became an *overt* topic of public debate and the subsequent target of explicit state intervention. Here we can identify two important steps. First was the decision by the Swedish Government in 1997 to call upon the Swedish Language Council (*Svenska språknämnden*)[2] to draw up a draft action plan for the promotion of Swedish (Regeringsbeslut, 1997). The second step came in 2000 with the appointment of a parliamentary committee, encompassing members from all political parties and a number of selected language experts, whose remit was to present a formal proposal for a comprehensive national language policy (Dir. 2000). Two years later, this committee publicised the outcomes of its various deliberations in a report of nearly six hundred pages entitled *Mål i mun* (SOU, 2002).[3] This report not only outlined the three broad aims that a national language policy should seek to achieve but also offered a detailed account of the practical steps required for their implementation across a range of societal domains (e.g. education, mass media, public administration, etc.). First, in the light of a perceived increase in the use and status of English, both within Sweden itself as well as internationally, the committee suggested that Swedish should remain a "complete and society-bearing language" (*komplett och samhällsbärande språk*) – while "complete" refers to the use of Swedish across all societal domains, "society-bearing" is a much more ambiguous term to which we shall return later in view of its centrality to the document in question). Second, it was proposed that official Swedish should be both "correct" and "well-functioning". According to *Mål i mun*, these two aims could, in turn, be achieved by means of a law that would, on the one hand, sanction the status of Swedish as Sweden's "principal language" (*huvudspråk*) as well as the "official language" (*officiellt språk*) in international contexts, and, on the other, establish that "those working in public administration should use clear and comprehensible Swedish in their work" (SOU, 2002:35).[4] Finally, the third proposal was that everyone, irrespective of their social or linguistic background, should be granted a three-fold "right to language", namely, Swedish, their mother tongue(s), and foreign languages.

In accordance with the conventions of the Swedish legislative system, *Mål i mun* was sent out for consultation to a range of public bodies before the Government presented its own official standpoint. Although responses to many of the proposals contained in the document were broadly positive, one of the main criticisms raised by some of the academics and judiciary organs that were consulted related to the possible ratification of Swedish as the "principal language" of Sweden. Two linguists in particular, namely Sally Boyd from Göteborg University and Leena Huss from Uppsala University, both of whose research deals with minority language issues,

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[2] On 1 July 2006, *Svenska språknämnden* (the Swedish Language Council) was formally replaced by *Språkrådet* (the Language Council [of Sweden]), a section of the public body *Institutet för språk och folkminnen* (the Institute of Language and Folklore).

[3] *Mål i mun* is an idiomatic expression which broadly corresponds to the somewhat more colloquial English term "the gift of the gab", that is, "an ability to speak easily and confidently and to persuade people to do what you want" (the Free Dictionary).

[4] All translations from Swedish sources are our own, unless otherwise specified.

expressed a number of concerns in the official publication of the Swedish Language Council, *Språkvård* (lit. "language cultivation"). Here they argued, for example, that the use of the term "principal language" was inappropriate given that this might be invoked "as an argument against the attempt to preserve and develop other mother tongue languages in Sweden, for example, the national minority languages" (Boyd and Huss, 2003:31). In addition, the two researchers noted how a law sanctioning the use of correct and well-functioning Swedish in the public sector could in fact be *discriminatory*. This is insofar as it might be open to abuse in relation to "[people with Swedish as their second-language] in their role as speakers and writers in public domains, given that their ability to produce 'clear and comprehensible Swedish' could be called into question" (ibid:32). From a specifically judicial perspective, members of the Stockholm city court (*tingsrätt*) also questioned the *form* and *content* of the proposed law, arguing that any law would ultimately need to set down a "precise rule" or "norm". Taking a somewhat similar stance, the administrative court of appeal in Stockholm (*kammarrätt*) queried the normative *efficacy* of a language law, pondering the legal ramifications arising from its potential violation (Remissvar på Mål i mun, not dated).

As for the Government, it took a further three years before a formal legislative proposal on Swedish language policy was eventually made public. Interestingly, the Government's bill (Prop. 2005/06) – entitled *Bästa språket - en samlad svensk språkpolitik* ('Best language: A concerted language policy for Sweden', official translation) – placed particular emphasis on the need to develop a national language policy. But whilst it was suggested that the recognition of Swedish as a "principal language" should certainly be seen as a "language policy goal" (*språkpolitiskt mål*), the Government did *not* believe that this should be officially embodied in law. Moreover, somewhat echoing Boyd and Huss's critique, the Government's standpoint against a language law was further justified by the claim that a requirement "to use clear and comprehensible Swedish in public administration could be perceived as *discriminatory* towards those who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue or, for other reasons, do not have a command of Swedish" (Prop. 2005/06:16 - our emphasis). Notwithstanding, the Government's rejection of a language law provoked an angry and bewildered reaction from several politicians and well-known academics. For example, the author of a number of popular publications and presenter of a successful TV programme on language, Fredrik Lindström, accused the Government of "cowardly political correctness" (SVT2, 6 December 2005). Likewise, in an op-ed article published in the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* (6 December 2005a), a member of the prestigious Swedish Academy (*Svenska Akademien*), Sture Allén, bemoaned the Government's standpoint, similarly describing it as a typical example of Swedish political correctness that betrayed an underlying anxiety around issues of racism and nationalism.

Finally, on 7 December 2005, the bill was brought before parliament where the Government's proposal *not* to introduce a language law was upheld by a narrow majority (147 vs. 145 votes)[5], although routine checks later showed the result to have

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[5] The language issue caused a split in the Leftist coalition in power at the time. While the Social Democratic Party was opposed to the law and the Green Party was in favour, the Left Party suggested that a language law should be evaluated by the ongoing inquiry into the constitution (*grundlagsutredning*). Also favourably disposed toward a language law were the parties belonging to the Centre-Right (i.e. the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party and the Christian-Democratic Party).

been the product of a procedural error. Understandably, this parliamentary dismissal by no means marked the end of the debate. On 20 December 2005, the Social Democratic Minister of Culture and Education, Leif Pagrotsky, argued in *Svenska Dagbladet* that "Swedish is so strong that it does not need to be defended" and went on to claim that "politicians should make laws and decisions about issues that really mean something. This law, by contrast, would have no tangible effect" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 20 December 2005). However, Sture Allén immediately countered that Swedish did indeed need to be defended in view of the changing conditions of the so-called "global village", which meant that "languages are rapidly dying out to the considerable detriment of both science and culture" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 December 2005). This was an argument reiterated on 19 January 2006 when Allén reminded readers of *Svenska Dagbladet* that "there is still scope for a re-assessment [of the language law] in the public domain".

The turning point in the debate appeared to come on 1 February 2006 when Pagrotsky somewhat revised his previous position, arguing in an interview published in *Svenska Dagbladet* that he was not essentially *against* the official sanctioning of Swedish as principal language, and signalled his intent to discuss the issue further with representatives from the other parties. To the best of our knowledge, the Government certainly *intended* to conduct a formal investigation about the possibility and juridical feasibility of a language law (Olle Josephson, Director of the Language Council of Sweden – see note 2 – personal communication) although such an inquiry failed to be initiated prior to the parliamentary election of September 2006, which then saw the defeat of the Social Democratic Party. However, on 8 February 2007, the newly-elected Centre-Right Government appointed a one-man inquiry commission whose remit was to draft a proposal for a language law (Dir. 2007) such that, at the time of writing (autumn 2007), it remains to be seen whether or not such a law will eventually be ratified in the near future.

3. Language, Publics and Legitimation

As noted in the introduction, recent developments in sociolinguistics and the cognate field of linguistic anthropology have meant that the concept of the "public sphere" – in relation to, say, "public debates" and "public representations" – has emerged as an important site for the study of language in its social and political contexts. For example, in their groundbreaking volume *Languages and Publics: The Making of Authority*, Gal and Woolard (2001a) explore what they consider to be the important dialectical relationship between two semiotic processes, namely, the public construction of *languages*, on the one hand, and the linguistic construction of *publics*, on the other. Here the notion of "public" is sociolinguistically valuable insofar as it allows us to go beyond constructions of identity in real-time and typically *spoken* interactions amongst groups of co-present interlocutors – a discursive phenomenon that constitutes the empirical foundation of the more traditional sociolinguistic concepts of "speech community" (e.g. Labov, 1966) and "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; see also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Instead, the focus of analysis where *publics* are concerned is more likely to be on mediated and typically time-delayed discursive exchanges in which "images of linguistic phenomena gain social credibility and political influence" (Gal and Woolard, 2001b:7; see also Johnson and Ensslin, 2007a:15). Such discursive accomplishment of authority in relation to language issues is then achieved through some form of textual mediation whereby a multiplicity of non-co-present social actors are represented - or *invoked* - as more or less autonomous, anonymous and/or

homogenous groups or publics (see also Johnson, 2005b; Johnson and Ensslin, 2007b). Put simply, the notion of publics may help us to capture *how* and *why* certain representations of languages and their speakers gain authority (or not) and how such semiotic processes are ultimately linked to the legitimation of, say, governmental intervention in linguistic matters.

3.1 The public sphere and crises of legitimation – a Habermasian view

Gal and Woolard base their concept of "public" on the well-known work of German social theorist Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, originally published in German in 1962 though not translated into English until 1989. Here, Habermas describes how the 17th and 18th centuries can be seen as a turning point in European history during which time a "bourgeois public sphere" first came into being as a result of three interconnected processes: (i) the emergence of trade capitalism; (ii) the demise of absolutist monarchies; and (iii) the rise of "a depersonalised state authority" separate from civil society (Habermas, 1989:19). Following Gal and Woolard (2001b:5), it is important to highlight that the bourgeois public sphere is not, for Habermas, simply an abstract phenomenon symptomatic of a budding economic and political ideology in post-enlightenment European polities. Rather, it needs to be understood as a more concrete site characterised by novel institutions and everyday practices. Central to this new kind of public space was not only the trading of a larger volume of *material* goods than hitherto, but the simultaneous increase in the circulation of *symbolic* commodities – not least, news and information – facilitated by the expansion of the print industry. Somewhat foreshadowing Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) observations on the role played by print capitalism in the construction of the nation as an "imagined community", Habermas emphasised the ways in which the growth of print media had a radical effect on social structure more generally (cf. Calhoun, 1992b:8). This was insofar as *private* individuals began to gather together as a *public* in new social spaces such as coffee houses, salons and voluntary organisations in order to discourse upon matters of common concern for the polity, e.g. trade, the news, administration, etc., typically on the basis of ideas previously encountered in newspapers and pamphlets. Furthermore, for Habermas, the most important characteristic of this new kind of public space was that "[t]he medium of […] political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: *people's public use of their reason*" (1989:26 – our emphasis). In other words, access to debates on matters of public interest was not regulated in accordance with the socio-economic status of its participants (as in the case of the Greek *polis*) but on the basis of *critical rationality* alone (cf. Calhoun, 1992b:2, 6ff). Moreover, the actual physical spaces in which these discursive encounters took place acquired their own status as *political* precisely on the grounds of their separation from the private sphere, one of the main concerns of participants being the defence of that private realm from any infringement by the state (for discussion, see also Calhoun, 1992a; Crossley and Roberts, 2004).

According to Habermas, the boundaries between these newly-emerged public and private spheres began to blur around the beginning of the 19th century as a direct corollary to transformations in the nature and structure of capitalism (cf. Calhoun, 1992b:21-32). This involved what he described as: "a progressive 'societalization' of the state", on the one hand, accompanied by "an increasing 'stateification' of society", on the other (Habermas, 1989:142). In other words, the state was itself increasingly becoming involved in the regulation of certain aspects of social life that had previously been dealt with from within the private sphere, whilst private organisations

simultaneously began to achieve public power. Crucially, the blurring of the boundaries between private and public resulted in "the loss of the notion that private life (family, economy) created autonomous, relatively *equal* persons who in public discourse might address the general or public interest" (Calhoun, 1992b:21 - our emphasis). This, in turn, meant that "members of the public sphere los[t] their common ground" (ibid:25), namely, critical rationality, ultimately leading to a transformation of that sphere into "an arena in which a wide range of social interests vie for state action" (ibid:30). Thus the hitherto more *general* concerns of the polity as critically debated in the early bourgeois public sphere were thought by Habermas to have been superseded by a multiplicity – cacophony even – of *particular* viewpoints, each now competing for official recognition.

Habermas's theorisation of the public sphere is undeniably contentious, partly because of the somewhat overly deterministic portrayal of generalised material conditions in relation to specific social, political and cultural behaviours, but also because the author failed to adequately problematise its highly élitist and ultimately androcentric structure within early capitalism (see Benhabib, 1992; Fraser, 1992). It has also been suggested that Habermas did not sufficiently highlight what exactly makes the purported blurring of these rather idealised notions of public and private so inherently problematic (Fraser, 1992) though this is a theme taken up in more detail in his later work *Legitimation Crisis* (Habermas, 1975 [1973]). Here the starting point is Habermas's observation that in advanced forms of capitalism the state has become increasingly *pro-active* in the regulation of the economy both on a national and international level (see also Fairclough, 2002, 2003). This has led, first of all, to a structural shift whereby many economic problems once resolved within the purportedly apolitical sphere of civil society have now become the responsibility of the state. However, given that acts of government in post-enlightenment democracies are typically legitimated on condition that they are justified in the name of "public interest", the capitalist state in late modernity constantly runs the risk of being caught up in a kind of legitimation paradox, itself characterised by a so-called "rationality deficit". This is because the state promotes and therefore officially endorses an economic system, i.e. capitalism, that (re)produces socio-economic inequalities amongst the inhabitants of its territory, whilst at the same time needing to justify – or *rationalise* – this economic choice in terms of the "good" of the population as a whole.

As Habermas (1975:46ff) suggests, however, it is not only the political management of economic issues that may be subject to this kind of legitimation paradox. Given that state actions in late capitalism typically extend to the *cultural* arena, any attempt on the part of the state to engage in the management of 'culture' is just as likely to encounter one or more types of rationality deficit underpinning what Habermas then refers to as *legitimation crises*. These crises, in turn, are generated by the interplay of two sets of mutually conditioning circumstances. First, once the state begins to involve itself in matters of culture (say, education), it finds itself having to rationalise its own intervention into issues previously defined by concepts of *self-legitimation*, and hence traditionally considered to be best resolved from within the private sphere (Habermas, 1975:47). Second, given the transformation of the public sphere into a discursive arena in which the interests of a range of *particular* organised constituencies each vie for hegemony, the state now finds itself in a position of having to justify why one set of viewpoints is to be prioritised over another. To give just one simple example, if the UK Government insists (as it has) that all pupils must at some point in the secondary school curriculum encounter the "great" works of William

Shakespeare, the Government's educational authorities must then *justify* this playwright's inclusion in the literary canon vis-à-vis the concomitant underrating/exclusion of other authors, not least the works of, say, women and/or writers of Asian or Afro-Caribbean descent. And as part of that process, of course, the state is obliged to explicitly articulate the very qualities of Shakespeare's oeuvre that contribute to its alleged "greatness" rather than simply taking these for granted in accordance with notions of tradition.

3.2 Legitimation crises and the reform of German orthography

This idea of a shift from a cultural canon defined primarily by "tradition" and "self-legitimation", on the one hand, towards a more explicit, state-led process of planning accompanied by public calls for justifiability, on the other, is one that can be fruitfully applied to debates over language. Of course, we are aware that Habermas's theory cannot in isolation account for all the complexities of a given language ideological debate. We therefore concur with Blommaert's (1999b:6-8) suggestion that social theory should always be informed by detailed investigations into the "intrinsic historicity" of the debate in question. This means paying close attention to the interplay between social actors and their interests, available semiotic resources, and the specific discursive constraints that collectively determine what may – or may not – be said at any given historical conjuncture (see also Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000; Blommaert, 2005). Adopting Blommaert's historiographical approach, one of the present authors (Johnson, 2005a, 2005b) therefore explored how the concept of legitimation crisis could be applied to one particular language ideological debate, namely attempts to re-standardise German orthography in the mid-1990s that culminated in a protracted process of litigation involving the highest judicial body in the land, the Federal Constitutional Court. As Johnson proposed, this particular crisis was rooted in at least three different kinds of "rationality deficit" as follows.

The first can be described as broadly *historical-cultural*. This related to the fact that prior to the political unification of Germany in 1871, the question of what constituted correct spelling and punctuation was largely regulated from within the private sphere via, for example, individual lexicographers, grammarians and publishing houses, etc. Of course, it is one of the most enduring myths of civil society that its own practices and values are somehow less susceptible to ideological interest than those of the state. However, it is certainly true that, for as long as questions of German orthography were subject to "self-regulation" within the private sphere, the pressure for *explicit* legitimation was largely absent. By contrast, following the state-sponsored codification of German orthography in 1901/2 and its concomitant monitoring of orthography throughout the 20th century (primarily via the education system), the re-standardisation process that took place in the mid-1990s was immediately accompanied by public demands that the state in fact *rationalise* its involvement in the standardisation of orthography per se. After all, many other states (notably the UK) do not engage in the formal codification of spelling and punctuation in this way. Moreover, there is nothing in the German constitution (or "Basic Law") that afforded the state the right to regulate any aspect of the German language, orthographic or otherwise. In other words, central to the complainants' call for legitimation was the perceived need for the state to formally account for its desire to participate in the process of orthographic standardisation – underpinned by the complainants' own conviction that this was in fact an area of the cultural canon more appropriately regulated by tradition and self-legitimation within the private sphere.

The historical dimension leads in turn to a second kind of rationality deficit, albeit one which might be described as more specifically *linguistic*. This relates to the fact that any state policy geared towards language standardisation necessarily involves the specification of rules – even where their *pre*scription is couched in terms of *de*scription. In this sense, the very process of standardisation, orthographic or otherwise, is rooted in what Rivers and Young (2001:178) refer to as a "positivistic rule-optimism", in other words, a belief that all language is ultimately rule-governed. This is neither the time nor place to enter into a protracted discussion about what is one of the most fundamental philosophical questions on the nature of language *per se*. But even if all linguists were to agree that language, including variation and change in its patterns of usage, could be satisfactorily rationalised in terms of a finite set of universal rules, the problem still remains that the formal process of standardisation is itself contrary to linguistic reality. This is because any official policy on standardisation is necessarily underpinned by an attempt to render *fixed* and *immutable* a phenomenon that is, by its very nature, *variable* and *mutable* such that, for Rosina Lippi-Green (1997:40), the whole notion of a "*standard* language" is something of an oxymoron. Even allowing for the truism that written language lends itself more readily to standardisation than its spoken counterpart, orthographic practices together with perceptions of "correctness" still remain subject to variation across time and space. Accordingly, the German state, in its attempt to fix spelling and punctuation practices, placed itself in the impossible position of having to explicitly rationalise (and ultimately monitor) a course of action that was rooted in a fundamental *mis*-recognition of the essence of any living language. Meanwhile, the complainants once again preferred to see such issues regulated within the private sphere via a more traditional, organic process of standardisation akin to Habermas's notion of *self*-legitimation.

The third kind of rationality deficit facing the reformers of German orthography follows on from the historical and linguistic issues described above and concerns the more explicitly *social* dimension of the standardisation process. This is because an ability to spell correctly generally functions in literate cultures as an in-group marker of educational achievement and/or social standing (Clark and Ivanič, 1997). In Western, highly literate societies this is therefore likely to mean that as soon as any state involves itself in the standardisation or, in this case, *re*-standardisation of language, it is going to be called upon by the public to justify the linguistic choices that are made alongside the metaphorical privileges thereby encoded. On one level, it could be argued that the state-sanctioned instrumentalisation of orthography as a symbolic resource for the disciplining of language users through the educational system is no more justifiable in terms of its infringements of the rights of *some* individuals than, by analogy with Habermas, an economy based on the principles of capitalism. That said, as Johnson (2005a:124-30) shows, the public calls for legitimation that were voiced within the litigation process surrounding the German case were less likely to come from anti-élitist quarters aiming to challenge the disciplinary use of orthography per se. On the contrary, protests originated predominantly from members of an educated bourgeois élite primarily concerned to protect any previously accumulated cultural capital that appeared to be under threat from the so-called "strategic recontextualisation" (Gal and Woolard, 2001b:8) of orthographic practices implied by the new reform. In this respect, as with the historical and linguistic issues discussed above, the overall crisis of legitimation surrounding the German reform was marked by a concerted effort on the part of its culturally conservative opponents to protect questions of orthography from state

intervention, itself shored up by the belief that such matters were more properly, indeed *legitimately*, regulated via canonical traditions organically generated from within the private sphere.

The three types of rationality deficit described here in relation to the German dispute – historical-cultural, linguistic and social – can help us to understand how and why this particular language ideological debate eventually developed into such a highly contentious and protracted crisis of legitimation. This consisted of public calls for *explicit* legitimation on the part of the state to justify its interventions into German orthography, which took the form of a series of regional court cases that were ultimately referred to the Federal Constitutional Court. As a language ideological debate, the German dispute was every bit as fuzzy as we have come to expect from scenarios such as these. However, even allowing for the fact that none of the issues subject to a rationality deficit was satisfactorily addressed within the ensuing process of litigation (see Johnson, 2005a:130-8 for further analysis), a form of "closure" was nonetheless achieved. In 1998, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that the reform did not in fact impinge upon the basic constitutional rights of citizens to a sufficiently fundamental extent as to prevent its implementation. In other words, closure was achieved, not through a resolution of those rationality deficits underpinning the crisis of legitimation per se, but ultimately via the imposition of state power. What we want to explore in the next section is the way in which the three kinds of deficit described in relation to the German debate might also be applied to the recent situation in Sweden where, by contrast, such *de jure* closure does not (yet) appear to have been achieved. [6]

4. The Swedish Debate Re-visited

As we saw in section 2 of this paper, we have recently witnessed for the first time in Sweden an attempt on the part of the state to legislate on a socio-cultural issue that had traditionally been seen as *outside* the realm of organised politics: the status of Swedish as the official language of Sweden. By drawing certain parallels with the language ideological debate over German orthography, what we want to address in this section is *why* this issue was increasingly *thematised* within the Swedish public sphere at this particular point in time, albeit without any tangible outcome or effect. This, we would argue, can be understood in the specific case of Sweden if we see the broader debate as symptomatic of "local" state-level problems that have arisen in response to sub- and super-state transformations that have recently taken place in the context of "globalisation" (Blommaert, 2003:612; see also Blommaert, 2005). Of course, globalisation is itself a contentious notion and it lies beyond the scope of our discussion to give a comprehensive overview of the relevant controversies. Suffice it to say here that we view globalisation as a process that pertains to the *re-structuring* and *re-scaling* of relations – be they economic, political, social, communicative, etc. In their semiotic dimension, this then entails a *re-signification* of the ways in which individuals both *perceive* and *make use* of material and symbolic resources (see Blommaert, 2003; Fairclough, 2002, 2003).

As far as Sweden is concerned, the single most important event in relation to "super-state" re-organisation to have occurred in the 1990s was the country's entry into the European Union. This prompted a range of public reactions, not least from a range of politicians and linguists who called for state intervention to protect the

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[6] It is important to note here that such formal, i.e. *de jure*, closure in the German case was by no means accompanied by a *de facto* resolution of the debate over orthography. For details of the ongoing disputes, particularly within the media, see Johnson (2005a, 2007).

Swedish language, fearing that the dominance of English in EU institutions would serve only to consolidate the already increased status of that language in several domains of Swedish society (see Milani, 2006, 2007, for a more detailed historical analysis). These concerns were what initially motivated the Government's request in 1997 that the Swedish Language Council draft a document for the promotion of Swedish, eventually leading to the policy proposals published in *Mål i mun* in 2002.

However, the first obstacle the state had to face in addressing the language issue consisted of a quite specific discursive constraint that regulates political discourse in Sweden. This pertains to the perceived unacceptability of any overt manifestation of ethnic nationalism in the form of, say, openly highlighting language as a resource that symbolises an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991, [1983]) of ethnic Swedes, and by extension, as a metonymic representation of the Swedish nation as a whole, thus privileging one ethnic or linguistic group. This taboo around ethno-nationalism (cf. Daun, 1996; Oakes, 2001) can be understood as the result of two historical and ideological conditions.

First, the nation-building project undertaken by the Social Democrats following World War II aimed at boosting Sweden as a paramount example of a modern and neutral, but nonetheless dynamic, nation-state in the international arena. Given that, when a state seeks to present itself as an international model, it "must deny that it is nationalist. It must claim to speak with the voice of universality, whilst protecting its own particular interests" (Billig, 1995:92), Social Democracy was obliged to uncouple any inherent ties between language, ethnicity and nation (Oakes, 2001; Teleman, 2003). This meant downplaying the overt function of Swedish as a symbolic means in national contexts, while embracing English as a symbol of Sweden in the international arena (Oakes, 2001). Second, without going into the details of the debates over immigration during the last thirty years, suffice it to say that since the mid-1970s the state has consistently opted for multiculturalism/diversity (*mångkultur/mångfald*) as the fundamental principles on which Swedish politics should be defined. Focusing on the relationship between ethnic groups, it was made clear in 1997 that the aim was to promote integration as "a reciprocal process" pertaining to all (i.e. Swedes and non-Swedes), emphasising "the possibilities to become part of a larger entity without being required to sacrifice one's own cultural and ethnic identity" (Prop. 1997/98:22ff). It was also suggested that integration can only be achieved provided that "societal, ethnic and cultural diversity is taken as the point of departure for the formation and implementation of policy in all societal domains and at all levels" (ibid:19). In other words, the Swedish state did not only endorse the maintenance and *promotion* of social, ethnic and cultural diversity – it adopted the very notion of *diversity* as a marker with which to define Swedish political praxis per se. In the next three sections, we will now explore how the discursive constraint ensuing from these two historical and ideological conditions relates to the three types of Habermasian "rationality deficit" described above, thus accounting for the stalemate that the state appeared to reach in late 2006 when attempting to legislate on the Swedish language.

4.1 Rationality deficit 1: Historical-cultural

As already indicated above, we see the first type of rationality deficit – *historical-cultural* – as having its origins in two conflicting discourses circulating in Sweden throughout the 1990s. Although Swedish has historically occupied the *de facto* position of principal and dominant language in Sweden, the state needed to justify its decision to *overtly* sanction such status in response to a perceived increase

in the use and value of English. As a direct consequence, however, the state found itself in the position of entering the domain of what is a socio-cultural taboo, namely that Swedish should be promoted and officially endorsed as a symbol of national identity. As we shall see, the textual manifestations of this paradox are typified by a constant tension between the need to foreground the instrumental-communicative function of Swedish, on the one hand, whilst at the same time downplaying the symbolic dimension, on the other (see also Milani, 2007). A good example of this can already be found in the connotations of the adjective *samhällsbärande* ("society-bearing") as used in *Mål i mun*. As emphasised in the part of the document dedicated to presenting the rationale and feasibility of a language law, the first and most important motivation for sanctioning Swedish as the principal language is that it should not lose its role as a "complete and society-bearing language" (SOU, 2002:465):

(1)   The status of Swedish as complete and "society-bearing" is under threat, as exemplified not least by a decline in the use of Swedish in certain functional domains. Other languages, particularly English, have accrued a higher status, both nationally and internationally. Moreover, Sweden has become a multilingual society. Five minority languages have now been formally recognised as national minority languages. As a result of immigration, a large number of languages have also come to Sweden. In this social context, it is important that the population has a common language, i.e. a language that is the principal language. In Sweden, this is Swedish. We therefore suggest that the status of Swedish as the principal language be ratified by law. Such legislation should be viewed as a measure to prevent Swedish from losing its society-bearing function. Our proposal should also be seen as a step towards accomplishing a multicultural and multilingual society, in which Swedish is the common language. (SOU, 2002:465)

Clearly, the authors of *Mål i mun* wish to highlight a pressing need for language legislation in Sweden on account of three main changes in the sociolinguistic landscape: (i) a rise in the use and status of English; (ii) the official recognition of indigenous minority languages; and (iii) the increased linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the Swedish population. Also evident is the way in which the representation of the Swedish language as somehow "endangered" is enhanced by the construction of a linguistic "Other", namely, English, against which Swedish needs some kind of safeguard (see also Milani, 2007). Nonetheless, it is still not entirely obvious what Swedish as a "society-bearing language" means in this context. One insight is provided elsewhere in *Mål i mun* by a definition which states:

(2)   That language [i.e. Swedish] is *samhällsbärande* means first of all that Swedish has the role of the common language in Sweden, i.e. the language which in a multilingual society makes it possible for people with different language backgrounds to meet and act together. Second, it means that Swedish is the language we use in official situations in Sweden: in politics, administration, the judicial and educational system, etc. (SOU, 2000:419)

Particularly significant in this extract is the way in which "society-bearing" is equated with the function of Swedish as an *instrument of communication* in the public sphere and as a *lingua franca* for inhabitants of the Swedish territory. By contrast, the symbolic function of Swedish as a marker of national identity is absent. That said, the importance of Swedish for identity purposes in general is not entirely missing in *Mål i mun*. For example, an electronic search shows that there are 20 occurrences of the token *identitet** (identity*) although the expression *nationell identitet* (national identity) features only once in over 600 pages. Moreover, this single occurrence is to be found in a quotation from the draft action programme elaborated by the Swedish Language Council in 1997, which explicitly claimed that a language law "would also contribute to strengthening the role of Swedish as a symbolic resource and bearer of national identity" (SOU, 2002:461). This is also one of the two contexts in which the lemma SYMBOL* occurs in relation to the Swedish language, the other one being the section of *Mål i mun* dedicated to the rationale behind the proposed language law as follows:

(3)   We think that it is important in a democratic society that everyone is given the opportunity to participate in public discussions, and that everyone has access to, or a command of, the common language [i.e. Swedish].
The issue of the national language is also an important *symbolic* matter. (SOU, 2002:463 – our emphasis)

Here we see how the symbolic relevance of Swedish in relation to national identity is explicitly articulated. At the same time, however, this link is downplayed by way of the adverbial hedge "also" that contributes to a positioning of the symbolic value of Swedish as a means of political participation only *after* reference to its instrumental value. To take another example from the same section of the policy document, it is argued that a law would give "a very clear signal of the importance of the Swedish language. Therefore, in our judgement, a law would help to achieve the language policy aims" (ibid). Once again, the symbolic aspect is broadly acknowledged. However, it is not conceptualised as an *inherent* component of the language policy objectives and hence central to the notion of "society-bearing". Rather, the "symbolic" is envisaged as an *external aid* that would contribute to the fulfilment of those policy goals.

To recapitulate, although we do not deny that there are some instances in *Mål i mun* in which language figures as a resource tied to national/cultural identity such as those mentioned above, what is foregrounded most prominently throughout the policy document is the instrumental function of Swedish as *a public medium of wider communication*. This function is then seen as politically worthy of legislation in relation to a "language-as-right" argument (cf. Ruiz, 1984; Ricento, 2005). In this respect, not only is the "right to language" one of the three language policy aims, but the Swedish language in its function as a medium of communication is represented as a *democratic* right that should be warranted to all individuals living in Sweden since it facilitates participation in the public sphere. It is also crucial to point out how the legitimacy of this argument is bolstered by the invocation of the people who inhabit the Swedish territory as a society (*samhälle*), or to employ Gal and Woolard's (2001b) terminology, a *public*, whose very existence as such rests on a *shared use* of the Swedish language. To put this point in the simplest terms, the Swedish language "bears" Swedish society because it provides its members – whatever their linguistic

backgrounds – with a medium through which to communicate. Accordingly, all inhabitants should be given the opportunity to learn and speak Swedish for use in the public sphere. This can also be seen as a prime example of what Gal and Woolard (ibid:6-7) refer to as the "authority of anonymity", that is, a semiotic strategy through which the authority of a linguistic image is achieved via the representation of a language (typically a standard language) as a code that belongs to "everyone" insofar as it belongs to "no-one in particular" (see also Johnson, 2005b:461, 468-9; and Lippi-Green, 1997 for discussions of the related notion of standard language ideology).

The examples discussed thus far illustrate the tension that exists between the need to justify state intervention in linguistic matters, on the one hand, and the available and culturally acceptable discursive means of doing so, on the other. This, in turn, presupposes the need to emphasise the *instrumental* function of Swedish given that the symbolic dimension remains taboo. Ultimately, however, these two functions cannot be separated. As Stephen May puts it: "*all* language(s) embody and accomplish both identity and instrumental functions for those who speak them" (2005:334 – emphasis in original). Accordingly, even if the symbolic aspect of language is downplayed, formal recognition of the standard language as official, national or principal, would automatically serve to legitimate its symbolic value or prestige (May, 2003; see also Bourdieu, 1991). This is also acknowledged by one of the academics involved in the formulation of *Mål i Mun*, Björn Melander, Professor of Nordic Languages at Uppsala University. In the pages of *Språkvård*, Melander argued that a language law "would give prominence to Swedish as a fundamental part of Swedish society, i.e. the essence of what makes Sweden Sweden. In international contexts it would also indicate clearly the importance we attribute to our language." (Melander, 2002:9). In our opinion, this does not concern here the communicative function alone, but the interplay between both the communicative and symbolic functions. However, this creates its own kind of rationality deficit since the Swedish state could not be seen to explicitly endorse this standpoint in view of its inherent conflict with the discursive-cultural taboo around nationalism, itself a product of the *historical-cultural* conditions emanating from the post-war period. Moreover, as Matilda Ernkrans, a Social Democratic Member of Parliament, claimed in her explanation of why the language law proposal was ultimately dismissed by the Government as potentially *discriminatory*, "Swedish is our principal language, but we are a multilingual country. This is a strength we want to highlight" (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 6 December 2005b). Here Ernkrans seems to assume a conflict between legislating Swedish, on the one hand, and recognising multilingualism, on the other. This, in turn, leads us to a discussion of the second of our three rationality deficits, namely the linguistic dimension.

4.2 Rationality deficit 2: Linguistic

In proposing that standard Swedish should be "correct and function well", the Swedish Language Council referred to three particular domains of language use: (i) public administration; (ii) mass media; and (iii) the institutions of the European Union. With specific reference to public administration, it is then stated in *Mål i mun* that: "the language of public administration should be correct and function well in that it is clear, and as simple and comprehensible as possible" (SOU, 2002:245).

The reasons why the Committee chose to emphasise "clarity" and "simplicity" as a pre-requisite of language use in public administration can be better understood if read in the light of the so-called "functionalist" approach that informed much of the

work around the standardisation of Swedish from the end of the 19th century (Josephson, 2004; Teleman, 2002, 2003). The main principle underlying such an approach was formulated in 1885 by the Swedish linguist Adolf Noréen, according to whom "the best language variety is one that combines the highest levels of clarity and simplicity" (1885:147, cited in Teleman, 2003:66). This functionalist view of language spread among Swedish linguists throughout the 20th century thanks to the success of the grammar that was commissioned by the Swedish Academy and authored by Erik Wellander (1939) (Teleman, 2003:54, 72). Here the titles of the sections dedicated to the guidelines on the written language implore the user to: "Write clearly! Write simply! Write concisely! Write in Swedish!" (*Skriv klart! Skriv enkelt! Skriv kort! Skriv svenska!*) (Wellander, 1939:iii-iv). Such functionalism did not, however, remain limited to academic circles. It had in fact a much broader societal impact insofar as Swedish language planners after World War II, informed both by Noréen's and Wellander's ideas and by a Social Democratic emphasis on social equality, became increasingly engaged in a range of activities aiming to simplify bureaucratic Swedish or so-called "officialese" (see also Oakes, 2001:75 and Teleman, 2003:55).

There can be no doubt that the prominence accorded by *Mål i mun* to the clarity and simplicity of standard Swedish in public administration (both in the national arena and the EU) was an important step along a well-established path towards language democratisation. That said, linguistic correctness or so-called 'verbal hygiene' (Cameron, 1995) is always a politically thorny issue and, as we saw in relation to the German debate over orthography, invariably subject to its own kind of rationality deficit. The first problem emerges from the fact that any notion of "standard" language is inherently tied to what constitutes a linguistic norm in a specific context. This is because the standard, in order to qualify as such, needs to be *singular*, that is, "imagined as one clear set of rules, patterns and conventions" that "allow[s] one 'correct' realization" (Blommaert, Creve and Willaert, 2006:37). Accordingly, the very process of defining what is to count as standard inevitably leads to the enactment of clear-cut boundaries between what is correct, and what is not. Of course, in many institutional or non-institutional contexts, issues of linguistic correctness are a taken-for-granted reality such that speakers' linguistic performances are constantly assessed against an invoked norm, and, if divergent from it, disqualified as incorrect and unacceptable. However, questions of correctness become particularly contentious where attempts are made to formalise them by means of language legislation. This is because, as soon as a norm is explicitly articulated (or implicitly presupposed) on the part of the state, the state must not only specify what that linguistic norm is, but also clarify the sanctions to be taken in those cases where it is violated, so as not to undermine the efficacy of the law itself (see the reaction from some judicial instances above). In the case of the Swedish debate, however, *Mål i mun* raises a further problem in this regard:

(4)   Another issue that has been discussed is which possible sanctions might be tied to a language law. As shown in our overview, the French language law contains such sanctions. However, we think that Swedish legislation should not contain them. […] In our judgement there are risks that an attempt to control language might come into conflict with the right to freedom of speech. We have highlighted in this policy proposal that language belongs to everyone and should not be subject to state normification. One might therefore argue that language

legislation would lack a precise judicial or effective aim. However, in chapter 20, we propose the setting up of a public authority with responsibility for the implementation of language policy. We suggest that one of the tasks of this authority should be to follow up and evaluate the functioning of legislative regulations and other rules in the field of language. Accordingly, a language law would give support in pursuing language policy activities. (SOU, 2002:464)

The particular problem here is a paradox between an act through which "clear" and "comprehensible" Swedish should be legally endorsed as a norm for the well-functioning of the public sphere, on the one hand, coupled with, what is effectively a *denial* of this very act of normativity, on the other.

It is at this juncture that it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the rationality deficit that might, for analytical purposes, be described as purely "linguistic" from its inevitably *social* implications. For example, as a large body of sociolinguistic research has demonstrated (see e.g. Blommaert, 1999c; Blommaert, Creve and Willaert, 2006; Lippi-Green, 1997; May, 2005), standard languages are far from *neutral* codes that have resulted from natural and evolutionary-like development. Rather, they are the historical and socio-cultural sedimentation of a series of selection processes through which the varieties of *some* speakers (typically middle-class, educated members of a majority group) have been *valorised* by being granted the status of norm within a given community (cf. Bourdieu, 1991). It has also been shown how the social inequalities that typically ensue as a result of language standardisation are the result of powerful synergies between class, gender, ethnicity and education that coalesce in ways that determine the *differential access* that speakers have to language(s) (cf. Gal, 1989). Accordingly, even if *Mål i mun* were to have specified a detailed norm for "correct" Swedish and then afforded it official recognition as a pre-requisite for participation in the public sphere, this very process would have invested linguistic boundaries with statutory legitimacy, thereby legitimating inequality between a public of speakers that *does* have privileged access to standard Swedish and a public of speakers that *does not*. But as we have seen throughout this paper, such state-induced inequality in the Swedish context would have been in opposition to the historical-discursive taboo around ethnicity and nationalism. In this way, we see how the fundamental rationality deficit surrounding the standardisation of the linguistic code *per se* is invariably tied into questions of *social* (in)equality, not least as we shall demonstrate in the next section in relation to questions of multilingualism and diversity.

4.3 Rationality deficit 3: Social

As has been argued elsewhere (Milani, 2007, in press), any representation of Sweden as an ethnically homogenous country is ultimately rooted in a discursive construct that *mis*recognises the inherent and historical heterogeneity of its inhabitants. Indeed, one of the main consequences of globalisation for Sweden has been the enhanced human mobility that has brought about a major transformation at the sub-state level by contributing to a re-shaping of the ethnic composition of the Swedish population. This process of change has been semiotically salient because it entailed, from the post-war period onwards, a re-signification of the boundaries between what counted as being "Swedish" versus being "Other" (Milani, in press; Stroud, 2004). Politically, this meant that the state was required to articulate its own

official standpoint about whether, and *how*, to manage this new-found diversity in relation to notions of ethnicity, culture and language.

With regard to questions of language, the state endorsed the recognition of linguistic minorities' right to "sustain and develop" their "home languages". In practice, this fed into the so-called Home Language Reform (*hemspråksreform*) of 1977 that subsequently led to the implementation of different forms of bilingual educational provision (though the official definition of "home languages" was changed to "mother tongues" in 1997). In this way, minority languages, both indigenous and migrant, were granted official recognition as subjects of the school curriculum and sometimes (though less frequently) as the medium of instruction alongside Swedish (see Hyltenstam and Tuomela, 1996 for a broader discussion of bilingual education in Sweden). A second step in the recognition of the linguistic rights of minorities (albeit indigenous minorities only) was the ratification in 2000 of the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, which led to the sanctioning of Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani, Sámi, and Yiddish as national minority languages, thus elevating the status of these languages vis-à-vis those spoken by migrants (see Hult, 2004, for a more detailed overview).

Returning to the question of whether or not to legislate on Swedish, we certainly do *not* wish to imply that *Mål i mun* failed to take seriously the linguistic diversity that obtains in Sweden, since an attempt was clearly made to accommodate the interests of majority and minority groups through the suggestion that everyone should be granted the "right" to his or her own language(s): Swedish, their mother-tongue, and foreign languages (e.g. English). It is also worth noting how the work around *Mål i mun* partly coincided with the celebration of the European Year of Languages in 2001, an initiative promoted jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The most important recommendation ensuing from this event was the need for EU-member states to promote language learning and linguistic diversity,[7] whereby it was proposed that EU-citizens should have a command of at least three languages summarised in the formula "mother tongue plus two".

The authors of *Mål i mun* certainly managed to avoid any overt representation of the relationship between different languages as mutually exclusive or oppositional – something which has not always been the case in similar contexts (see for example May, 2005). In this sense we might see the document as very much in the spirit of the European Union's recommendations. But it is also evident that *one* language, i.e. Swedish, is still envisaged as *the* necessary means through which some kind of societal *cohesiveness* could be attained (see extract 1 above). Of course, highlighting the instrumental function of Swedish as a *lingua franca* in Swedish society may sound legitimate, not to say commonsensical, given that Swedish has historically been the dominant language used by the vast majority of the population living on the Swedish

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[7] In a Resolution passed on 13 December 2001, the European Parliament reaffirmed "that the Member States and the Commission must take measures to enable all citizens to learn languages for the purpose of communication as a basis for improved mutual understanding and tolerance, personal mobility and access to information in a multilingual and multicultural Europe" (European Parliament, 2001). In the same document, the European Parliament called upon the European Commission to "propose measures to promote linguistic diversity and language learning" (ibid). At a meeting in Barcelona in March 2002, the Heads of State and Government "called for further action to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age" (European Commission, 2002:3). On 24 July 2003, the European Commission then published an Action Plan, which reiterated the importance of life-long language learning and the application of the formula "mother tongue plus two other languages" (European Commission, 2003:7).

territory. Nonetheless, what is interesting here is to see how such dominance – or to use Gramsci's (1971) term *hegemony* – is rationalised in *Mål i mun*, and to understand why such rationalisation is particularly problematic in the context of a language law. In order to do this, however, we need to understand the multi-scalar position of Swedish vis-à-vis national, European and global spaces, respectively.

While Swedish occupies the position of dominant language in relation to, say, indigenous minority and/or migrant languages in terms of the *national* space, it has itself been described as a "minority language" in relation to the dominance of English in *European* and *global* contexts (Hyltenstam, 1996). Crucially, the attempt to maintain the hegemonic position of Swedish within the national space is not realised in *Mål i mun* through the official *exclusion* of other languages as is the case, for example, in many of the arguments advanced by the supporters of the "Official English" movement in the United States (see Schmidt, 2007). Rather, as the extracts above have shown, the acknowledgement of the function of Swedish as the *lingua franca* in Sweden, coupled with the recognition of the "right to languages", are textual/discursive tokens of a broader discursive process of *inclusion* whereby the interests of both members of a linguistic majority *and* linguistic minorities are officially recognised by the state. In other words, consensus about upholding the dominance of a majority language threatened by English is discursively constructed through recognition and *incorporation* of *particular* and potentially dissenting interests, such as those that might arise from speakers or advocates of minority languages (cf. del Valle, 2007:257ff for a similar line of argument). As we saw above, however, such consensus is also based on a representation of Swedish as an overarching *general* concern that pertains to everyone, because it is ultimately not tied to anyone in particular, and therefore as a *sine qua non* for the functioning of Swedish society.

While this totalising attempt at inclusion might not be particularly controversial with regard to the instrumental-communicative function of languages insofar as it legally ratifies the use of different languages in different domains, it does become more problematic in relation to the symbolic dimension of language use. In fact, if the state were to legislate on Swedish as the principal language mainly in order to counteract the accruing status of English, it would at the same time overtly endorse a symbolic hierarchy between the different languages spoken within Sweden. Here standard Swedish would be officially granted the most prominent status (*huvudspråk* literally means "head language"), followed by indigenous minority languages and migrant languages.

Accordingly, in attempting to legislate on Swedish, the state was caught in a third kind of rationality deficit. This was because the state, despite the attempt to recognise linguistic diversity, by adopting the type of legislation proposed in *Mål i mun* would ultimately have been sanctioning what Billig (1995:87) refers to as "a syntax of hegemony". This would have occurred since *one* dimension of the polity, in this case standard Swedish, was *explicitly* projected as a symbolic trait "bearing" the whole (cf. Milani, 2007). Once again therefore the state's actions would not only have gone against the historical-discursive prerogative established for the management of the Swedish polity, namely that Sweden be a modern, neutral and international state that does not overly emphasise the links between language, ethnicity and nationalism. In addition, such actions could have been perceived as a form of state-induced symbolic discrimination, thereby contradicting the official endorsement of multilingualism and diversity.

5. Concluding Remarks

The aim of this paper has been to explore the recent public debate over whether or not to promote Swedish as the principal language of Sweden. In order to do so, we have introduced Habermas's notion of "legitimation crisis", showing how such crises are underpinned by one or more "rationality deficits", i.e. discursive paradoxes that typically emerge in a given historical, cultural, social and economic context. This is a theoretical framework that, we believe, not only has much to contribute to Blommaert's concept of a language ideological debate, in particular, but also to the study of language politics more widely.

Of course, the kind of legitimation crisis that we have identified in relation to Swedish is rather different to the one explored with regard to the disputes over German orthography. This is insofar as the latter culminated in what might be seen as a full-blown crisis with official public contestation, the involvement of the judiciary, and eventually a formal ruling. By contrast the Swedish debate seems to have reached an impasse towards the end of 2006 without resulting in the *de jure* ratification of the status of Swedish. Our analysis has suggested that this lack of formal "closure" can be usefully interpreted in relation to an inability on the part of the Swedish state to resolve three inter-related types of Habermasian "rationality deficit". First, post-war Swedish politics have been discursively shaped by an *historical-cultural* imperative requiring a form of self-presentation that downplays overt links between language, ethnicity and culture. Second, any attempt to define what counts as "correct" and "well-functioning" Swedish would have required the linguistic specification of the variety of Swedish to be considered thus. Third, even if suggested primarily with a view to safeguarding Swedish from *English*, the promotion of standard Swedish as the principal language of Sweden would also have entailed the official endorsement of a *symbolic hierarchy* of Swedish in relation to national minority and migrant languages. This, in turn, takes us back to the historical-cultural imperative, according to which the Swedish state is obliged to avoid any action that might be perceived as generating closer ties between one language, one ethnic group, and one culture together with the potentially discriminatory effects of such actions.

The question that remains therefore is what, if anything, will happen next? This is an important consideration given that the newly elected Centre-Right coalition Government announced on 8 February 2007 that it will indeed be re-visiting the issue of language legislation. Thus the Government has requested that a new inquiry formulate a revised proposal for the ratification of a language law to be presented by the end of 2007 with a view to implementation on 1 January 2009. This new inquiry can be undoubtedly interpreted as a sign of a *political will* to ratify the status of Swedish. Nonetheless, as we hope to have shown in the present paper, any act of *overt* state intervention into linguistic matters that have been previously regulated by tradition constitutes an extremely thorny issue, not least in relation to the discursive means and constraints that determine how such intervention is ultimately rationalised and legitimated. It still remains to be seen, therefore, whether – and how – a language law might be implemented in Sweden.

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