



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

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Project title: Labour from the Baltic Sea region: Language, migration and daily working life among Polish and Estonian citizens in Sweden.

The purpose of this sociolinguistic project was to study multilingual professional language practices among workers commuting to Sweden across the Baltic Sea for manual work, for instance, at construction sites. Similar to other studies within sociolinguistic research, the project has focused on language practices and how language both constructs, and is constructed by, social contexts, which in this case concerns workplaces situated in the broader context of work migration within the European Union.

The over-arching empirical research questions include the following:

- How is manual work organised in relation to language and multilingualism?
- What is the role of Swedish at multilingual workplaces?
- What are the social and economic values of migrating workers' linguistic resources at workplaces and within the Swedish labour market more generally?

Data were collected via ethnographic observations and video recordings of interactions at six different workplaces. These included construction sites of different sizes, and places that involved excavation work and city maintenance work. Interviews with key persons were also included. The rich data collection and the following analyses of interactions comprising Polish, Estonian, Swedish and English were made possible through the composition of the research team, representing the different languages.

1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

a. The studied workplaces are multilingual in the sense that workers from different countries bring different languages to the sites and use these as their primary working languages in Sweden. This is made possible via an organisation built on teams with team leaders speaking both the language of the team and English, thereby functioning as language brokers between the workers and the management. The broker makes communication across the hierarchy of the workplaces possible, and his linguistic repertoire has thus collective meaning at the sites.

In Söderlundh et al. (2020), we conclude that top-down communication at the sites is structured as multilingual chains of communication. The chains (see Figure 1) start with a discussion at the highest level of the organisation (often in Swedish), followed by a decision. A manager instructs the broker (often in English), who later transfers and translates the instructions to the manual workers (in Polish/Estonian).

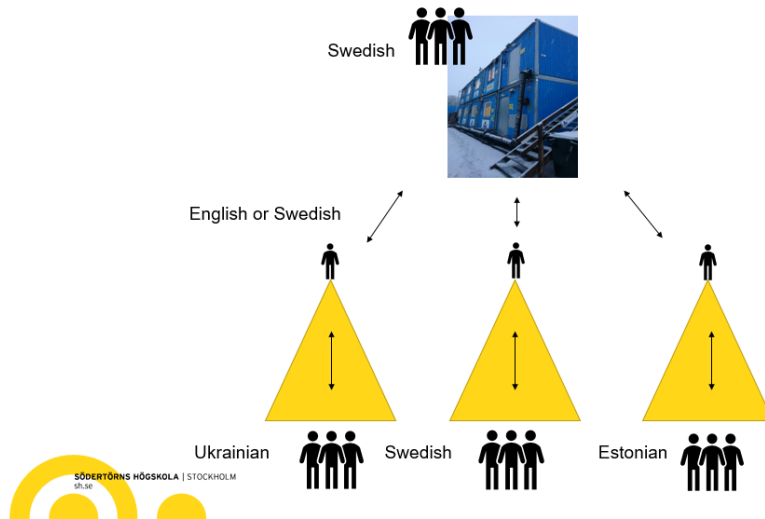


Figure 1. Multilingual chains of communication.

The interactional order with a broker transferring instructions to the team was observed at all studied workplaces, notwithstanding differences in size, temporality and spatiality. Interactionally, professional communication at construction sites features abundant deictic expressions and extensive use of embodied resources. At small sites, such as the studied excavator site, all workers can visually access to their responsibilities, and chains were demonstrated to be less linguistically elaborated. At large sites, such as the construction of new buildings, where superiors and workers are spread out over a large area, interactions between broker and manager were demonstrated to be more complex and elaborated, as interactants did not have visual access to the task at hand.

b. In Söderlundh & Keevallik (2022), we discussed the social and economic values of linguistic resources in work migration across the Baltic Sea. We demonstrated how the linguistic repertoire of the broker provides added value to the company, as the company can recruit workers in relation to business needs without special language requirements. The system is also beneficial for the broker, since he can recruit from his own transnational network of family and friends and expand his professional and social network in Sweden. The workers, in turn, are able to gain a higher salary in Sweden. However, we also demonstrated that the system accommodates power asymmetries based on language skills, and the workers' lack of skills in Swedish and English place them, socially and professionally, in a vulnerable position. The workers must place great trust in the broker, and we conclude that the relevant language skills empower him, more than his formal organisational position would indicate. The observed power asymmetries, we argued, are enhanced by the type of isolated work and minimal contact with the receiving society.

c. Regarding the language of the surrounding society, the project showed that such knowledge is unnecessary for the manual workers regarding both access to the sites and the completion of work tasks. For access to work, a combination of professional skills and skills in the language of an existing team seemed rather to be key. Consequently, the Estonian installers studied in Söderlundh & Kahlin (in press) report no interest in learning Swedish, and while the more permanently settled Estonians did report an interest in



learning the language, they experienced difficulties in taking Swedish courses due to a lack of energy after the physically demanding working days. Investing in language learning at work was also considered difficult, partly due to the isolated and language-marginal work tasks, but also due to the continual brokering activities, which lessened the workers' opportunities to practice Swedish at work. Nevertheless, the project indicates that language learning is key to adjusting power asymmetries at the sites and concludes that the issue of access to language learning is highly relevant for understanding power relations in mobile blue-collar settings.

2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

The project has promoted our understanding of language and manual work in understudied blue-collar workplaces. In earlier studies, manual work has often been considered language-marginal due to the type of individual, and the repetitive and sometimes low-skilled work. This also proved true at our studied workplaces; nevertheless, in Söderlundh & Kahlin (in press) we problematised this conclusion, demonstrating that the manual workers also have complex interactions concerning, for instance, problems that arise with their team leaders.

The data demonstrates very few examples of language mixing or so-called "truncated" multilingual repertoires. Instead, most participants spoke English, Polish, Estonian, Ukrainian or Swedish without mixing the languages. We observed how the migrating workers incorporated Swedish nouns for tools and materials into conversations that otherwise transpired in Polish or English but found very few examples of translanguaging, i.e., instances where interactants go between or beyond different linguistic structures and systems in a fluid manner. Only team leaders and workers who did not belong to a team were observed using translanguaging as a professional resource to, for instance, recruit help from workers with only partially overlapping repertoires (Kahlin et al. 2022). In relation to earlier studies of team leaders at construction sites, we could, from the perspective of translanguaging, add that team-leaders are in a hierarchical and social position that gives them latitude to create a professional and social space where they can transcend linguistic boundaries and monolingual norms.

3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

Poland and Estonia are geographically close to Sweden, and shared EU policies make work migration easy in terms of administration. Networks of business contacts are well established, and the managers were observed to recruit day-to-day in relation to their business needs. The trusted team leaders are particularly interesting with respect to recruitment, as they can recruit from private networks. We find this type of recruitment and adherent social scaffolding of family and friends within the European labour market particularly interesting and a significant finding related to work mobility across the Baltic Sea.

Further, it is interesting to note that English does not always constitute the main linguistic capital in work migration across the Baltic Sea. In Söderlundh & Keevallik (2022), we demonstrate how the broker's competence in the language of the local society (Swedish), on the one hand, and the language of the workforce (Estonian) on the other, are the local



form of symbolic capital that generates economic benefits. More generally, this implies that a particular linguistic repertoire can be used to gain value due to combinations of local circumstances and the macro-social structures that make work migration advantageous. This finding thus problematises literature that advocates English as the constant dominant global language for economic and social mobility.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

We suggest that multilingualism and construction work could be further investigated in relation to security. How is safety constructed, managed and communicated visually and verbally across language boundaries, and how are labour migrants from different European countries involved in a safe and secure work environment, regardless of linguistic resources? Answers could provide scientifically-based recommendations for a safe and secure work environment within the multilingual construction industry.

The results also raise questions about the role of gender in the globalised labour market. International migration has become increasingly gendered, in the sense that men migrate for work in the manual sector while women are being recruited to the caring and service sectors. Work in the manual sector is less dependent on language skills, as demonstrated in the project, while this is not the case for service work. Do migrating women face higher language requirements for entering the labour market? Questions about structured differences on a gendered international work market are interesting for further research.

5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

Dissemination of the project's results were ongoing throughout the duration of the project in the form of scientific articles, presentations at conferences and higher seminars. Project members have also contributed expert knowledge to research networks on migration and language learning, and we have participated in discussions and workshops on how adult education for immigrants should be organised, for example, in the municipality of Södertälje. A workshop was also organised at Södertörn University with significant scholars from the research field of language, migration and manual work. Additional project activity included discussions and collaborations with the Nordic research network Language at Work: Migrants and Nordic Workplaces (funded by The Joint Committee for Nordic Research in Humanities and Social Sciences). Hedda Söderlundh and Linda Kahlin were also invited to speak at a seminar that celebrated a new research project in Norway called Investigating *Second-language communication in workplace settings – the case of Polish migrants in Norway*.

Open access publications:

Weidner, M., & Kahlin, L., Söderlundh H. (in preparation). Doing measuring: coordinating precise actions at a multilingual construction site.

Söderlundh, H. & Kahlin, L. (in press). Betydelsen av svenska, engelska och andra språk för hantverkare som reser till Sverige för att arbeta. En nexusanalys av språk och arbete på den flerspråkiga byggarbetsplatsen. [The importance of Swedish, English and other languages for commuting craftsmen. A nexus analysis of language and work on the multilingual construction site] *Språk och stil*.



Söderlundh, H. & Keevallik, L. (2022). Labour mobility across the Baltic Sea: Language brokering at a blue-collar workplace in Sweden. *Language in Society*. First view. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404522000392>

Kahlin, L., Keevallik, L., Söderlundh, H., & Weidner, M. (2022). Translanguaging as a resource for meaning-making at multilingual construction sites. *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2021-0125>

Söderlundh, H., Kahlin, L. & Weidner, M. (2020). Arbetsmigration och flerspråkig interaktion på byggarbetsplatser. I: *NordAnd* 3:93-110. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2535-3381-2020-02-0>

Keevallik, L. (2020). Töörändajate keelekeskkond. I: R. Blokland & R-L. Valjärvi, *Där Östersjön är Västersjön – Seal, kus Läänemeri on Idameri: Festschrift till Virve och Raimo Raag – Pühendusteos Virve ja Raimo Raagile*. S. 36-42 DOI: <urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-416455>

Conference activity (five most important):

Linda Kahlin, Leelo Keevallik, Hedda Söderlundh, Matylda Weidner: *Spaces of translanguaging at multilingual construction sites*. NORDISCO, November 2021.

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Language and manual work abroad. Expressions of language ideologies in interviews with work migrants in Sweden*. *NordAnd* May 2022.

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Språket som nyckel till arbetsmarknaden. Reflektion utifrån en studie om språk och yrkesliv hos arbetspendlande snickare från Estland*. [Language as key to the labour market. Reflection based on a study on language and professional life of commuting carpenters from Estonia.] *Svenskans* beskrivning, May 2022.

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Byggarbetsplatsen som miljö för språkinläring*. [The construction site as an environment for language learning.] *NordAnd*, May 2022.

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Inclusion and exclusion in interaction at multilingual workplaces*. OFTI September 2019.

Project presentations within academia (three most important):

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Labour from the Baltic Sea region: Language, migration and daily working life among Polish and Estonian citizens in Sweden*. University of Warwick. 2020-05-13.

Linda Kahlin, Hedda Söderlundh, Matylda Weidner: *Practices for doing work together: observations from a multilingual construction site*. 2021-02-23. University of Oslo.

Linda Kahlin & Hedda Söderlundh: *Labour from the Baltic Sea region: Language, migration and daily working life among Polish and Estonian citizens in Sweden*. Södertörn University, Higher seminar in Sociology. 2021-01-12