



## Swedish L1 High-stakes Exam in Finland Poised Between the Local and the Global

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### *Abstract*

In this article, we give a corpus-based overview of traces of influence from foreign languages that can be found in Matriculation Examination essays written by Swedish L1 speakers in Finland. We place our findings in an educational context where the Swedish L1 test, and especially its essay, requires formal language use and adaptation towards the prevailing Swedish language norms. Even in this high-stakes exam with high demands on normative language use, the influence of foreign languages can be seen. This study also provides an overview of the Matriculation Examination as a high-stakes exam that measures the extent to which the examinees have achieved maturity and readiness for further studies.

**Keywords:** Essays, High-stakes Exam, Matriculation Examination, Normative Language, Swedish L1

### *Introduction*

Language proficiency testing is associated with L2 teaching and assessment. However, there are also L1 language tests and examinations which seem to receive less attention in applied linguistics. One such L1 examination is part of the Finnish Matriculation Examination arranged at the end of the upper secondary school education (*gymnasium*). The only mandatory test in the Matriculation Examination is the test in Mother Tongue and Literature in either Finnish or Swedish, the L1 language, depending on the language of instruction at the educational institution. The test measures the extent to which the examinee has achieved the objectives set out in the upper secondary school curriculum and the extent to which they have achieved maturity and readiness for further studies (Lag om studentexamen 502/2019).

The Matriculation Examination functions both as an exit exam and a high-stakes exam, marking successful completion of school and regulating entry to higher education (Matriculation Examination Board 2025; Myers 2021). The exam results play a crucial role in admissions to higher education. Thus, the pressure on the examinees is high as they must perform at their very best (Klein and van Ackeren 2011). From the point of view of social constructivism and systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2013), both the context of language use and the society at large affect language choices and language use. A language in a minority position is affected by the other languages surrounding it; Swedish in Finland is affected by the majority language Finnish and the ubiquitous L2 English. Influences from other languages are not seen as a benefit in a test where a written standard Swedish variety is rewarded, according to the assessment criteria (Studentexamensnämnden 2025). The test in Mother Tongue and Literature requires formal language use and adaptation towards the prevailing Swedish language norms (Forsskåhl *et al.* 2020).

In this article, our aim is twofold: first, to present the Swedish Mother Tongue and Literature test, hereafter called the Swedish L1 test, and second, to present how languages other than Swedish affect the language used in exam answers from 2021 and 2022. The article is structured as follows. We start by providing some background about the linguistic situation in Finland. After that, we present the Swedish L1 exam, to meet the first aim. The second aim is met by presenting the empirical analysis of influences from other languages than Swedish.

### *1. Swedish in Finland*

In this section, we provide some background on Swedish in Finland. In the Swedish L1 test answers the standard Swedish written variety is expected, according to the assessment criteria. Swedish is a pluricentric language, but Swedish in Finland follows the same linguistic norms as Swedish in Sweden (Norrby *et al.* 2021). Standard Swedish is expected in writing at all levels of education.

Swedish is one of the two official languages in Finland according to the Constitution and Swedish is spoken as the first language by around 5% of the population in Finland (Statistics Finland 2024). The other official language, Finnish, is spoken by 84%. The education system in Finland is almost identical in Finnish and Swedish, and there is Swedish schooling from kindergarten to university.

Minority languages face challenges. Swedish in Finland is used in a society that is largely Finnish-speaking, and its speakers live in a translated reality (Tandefelt 2017). There are some influences from the Finnish majority language, e.g. loanwords and direct translations (*finlandismer*), but the degree of this varies greatly between different regions in Finland. Some Swedish-speaking Finns grow up with both Swedish and Finnish as their home language while others may grow up in an almost monolingual Swedish environment (Oker-Blom 2021, 27-33). Although the Swedish language in Finland is viable and strongly anchored in the standardised Swedish language, it is not an isolated language but affected also by English. Swedish often functions as a minority language in important domains such as science, commerce, and technology. As a result, Swedish risks losing its function in these domains, which in turn can weaken the language proficiency of its speakers (Mattfolk 2011). Mattfolk states that young Finland-Swedes show deficits in language proficiency and feel insecure in their mother tongue, which can be linked to the influence of other languages, especially Finnish and English (15-16).

It is not primarily Finnish that is challenging the position of Swedish in Finland, but rather the country's increasing multilingualism and the rise of English (Kairos Future 2020;

Lassus and Stolt forthcoming). The increased use of English in media and popular culture in Scandinavia has been pointed out by Beers Fägersten (2023), and the development is similar in Finland. Young people follow news in social media rather than through traditional channels (Markelin, Salovaara and Wrede-Jäntti 2024). In these channels, the content is international, i.e., the media content is largely in English. Based on Kepsu and Markelin (2021), around 35% use English for oral communication in the digital environment.

As languages interact with the surrounding society, it is natural that there are influences from other languages also in texts written in educational settings (Granskog, Gustafsson and Stolt 2022). However, considering the future and working life, it is important that Finland-Swedes know the standard Swedish language norm, as Swedish is a key to cooperation and business in Scandinavia (Lassus and Tanner 2019).

The linguistic background among Swedish speakers in Finland is diverse, and Martola (2009), among others, believes that Finland-Swedish is facing major linguistic changes. Overall, there is a concern that the Swedish L1 is losing its function in important areas of society (Mickwitz 2008). Sandøy and Östman (2004) express concern that L1 language may be weakened as English becomes more prominent, emphasising the importance of preserving and demonstrating knowledge of one's mother tongue. According to the researchers, mastering and using one's L1 is crucial if one does not wish it to disappear. There is an ethical responsibility to protect and promote one's L1, especially in a world where other languages dominate. There are language policy measures: both in Finland and in the other Nordic countries language policy programmes have emphasised the importance of strengthening the minority languages as a counterweight to the dominance of English (Mattfolk 2011).

## 2. Previous Research

Research on the Mother Tongue and Literature test in the Matriculation Examination is scarce. Most of the research is on older test versions before the tests were in digital form. A major project, Kielitaidon kirjo – Språklig mångfald (Kauppinen *et al.* 2011), combined different analyses of the Finnish L1 test and the Swedish L1 test. Later, a group of researchers studied good and weak answers in the Swedish L1 test (Forsskåhl *et al.* 2020). Some research has also been done on the Finnish task verbs and other aspects of the tests, but as mentioned, to our knowledge there is no research on the Finnish L1 nor Swedish L1 digital matriculation examination. Previous research on the older test formats has been either quantitative, dealing with points and grades, or qualitative, based on close readings or assessments (Stolt 2016). Some studies have used Ivanič's writing discourses (2004) or Bakhtin's idea (1981) that all language is fundamentally dialogical, to capture the nature of the (older) essays and examinees' voice(s) (e.g. Silén 2020; Juvonen 2015).

When it comes to linguistic influences and changes in Finland-Swedish, there is some research, but the language of Finland-Swedish upper secondary school students has been studied to a limited extent. The most comprehensive study is Melin-Köpilä's (1996), who in her doctoral thesis examines Finnish influence on the Swedish language of pupils and upper secondary school students in the early 1990s. This study is somewhat dated now, and the other above-mentioned studies focused on old tests, so we do not know much about the current situation. Most earlier research has also been done before the breakthrough of internet and social media available in English on every smartphone. Evaluation reports of national assessments of learning outcomes in Swedish and literature in school year 9 (Hellgren and Marjanen 2020) show that pupils who intend to apply for upper secondary education have stronger knowledge

of their mother tongue than those who have other plans for upper secondary education, a result similar to Melin-Köpiälä (1996).

In Sweden, the national test (*Nationella prov*) and its answers have raised some research interest that often focuses on non-linguistic perspectives. Palmér (2013) focuses on writing didactics discourses; Edander and Palmér (2020) on the role of writing instructions; Bendegard, Hussenius and Palmér (2024) on assessment perspectives; and Halleson and Westman (2021) on intertextuality or how examinees tend to use exam materials as a resource in this kind of exam.

### 3. National Test and High-stakes Exams

The first aim of this article is to present the Finnish Matriculation Examination and especially the Swedish L1 test. We start by outlining the difference between a “national test” and a “high-stakes exam”. Both are standardised tests with a national administration and centrally set examinations. They are instruments for systematic measuring and monitoring of the performance of individual pupils or students, schools, and national education systems. National tests are shaped by and developed in accordance with national policy agendas to maintain a comparable grading standards across schools. In high-stakes assessments, measured outcomes have direct consequences, most commonly for the pupil (Lorenz, Eickelmann and Bos 2016). According to Beck and Jeffery (2007), the positive view of high-stakes exams is that they raise standards for and encourage all students to achieve at higher levels.

National tests and high-stakes exams can consist of summative tests<sup>1</sup> that summarise the achievement of individual pupils or students at the end of a school year or of a particular educational stage and have a significant impact on their educational careers. National test results are used as indicators of the quality of teaching and the performance of teachers, but also to measure the overall effectiveness of education policies and practices and to identify an individual pupil’s specific learning needs and adapting teaching accordingly.

Many countries in Europe use high-stakes exams that lead to higher education studies (van Ackeren *et al.* 2012; Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency and Eurydice 2009; European Commission; Klein and van Ackeren 2011). Here, we limit the study to the Nordic countries. In Denmark, high school ends with a matriculation examination with internet connection, but in Sweden the upper secondary education itself prepares the student for higher education studies (Skolverket 2025). The national test in Sweden does not assess students’ knowledge in relation to the entire upper secondary school course, but the test result has a special significance in grading even if it is not an exit exam. In Norway, upper secondary education leads to a general university entrance diploma (Stähle 2004; The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers 2025). Next, we present the situation in Finland.

### 4. The Matriculation Examination in Finland and the Writing Skills Test

The Matriculation Examination in Finland is carried out as part of the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture, with the Matriculation Examination Board as the executing authority. The Matriculation Examination is a centralised and standardised digital test without connection to the internet or any spell checking. The exam is held nationwide biannually, consisting of a minimum of five tests. All examinees must take the Mother Tongue

<sup>1</sup> As opposed to summative tests, formative assessments/tests focus on the idea of “assessment for learning”.

and Literature test, in either Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi. In addition, examinees are required to complete at least four other tests from the following subject groups: Mathematics, Second National Language, Foreign Language, Humanities and Natural Sciences (Matriculation Examination Board 2025). The Matriculation Examination is based on the curriculum of the upper secondary education (*gymnasium*) and results in a certificate with importance for future academic studies. Those who pass receive a certificate and the grades will affect their chances of admission to higher education.

The general upper secondary education school supervises the examination, and the teacher gives the preliminary points based on the assessment criteria for the test. After that, the board's assessors, called censors,<sup>2</sup> review the grading and determine the final points, after which the Matriculation Examination Board decides on the scale based on the points given and defines the grades. The grading system is anonymous and ensures fairness and comparability by using a standardised approach. The aim is to have properly comparable examinations and grades, allowing the reliable and fair use of Matriculation Examination grades for admissions to university and other higher education institutions (*ibidem*).

The test in Mother Tongue and Literature focuses on literacy skills and is evaluated by the assessment criteria of the Matriculation Examination as well as the criteria for good answers specific to the test (Studentexamensnämnden 2025). It has two parts: the writing skills test and the reading comprehension test. In this article, we focus on the former.

The writing skills test in Swedish L1 assesses the examinees' ability to express themselves in writing, as well as their ability to articulate thoughts and manage complex topics. The L1 essay in the writing skills test is a discursive text. It requires students to choose between provided source texts, test materials, and to write a reflective or opinionated essay of around 6,000 characters and manage thematic units. The test measures a distinct type of writing competence, associated more with academic literacy. The maximum score on the grading scale in the writing skills test is 60 points and the minimum 0 points. A score of 40 points indicates that the examinee has a good command of the norms of standard Swedish.

The test material for the essay is authentic and multimodal, and it can therefore contain non-standard language (*ibidem*). Even so, the test answers require formal, standard Swedish language use and knowledge of the normative written language. Influences from other languages are seen as less appropriate in this context. The expected written standard variety is learnt in school, while the language outside school is characterised by both regional and global influences. The assessment of the writing skills test emphasises the overall picture of writing competence, the structure, handling of the material, and the language and style. The assessors highlight weaknesses and linguistic inaccuracies in relation to the standard norm, described in the assessment criteria table under the heading *Language and style* (*ibidem*). There may be language errors, but for the highest grades, the examinee must have nearly flawless language.

In language contact situations, language-mixing is not recommended by language experts, and English is sometimes even seen as a threat to Swedish (Bylin and Melander 2023, 93-99). When words are borrowed, a morphological adaptation is often recommended (to rave > rejva; *ibidem*). In the next section, we meet our second aim and present how influences from other languages are visible in the exam answers, essays written by Swedish L1 speakers in Finland.

<sup>2</sup> Both authors of this article work as censors (assessors) for the Matriculation Examination Board.

### 5. Material and Method

This study is based on part of the *Studex-19-24* corpus in the Language Bank of Finland (Kielipankki), more specifically on the essays from spring 2021 and spring 2022, amounting to about 5.3 million tokens. The essays were annotated at the University of Helsinki using the Sparv tool (Hammarstedt *et al.* 2022) and the restricted corpus can be accessed via the Korp interface (Borin, Forsberg and Roxendal 2012) after research permission from the Matriculation Examination Board.<sup>3</sup>

The exam answers in the Swedish L1 tests are not openly available. To do research on this data, research permission from the Matriculation Examination Board is needed, which we have. To compile the corpus *Studex-19-24*, we also obtained a corpus permission. We do not know the identities of the examinees and the exam answers are split into graphical sentences, i.e. we do not have access to whole texts. We follow the Finnish code of conduct for research integrity (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 2023). Although there may be personal identifiers in individual sentences, such as personal names or place names, we do not use such sentences in our public presentations or articles. Through these measures, we do our best not to reveal any identifiable information on any examinee, school, or censor.

The empirical analysis focuses on lexicon and has two phases with different methods. In the first phase, we use quantitative corpus linguistics (Biber 2015) to find linguistic examples in our data. For this article, we compiled from the subsets “spring 21” and “spring 22” of *Studex-19-24* corpus a list of words that the Sparv tool annotated as a “foreign word”. This category is used when Sparv cannot identify the word in its Swedish word list and assign it a Swedish word class. This list with about 4200 entries was filtered and sorted by codes<sup>4</sup> so that we could build a list with phrases with “foreign words”. We noted spelling mistakes (e.g., “acquired taste” can be difficult to spell) and narrowed down the single words to phrases, ending up with about 950 phrases that could be analysed manually. Some of these are single utterances, only used once. In this study, we focus on the most frequent phrases.

In the second phase, we do a qualitative analysis of the findings, i.e. the most frequent phrases from the analysis of “foreign words”. In previous research on language contact, there have been suggestions of categories such as “lexical borrowing” or categories that focus on the degree of semantic similarity or how the borrowed item works in interaction (Hilmisdóttir and Peterson 2023). We work inductively and do not use given categories when sorting and grouping the phrases. The steps in our categorisation were to 1) identify the language or other reason for the annotation “foreign word” (in some cases, misspelling was the reason); 2) compare the phrase to the test materials; 3) group the phrases that were not part of the test materials according to their language, possible original contexts, and type of “foreign word”. We used our linguistic expertise of different languages and our knowledge of the exam and its materials.

Of course, not all words influenced by other languages are found in this list. In this way, as in most corpus linguistic analyses, we only find what Sparv has identified and annotated as a “foreign word”. This method allows us to find spelling mistakes if the word is misspelled in such a way that it cannot be recognised, but many spelling mistakes are not that severe: for example, *finansiell* instead of *finanssiell* (“financial”). However, this method cannot capture neologisms influenced by other languages if the words “look Swedish”, that is, follow Swedish morphology.

<sup>3</sup> The annotation was made by Erik Axelson.

<sup>4</sup> The sorting and filtering were done by research assistant Kasper Sundström.

To investigate whether the test materials have affected the test results, we analysed in step 2 the test materials used in the exams spring 2021 and spring 2022 with the AntConc programme (Anthony 2022). We compared the test materials to the “foreign word” list. This was important, as some of the materials dealt with languages and multilingualism and contained quotations in different languages.

### 6. Influence From the Test Materials

In step 2 of our analysis, we identified which phrases in the list of “foreign words” are found in the test materials. The test materials are authentic texts, with authentic language use, including non-standard varieties and foreign languages. That examinees use test materials as a resource has been proved by, for instance, Halleson and Westman (2021), and we can see that the examinees in the Swedish L1 test did the same. In spring 2021 (Yle Abimix 2021), when the theme of the test was nationality, the test material contained foreign words and expressions, and not only in English and Finnish. There were several data sources with English names in a video (e.g., the world happiness report), song lyrics in both Finnish and English and the name *Eurovision Song Contest*. Many of the phrases in foreign languages are found in a text by Tito Colliander, given in the test material. There is also a video with a Swedish regional variety represented with expressions like “å he va bästa somare”<sup>5</sup>. Even if the expression is intelligible to us as Swedish speakers, the Sparv annotation tool does not understand what “he” (*det*) is and what word class to annotate it with, so it annotates the word as a “foreign word”. In the following sections, we present results of our analysis on quotes from the test material with a special focus on influences from English.

### 7. Quotations from the Test Materials

There are some frequent expressions and phrases marked as “foreign word” that were found in the test materials. We will start by examining three of the most frequently used phrases that have their origin in the test materials, hereafter only “materials”.

In spring 2021 (Yle Abimix), in the materials there is a song called *Vår tid – Vårt Land* with some language mixing in the lyrics. From this song, the examinees rather frequently quote in Finnish “Ja tänne varmaan aina tervetullut oot”<sup>6</sup>. Another quotation from the song, less frequently used, is “Remember that we love you from our hearts”.

Besides the two song quotations, in spring 2021 there was also frequent use of the expression “acquired taste”. This is used in spring 2021 in a column by Peter Al Fakir: “Finland är precis som sitt kök, en ‘acquired taste’ ”<sup>7</sup> (*ibidem*). A third frequently used phrase is “political correctness”. This phrase is found in the materials in spring 2022 in a column by Måns Nyberg: “Sedan har vi kraven utifrån political correctness (också detta tydligen ett svenskt uttryck numera)” (Yle Abimix 2022)<sup>8</sup>. Besides these, there are also some other expressions in

<sup>5</sup> Studentexamensnämnden, *Exempel på olika svenskspråkiga dialekter*, <<https://svenska-content.ylestatic.fi/abimix/2022/var/OE-sv/attachments/C.mp4>> (01/2026). Trans.: and that was the best summer. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the authors.

<sup>6</sup> Trans.: and you are probably always welcome here.

<sup>7</sup> Trans.: Finland is exactly as its cuisine, an acquired taste.

<sup>8</sup> Trans.: then we have the requirements based on political correctness (also this is obviously a Swedish expression nowadays).

English that have their origin in the materials: “Eurovision Song Contest”, “my home is my castle”, “world wide web”, “lockdown”.

The columnist Al Fakir used quotation marks around “acquired taste”. In spring 2021, the 58 instances of this phrase either use quotation marks around it or the phrase is in a longer quotation from the material with simple quotation marks. This example illustrates this: “Och jag gissar att Finland därför inte är för alla, utan en ‘acquired taste’ som Fakir sa”<sup>9</sup>.

The phrase “political correctness” was used without quotation marks in the material. When the examinees used it in spring 2022, in 28 instances of 49 they used quotation marks around the phrase, signalling awareness that this is not Swedish and not standard. However, there are 21 instances where it was not enclosed in quotation marks but imported directly into the text, as in this example: “Vi är definitivt inte vid det skedet ännu i frågan om political correctness, men man ska aldrig ta språkets politiska neutralitet för givet”<sup>10</sup>.

It is obvious that the materials influenced the examinees’ texts, as these phrases were used in texts from the corresponding spring: the Finnish quotation and “acquired taste” were used in spring 2021 and “political correctness” in spring 2022. We also checked whether the materials’ expressions were translated into Swedish and used as a resource in the essays. In one sentence *speciell smak* (“a certain taste”) was used in spring 2021 in reference to the column where “acquired taste” was used. There are no instances of the Swedish equivalent to “political correctness”, *politisk korrekthet*, in spring 2022. These materials thus give the examinees linguistic resources for their writing, but they have not translated them into Swedish.

Conversely, there is a group of words in Swedish in the material that led to translations into English in the essays. In spring 2022 (Yle Abimix 2022), there was a material with neologisms, new words (*nyord*), in Swedish. The material contains *cancelkultur* and *mjuta*, which led the examinees to explain these words in English, thus resulting in many instances of “mute” and “cancel”, “cancel culture” and “cancelled”. For “mute”, *mjuta*, the examinees could use Swedish phrases (*tysta mikrofonen* or *stäng av mikrofonen*). For “cancel”, “cancel culture” and “cancelled”, the expressions did occur a few times in the essays from 2021, but not in the test material. In spring 2022, the Swedish neologism *cancelkultur* was in one of the materials that listed new words. In modern English, “cancel” can mean that someone is not supported or liked anymore, or perhaps they are even boycotted (Lendvai 2025). There are some alternatives in Swedish that could be used (e.g., *utfrys*, *impopulär*) but the examinees chose to use the English word as in: “Ingen människa är perfekt, inte heller de människor som skriver cancel åt alla”<sup>11</sup>. In this sentence, the examinee wants to explain the phenomenon of writing “cancel” in the comments in social media, which not easily translated into Swedish.

### 8. The Other “Foreign Words”

In step three, we analysed the “foreign words” that had no explicit connection to the test materials. Almost half of these were of English origin and a fifth of Finnish origin. Among the remaining hits, there were single words from German, Italian, French, Russian, Greek, Latin, Chinese and Spanish. Some of these, such as “vice versa” are lexicalised and accepted in

<sup>9</sup> Trans.: and I guess that is why Finland is not for all, but an “acquired taste” as Fakir said.

<sup>10</sup> Trans.: we are definitely not in that phase yet concerning political correctness, but one should never take the political neutrality of a language for granted.

<sup>11</sup> Trans.: nobody is perfect, not even the people that write cancel to everyone.

Swedish. There were also some Swedish dialectal expressions, many of them, but not all, from the materials. We will focus on the words of English origin, as they form the biggest subgroup.

First, we want to emphasise that (besides the most frequent phrases used) there are not many instances of English expressions or words in the group “foreign words”. Even if a phrase was used ten times or more, the relative frequency is low as there are 5.3 million tokens in the data we examined. Some expressions with a Latin background are used in both English and Swedish, such as “lingua franca”.

The English loanwords that are not given in the materials but by the examinees themselves reflect our current society and global trends. The movement Black Lives Matter really engaged the examinees. It is not used in the materials, but in spring 2021 there were 60 instances of the phrase, and in spring 2022 there were 14 instances. As we see only one sentence of the text in the corpus, and not what precedes or follows it, we cannot tell for all instances what the context is. Nevertheless, many examinees also wrote about MeToo and other protest movements in the same sentence, and of racism: “Exempel på det här är black lives matter rörelsen och rörelser mot klimatförändringen”<sup>12</sup> and “Rasismen har gett upphov till rörelser såsom Black Lives Matter”<sup>13</sup>.

The phrase “comfort zone” has an equivalent in Swedish, *bekvämlighetszon*, but the English phrase is preferred in the essays. However, there are also many instances of *bekvämlighetszon*. The following two examples, both from spring 2022, show how the English and Swedish words are used: “Att stiga ut från sin bekvämlighetszon är viktigt”<sup>14</sup> and “Ta i, stig ut från din comfort zone, lär dig ett nytt språk”<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, there is a group of words that we connect to youth language and digital communication. “Cap”, “Lol” and “laughing out loud” were used in spring 2022 as examples of new words that the examinees know and that are not in the materials.

There are also cases where we do not know if there is a mistake or spelling influenced by English. We suspect influence from English, as some words are almost identical in Swedish and English due to language contact with only minor spelling differences (Malmström and Pecorari 2022; Lindström 2004). There are some words in the “foreign word” group that might be spelling mistakes; one of them is “up”. There are a few English quotations with “up” but most cases of “up” are spelling mistakes; in Swedish the word is spelled *upp* with two ps. Another one is “best”, spelled like that instead of the Swedish *bäst*. Many of the examinees also used the English spelling of the word “racism” (Sw. *rasism*).

When using a corpus and looking at words annotated as “foreign word”, it is always important to take a closer look at the context. For instance, the word “europe”, annotated as a foreign word, could be interpreted as a misspelling of the name of the continent, which is *Europa* in Swedish. Instead, the examinees used “europe” for *europé*, “a European”. It is a spelling mistake, but probably not influenced by English. It is more likely that in the stressful exam situation, the examinee does not have time to sort out how to type the accent mark on the e. The word “national” does not exist as such in Swedish but starts to exist when the examinees write words such as *nationalspråk* (“national language”), *nationalkänsla* (“national feeling”) or *nationalidentitet* (“national identity”) as two separate words: \**national språk*, \**national känsla* or \**national identitet*. Sparv annotates the word “national” as a foreign word, but the examinee

<sup>12</sup> Trans.: examples of this are the black lives matter movement and movements against climate change.

<sup>13</sup> Trans.: racism has given rise to movements such as Black Lives Matter.

<sup>14</sup> Trans.: to step out from one’s comfort zone is important.

<sup>15</sup> Trans.: make an effort, step out of your comfort zone, learn a new language.

just made a spelling mistake. However, this particular spelling mistake, the phenomenon of writing compound words as two separate words, in Swedish called *särskrivning*, is probably a result of influence from English.

### 9. Discussion

In this article, our aim has been to present the Swedish Mother Tongue and Literature test and how languages other than Swedish affect the language used in exam answers from 2021 and 2022. We have identified the L1 Swedish test as a high-stakes test with consequences for the future of the examinees. In the writing skills test, the examinees are required to use standard Swedish, and they are poised between the local and the global. Swedish in Finland, a local variety of a pluricentric language, is bound to the standard norms of Swedish (Norrby *et al.* 2021). At the same time, the Swedish speakers are surrounded by a Finnish-speaking community – and they are part of a global, digital English-speaking environment (Beers Fägersten 2023; Markelin, Salovaara and Wrede-Jäntti 2024).

The Swedish L1 test is the most important essay the examinees have written in their lives so far. Our study shows that apart from occasional phrases in other languages used in the test materials, there are traces of English in the exam answers. Some phrases of foreign origin are from the test materials (see Hallesson and Westman 2021), while others are not, such as influences of English spelling (see Hilmisdóttir and Peterson 2023). We see that the examinees are mostly aware of non-Swedish elements, and they use quotation marks to indicate this. With knowledge of English, the content can be understood, but it is not standard Swedish, and it fails to meet the expectations of the high-stakes exam, leading to lower points.

The material in our study is unique in the sense that the essays are unrevised and written by non-professional writers who do their very best to show their skills in writing. Therefore, the material shows the genuine level of knowledge of Swedish as an L1 language. Both as researchers and as censors, we often wonder if the examinees, the writers, are aware of what they are doing when they breach the linguistic norm. Do they know how to keep the languages separate and use influences from foreign languages consciously, or is this mixing of languages something they cannot stop doing, indicating a possible language change in written language (see Martola 2009)? Based on Mattfolk (2011), there seems to be a difference between explicit opinions and implicit attitudes. She argues that young people, when asked, believe that English words should be replaced by Swedish, but when tested, they attribute positive values to English words (6, 55-57). Also socially conscious attitudes can be detected: people adapt their language depending on the situation and interlocutor, which can lead to the displacement of the mother tongue in certain contexts if it is not actively maintained (56-57).

The languages of media, newspapers and academia all support these influences, and we know that people today are exposed to English in their daily lives (Beers Fägersten 2023). The English words and phrases that the examinees use and that are not given in the exam material reflect our current society and global trends.

Although society today encourages multilingualism, it is important to consciously preserve the L1 through language planning measures at the local level and to be able to demonstrate knowledge of the L1 on an individual level (Mickwitz 2008). Actively using a standard variety of one's mother tongue is one way to preserve it, and that requires knowledge of the language (Sandøy and Östman 2004). This requires the intake of texts and media written in good language and the presence of good role models. We know that language contact leads to language change, but we do not know the scope of this potential change in Finland Swedish.

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