

Ideology and *Språkfrågan*

Paths Leading to Language Shift in Four Swedish-American Congregations

Previous research (Brown & Hoffman *fc*; Hoffman & Kytö 2018) has shown that congregations moved at different speeds in shifting from Heritage Swedish to English. The present study has two goals. Firstly, we examine the language ideologies expressed in the written materials from individual congregations. Secondly, those ideologies are placed against the backdrop of language shift through the SOCIAL PARTICIPATION element of Warren's (1978) verticalization model, previously applied to language shift among German-Americans by Brown (*fc*).

In the Augustana Synod, the Swedish-American arm of the Evangelical Lutheran church, the language question—whether to shift from Swedish to English—was not settled for nearly fifty years (Hasselmo 1974). Some leaders called for a rapid shift to English; some embraced a compromise, enabling the languages to co-exist, while others championed the preservation of Swedish in America:

“A people's spirit abides in the language [. . .] If now the spirit is good and its influence is a healthy one, then it would be unjust and a great sin to make that spirit homeless or at least ineffective by forgetting or spoiling the language that constitutes the dwelling of the spirit and its instrument. [“Ett folks *ande* lefver och bor . . . i språket [. . .] Om nu anden är god och dess inflytande hälsosamt, så är det orätt och stor synd att göra den anden hemlösa eller åtminstone överksam genom att glömma eller fördärfva det språket, som utgör den andens hemvist och verktyg” (1923: 9 & 24, *qtd.* in Hasselmo 1974: 40; translation ours).

Carlson interpreted the religiosity of the heritage language for Swedish-Americans, invoking both spirit and sin. He also contributed to the narrative of a combined religious and linguistic ideology for Swedish-American identity.

Through historical letters, church records, and memory albums (*minnesalbum*) of congregations in McPherson County, Kansas, and Hennepin County, Minnesota, we show that the debate about the language question was recognized as problem for SOCIAL PARTICIPATION in the community in several ways: *theological* and *hagiolectal* (e.g., ‘If we pray in English, will God recognize us?’); *sociolinguistic* (‘If we continue using Swedish in our churches, will our children be isolated from American society and from the English language?’); *economic survival* (‘How many members will we lose if we maintain the use of Swedish in the sanctuary?’); and *recruitment* (‘Will we be able to appoint a Swedish-speaking pastor when we need one in the coming years?’).

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