

Book review: *Language rights and the law in Scandinavia: Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland* by Eduardo D. Faingold (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023)

Alia Amir

aa235@soas.ac.uk

ORCID: 0000-0002-4624-5535

This book highlights relevant debates for readers seeking a deeper grasp of language policies and language legislation in Scandinavia. In the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and its impact on anti-racism movements globally, this contribution is significant for the field of language policy and migration, offering substantial learning opportunities for policymakers. Constituting eight chapters, six of which examine the language policies and laws of the four Scandinavian nations and Denmark's autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the book focuses on the linguistic ecology of Scandinavia. The eight chapters are spread over 303 pages, encompassing language legislations across wide-ranging domains, such as work, immigration, the public sector, and education.

In the opening chapter, the book argues that official language policies emerge through the enactment of linguistic laws, often enshrined in the constitutions and legal statutes, including language regulations that promote the protection of minority linguistic rights within a given nation-state. These language policies play an important role in educational curricula, as well as in the public and official linguistic landscape. In this background, this book holds considerable importance as it discusses the legislation of the immigrant languages given that although complete volumes have been dedicated to exploring the policies of Sweden and Finland (see, e.g., Kaplan and Baldauf 2005), there has been a considerable gap in the literature regarding immigrant languages. Secondly, this chapter establishes that while English has been the subject of numerous publications, a comprehensive study of the ecology of all language-related laws, which is covered in this book, has been lacking.

Stepping into the realm of Swedish legislation, Chapter 2 reveals that language tests are not required for naturalisation. After 1995 EU accession, Sweden recognised five minority languages, which followed the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2000 by the Swedish Parliament, triggering debates on the status of Swedish in relation to English, minority, and immigrant languages (Milani 2008), because of which a parliamentary committee was set up (Norrby 2008). In 2009, Sweden promulgated the Language Act with stipulations for the Swedish language, the official minority languages, and Swedish Sign Language. The law puts emphasis on learning, developing, and using Swedish, Swedish Sign Language and other minority languages. However, it does not specifically mention any immigrant languages. The dominant languages of higher education are Swedish and English, whereas the immigrant languages are at the periphery, with the official minority languages completely absent. The law also provides the right of access to the courts and government services for all linguistic minorities in Sweden. Lastly, on Sweden, the chapter explains that the Education Act (Ministry of Education and Science 2010) protects the right of all minority children to receive language support for Swedish, Swedish Sign Language, official minority languages, and immigrant languages. However, it is acknowledged in the book that this right is constrained by the School Ordinance (Ministry of Education and Science 2011), which limits mother-tongue instruction.

With a focus on Denmark, Chapter 3 provides essential historical background to the current linguistic situation in the country. From 1397 to 1523, the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were joined under the Kalmar Union. From the 16th century, Denmark-Norway was a multilingual confederation. However, during the Napoleonic wars, Denmark lost Norway but retained Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The latter two were later lost to the army of the Prussian-Austrian alliance. This left Denmark to become a more ethnically and linguistically homogeneous country in which Danish became the predominant language, with German spoken only by a small minority. This scenario changed when the guest workers (defined in this context as foreign nationals who live and work temporarily in a host country, Parry 2013) from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia arrived in Denmark in the sixties. However, subsequent migrations in the eighties also led to a sixfold increase in the number of foreign-born residents, bringing the immigrant population of Denmark to 10%. However, immigration from non-western countries is viewed negatively in Denmark, and a large section of the Danish population feels threatened by the arrival of immigrants as they fear that it will negatively impact the language and culture of Denmark. This, in turn, has hampered the language rights of immigrants in terms of naturalisation and education as the Danish laws promote Danish language and culture in the educational system but completely disregard the widely spoken minority languages of the immigrants, such as Urdu, Arabic etc. Moreover, some Danish laws completely ban or restrict mother-tongue education for immigrant children from non-Western countries. The chapter mentions that there are also no constitutional provisions for the German-speaking minority.

In the Norwegian context, Chapter 4 shows that applicants for Norwegian residence and citizenship must pass a language and citizenship test. Norwegian legislation provides the right of linguistic minorities to have access to a qualified interpreter in encounters with the law and healthcare systems, but qualified interpreters are often unavailable. Another aspect peculiar to Norwegian law is that the construction industry created Norwegian-only regulations that can hinder immigrant workers from obtaining permanent employment because the use of immigrant languages in the workplace is believed to compromise safety and security standards. Moreover, another right that the Norwegian law provides is the right of Sámi children to learn their language. The law also recognises the value of Norwegian Sign Language in kindergarten. Preschool regulations also mandate fostering linguistic and cultural diversity, yet these regulations do not offer an explanation or detailed information on this term. Finally, Norwegian law also protects the use of Norwegian dialects (Bokmål and Nynorsk), Sámi, Kven, and Norwegian Sign Language in schools. At the grassroots level, there are very few municipal programmes or classes taught in Norwegian Sign Language. Moreover, teachers in mainstream schools are not expected to acquire even a minimum knowledge of Norwegian Sign Language, where many of the deaf children end up. The main languages used in higher education are Norwegian and English, whereas Sámi is the principal language used at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Kautokeino. Kven language and culture classes are offered at the University of Tromsø, while Norwegian Sign Language and sign language interpreting programmes are available at universities across Norway.

Discussing Iceland in Chapter 5, the author addresses the language rights of the native Icelandic-speaking majority with respect to Icelandic Sign Language users and a growing non-Icelandic immigrant population. In Iceland, language nationalism and a linguistic protectionist culture promote the use of Icelandic above all other languages and in all domains of language use, which influences laws and regulations that may hamper the prospects of immigrants to become naturalised citizens and avail themselves of the necessary services. However, it is acknowledged that while the Icelandic parliament and government authorities have put into

place many linguistic laws, regulations, and policies to promote the rights of Icelandic Sign Language users to equal access to public services, there remain no legal provisions providing the financial backing to guarantee the enforcement of these rights.

In the changing demographics of the Faroe Islands, Chapter 6 shows that there is an expanding community of non-Faroese-speaking immigrants who do not have to pass a Faroese language test to obtain a permanent residence permit. Faroese authorities and employers have favourable positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, an attitude that helps protect the language rights of immigrants. Faroese has been adopted as the official language of instruction in the Faroe Islands from elementary school to high school since the passing of the Home Rule Act in 1948. However, Danish and English remain the main languages of instruction in Faroese higher education due to the lack of proficient lecturers in Faroese and the lack of regulations to support the use of foreign languages in higher education. To this end, however, Faroese education legislation does not have any provisions which support the language rights of immigrant children who do not speak Faroese.

In the context of Greenland, Chapter 7 discusses the language rights of the indigenous Greenlandic Inuit majority, foreign nationals, and the Danish-speaking community, explaining that a language test is not needed to obtain residency in Greenland. The Language Policy Act of 2010 protects the rights of both Greenlandic speakers and Danish speakers to be able to use their languages in government and legal settings; however, Danish is the language of public administration and the judiciary. The Language Policy Act also provides the rights of organisations and businesses to create their own language policies. Another critical aspect of Greenland's language policy is that Greenlandic-speaking students with low proficiency in Danish are at a disadvantage when acquiring higher education either in Greenland or Denmark.

One key argument of this book is that despite the fact that English was not implanted in Scandinavia through colonisation, it dominates in domains such as higher education. Though the encroachment of English is questioned in local debates, it does not have the same racist undertones associated with immigrant languages. The Scandinavian languages are also seen as a resource which opens doors for academics to serve on external review committees in academic institutions across the region. These are positive aspects of policy developments at higher educational institutes; however, it further shows which languages are considered pragmatically viable and which languages are deemed worth nurturing at higher education, which may not fully reflect the actual linguistic communities of a nation-state. Lastly, the book shows that immigrant languages are not explicitly mentioned in the legislation of any of the Scandinavian countries.

The book is a valuable addition to the scholarship on Scandinavian language policies and legislations. It also deals sufficiently with popular discourses. However, the variations in language policies practised at the grassroots level are not touched upon, but that could be a next step in this series. The book would be of value to anyone wanting an overview of Scandinavian language legislation.

References

- Kaplan, Robert B. and Richard B. Baldauf. 2005. *Language policy and planning in Hungary, Finland and Sweden: Some common issues*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Milani, Tommaso. 2008. Language testing and citizenship: A language ideological debate in Sweden. *Language in Society* 37. 27–59.

- Ministry of Education and Science. 2010. Education Act.
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/ (14 August 2024).
- Ministry of Education and Science. 2011. School ordinance. Retrieved from School Ordinance, Swedish Code of Statutes 2011.
<https://www.government.se/contentassets/0d05209c49824d86bd3d977f4cfaa568/2011203-budget-act/> (14 August 2024).
- Norrby, Catrin. 2008. Swedish language policy: Multilingual paradise or utopian dream? In Jane Warren and Heather Merle Benbow (eds.), *Multilingual Europe: Reflections on language identity*, 63–76. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Parry, Sarah. 2013. Guest worker. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
<https://www.britannica.com/money/guest-worker> (14 August 2024).