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Teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism: findings from Q method research

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Abstract

This study explores teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism and multilingual students in Swedish primary schools. The aim is to support a better-informed discussion about teachers’ decision-making in linguistically diverse classrooms in the European nation-state. The use of Q method combines qualitative and quantitative data analyses. Q material applied in the present study provided the participants with all the necessary language to describe their beliefs. Two Q sets of statements – one regarding the understanding of the phenomenon and the other concerning suggested pedagogical responses in relation to current multilingualism – were constructed using a variety of sources. The participants are forty teachers, predominantly female, employed at three different primary schools in southern Sweden. Applying inverted factor analysis and abductive interpretation, three sets of teachers’ beliefs emerged and descriptions represent the teachers’ complex views about multilingualism in the classroom. Overall, teachers’ beliefs are rather welcoming towards multilingualism and multilingual students and recent concepts with growing acceptance in literature, such as translanguaging, are well accepted. However, sceptical views, often based on monolingual ideologies are present and are likely to pose challenges for the implementation of pluralistic policies. This study contributes to an open debate about benefits and challenges of current multilingualism in education.

Introduction

Historically, the social and political organisation of nation-states along monolingual lines has been ‘the dominant modality for the organisation of European territory and the management of its populations’ (Lo Bianco, 2005, p. 115). However, the increase in linguistic and cultural diversity due to accelerated migration flows challenges ‘the idea of a single, common “national” language [as] the leitmotif’ (May, 2017, p. 5). Sweden is a prominent example of such a practice, in which a national language is elevated to the role of safeguarding a national culture and identity (Cots, Lasagabaster, & Garrett, 2012). At the

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same time, the education system has an opportunity to sensitise the society about a possible new social norm that foregrounds multilingualism with Swedish as the shared national language. From a language ecology perspective, the classroom represents ‘a key site where policies become action’ (Hult, 2014, p. 159), and teachers, through their pedagogical decisions based on their beliefs, are at the metaphorical heart of language policy implementation (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Menken & García, 2010; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). In recent years, research has shown increasing interest in educators’ dilemma of finding themselves in linguistically diverse classrooms, which are historically perceived monolingual spaces in many nations. Some examples include a study of pluralist language ideologies of two primary school teachers in the United States (Henderson, 2017), a research project on monoglossic echoes in multilingual spaces in Australia (Reath Warren, 2018) and tensions between ‘globalising’ and ‘nationalising’ discourses in Estonian higher education (Soler & Vihman, 2018). Furthermore, Young (2014) in France and Haukås (2016) in Norway investigated teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism and a multilingual pedagogy with interviews and focus group discussions, while De Angelis (2011) used a questionnaire for her study of teachers’ beliefs about their students’ prior language knowledge.

**Teachers’ beliefs**

Research about teachers’ beliefs is considered especially challenging, due to the fact that different teachers’ beliefs and their interrelationships are not observable and may not be entirely consciously accessible (Rokeach, 1968). Moreover, when asked, teachers may respond with what is culturally and socially desirable. Observations, questionnaires or interview studies are therefore insufficient means to investigate teachers’ beliefs. As a result, the present study has adopted a powerful qualitative method with quantitative features to provide accounts of human subjectivity to explore teachers’ beliefs in the context of multilingualism in Swedish primary education.

Drawing on a review of teacher cognition in language teaching, Borg (2003) describes teachers as ‘active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs’ (p. 81). Because it is often difficult or even impossible to clearly determine whether the teacher knows or believes something (Pajares, 1992), and because ‘in the mind of the teachers these concepts are not held distinctively separate’ (Borg, 2006, p. 33), in the present study the concept of teachers’ beliefs refers to the teachers’ understanding of and pedagogical thinking about multilingualism and multilingual students. Belief elements of different strength are organised in complex networks and structured in a central-peripheral way. The more central and stronger an element is, the more resistant it is to change (Rokeach, 1968). Moreover, different beliefs may contradict one another, reflecting their complexity (Pajares, 1992).

**Complexity of multilingualism**

This study aims to shed light on teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism as a social phenomenon and on their pedagogies regarding multilingualism ‘in the most unbiased way possible’ (Aronin & Jessner, 2015, p. 286). Most of the research carried out about
multilingualism supports the acquisition and use of different languages in different domains and illustrates advantages of multilinguals, such as superior metalinguistic and meta-cognitive abilities (Bialystock, 2011; Cenoz, 2003; De Angelis, 2007) or multilingualism’s positive effect on earnings (Grin, Sfreddo, & Vaillancourt, 2010) to name but a few. According to Jessner and Kramsch (2015) the ‘dark side to linguistic diversity’ (p. 6) has received far less attention in academia. They proceed to say that current multilingualism ‘is part of a general revolution against monolingualism and what it stands for, namely [...] the bedrock of schooling, the nation-state and the Academy’ (p. 7, italics in original). By adding a complexity lens (Larsen-Freeman, 2014), the current paper understands multilingualism as a dynamic phenomenon, consisting of opportunities and difficulties to be faced by individuals, the society and its institutions.

In academia, the bi- and multilingual norm in societal language use seems to have replaced the monolingual perspective (Aronin, 2015; Jessner & Kramsch, 2015; May, 2014). This multilingual turn (May, 2014) is characterised by the acknowledgement of multilingual speakers’ fluid language practices in their full complexity (García, 2009). García refers to translanguaging when multilingual individuals use their full linguistic repertoire and receive positive confirmation for their linguistic capacity. As a new method of teaching and an alternative to traditional pedagogies, where the teachers ‘keep knowledge about other languages, including the L1 [the students’ first language], out of the classroom in order not to confuse students’ (Jessner, 2008, p. 39), translanguaging requires the teachers’ willingness to engage in learning with their students and equalise power relations (Flores & García, 2013). Comparable terms to translanguaging which all ‘shift the focus from languages to speakers and open up the possibility for a multilingual analysis, rather than a monolingual one’ (Jonsson, 2017, p. 22) include Canagarajah’s (2011) codemeshing or Jørgensen’s (2008) polylingual languaging. According to Paulsrud, Rosén, Straszer, and Wedin (2017), the concept of translanguaging creates a stronger home-school connection and allows for better participation between weaker and stronger learners in mixed-ability classes. However, this more fluid understanding of language use in current multilingualism represents a challenge for educators, because it destabilises codes, norms and conventions that teachers and especially language teachers have relied upon (Kramsch, 2014). It is therefore not surprising that different research studies have identified a discrepancy between multilingual pedagogies celebrated in literature or pluralistic policies and current classroom practice (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Cummins, 2007; Daryai-Hansen et al., 2015). The reasons for this gap are manifold. The implementation of a multilingual pedagogy is connected to new curricula, new appropriate learning material, adapted assessment practices and enough time for the teachers to engage and adapt, as they are expected to perform a major paradigmatic shift. In order to understand the reasoning behind sceptical beliefs and to lead a better-informed discussion about multilingual education, this current research project applies a methodology that captures the richness of the phenomenon and explores patterns of Swedish primary school teachers’ beliefs about it.

**Linguistic ecology of Sweden**

The current research project is situated in Sweden, where the national language hierarchy is clearly dominated by Swedish and English (Josephson, 2004). To secure the
development of Swedish, mainly in respect to the rise of English, Swedish became the official language of the country in 2009 (Swedish Ministry of Culture, 2009:600). English is considered a transcultural language (Hult, 2012) whose position is continually negotiated and part of the local dominant language constellation, which is described as ‘the complex of languages shared on a day-to-day basis [to meet] essential functions of communication, interaction and identity-marking’ by Aronin and Singleton (2012, p. 59). While Swedish is taught as a mandatory subject from first grade and English from third grade in public schools, other major European languages and minority languages, non-official ones in particular, are marginalised in the Swedish educational system. This is party due to the organisation of school subjects, where languages are treated as ‘separate units, each with specific goals and learning outcomes’ (Rosén, 2017, pp. 44–45). In addition, studying an additional language to Swedish and English lies in the students’ responsibility. Many students however choose more lessons in Swedish or English (Tholin, 2012, p. 71) and thereby miss the European Union’s policy objective of ‘mother tongue plus two other languages’ (European Commission, 2004, p. 16). Nevertheless, three efforts to foster multilingual development need to be mentioned. Mother tongue instruction was established in 1977 and is currently an elective school subject in its own right. Municipalities are obliged to organise the classes, if five students or more use a particular language on a daily basis with a caregiver and wish to receive such an instruction. Moreover, a suitable teacher must be available. These requirements are waived for official minority languages. The second, more short-term educational support is study guidance in the mother tongue, which aims at helping students with limited Swedish language competence understand schooling held in the national language. Thirdly, Swedish as a Second Language was established as a school subject in 1995 to provide a more systematic support for immigrant students’ development of the Swedish language. It is telling that in Sweden these immigrant children are often referred to as multilingual students, which is an acknowledgment that the children have a language other than Swedish as their first form of communication and now need to acquire the dominant language of their host country, thus becoming even more multilingual. As concluded by Lundberg (2018), even in research results, discourses of multilingual students in Sweden often refer to children with a migration background and mother tongues other than Swedish. They are thereby discriminated as different from the perceived monolingual norm in national education policy documents. On the other hand, multilinguals in a wider understanding, are not necessarily called multilingual for at least two reasons. First, the particular usage, described by Lundberg, has a strong negative connotation and is avoided when referring to native Swedish speakers. Second, individual multilingualism is still popularly understood as consisting of a native-like control of two or more languages (Bloomfield, 1933) and speakers whose linguistic proficiencies are partial tend not to be considered multilingual. As a consequence of the described monolingual stance, it can be hypothesised that the linguistic repertoire of multilingual individuals who have high Swedish language competency is overlooked.

This monolingual disposition stands in sharp contrast with the multilingual sociolinguistic reality of most children (monolingual and multilingual ones) entering the Swedish school system and the current state of research about multilingualism and multilingual pedagogy described above.
Research setting

In light of these peculiarities in the Swedish context, the present study used a range of school settings to ensure representative coverage of typical conditions. Forty teachers from three different primary schools in the southern Swedish region of Scania were recruited for this study on a voluntary basis. The biggest school, with around 400 students of which 95% have a non-Swedish background, is located in the inner city of Malmö, Sweden’s third largest city and an excellent example of a ‘test bed for understanding social diversity and complexity’ (King & Carson, 2017, p. 3). Twenty-nine teachers (23 female and 6 male) from this school took part in the study. According to their self-evaluation, all of these teachers can communicate in at least two languages and more than half of them do not have Swedish as a first language. The other two schools are smaller and located in a more rural area, approximately 40 minutes away from the city of Malmö. Seven teachers (5 female and 2 male) participated from a school with about 250 students, whereby 20% are of a non-Swedish background. The four remaining participants are all female and employed at a school with 110 students who are almost exclusively of Swedish background. All of the teachers in the rural area are native speakers of Swedish and consider themselves able to communicate in at least two languages.

Materials and methods

In order to explore teachers’ subjective beliefs from the individual’s point of view instead of imposing researcher-defined categories onto them, Q methodology (henceforth Q) was selected as particularly well suited to the requirements of the current research project. Moreover, Q provides the sometimes insufficient language to describe and label their beliefs (Ernest, 2001) and is an interactive, dynamic and operant methodology (Brown, 1980), which approaches individuals in terms of their own priorities, values, beliefs and opinions (Ernest, 2011). Furthermore, by making use of a form of inverted factor analysis thereby combining qualitative and quantitative aspects, Q ‘is an effective method for turning subjective statements into an objective outcome’ (Akhtar-Danesh, Baumann, & Cordingley, 2008, p. 770). Invented by psychologist William Stephenson in the 1930s, Q methodology locates shared viewpoints in a purposely-selected group of people about an issue. One of the many strengths of Q’s abductive approach lies in its exploratory and theory-generating potential, because typically no hypotheses are formulated before the execution of the study (Stenner, Dancey, & Watts, 2000). Many studies have shown Q to be a reliable method (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Moreover, Lo Bianco (2015) describes Q as a valuable research method in the field of language policy and for plans to explore and define ‘the nature and complexity of communication problems’ (p. 70) by mapping out the field of arguments, positions, and the underlying discourses in the debates about multilingualism.

Research design

To identify the complexity of teachers’ beliefs about multilingualism in general, multilingual students in particular and respect the approach to the concept of teachers’ beliefs mentioned above, the participants in this study were given two Q samples to complete. The first aimed to capture their underlying understanding of the subject while the
second explored the teachers’ suggested pedagogical action regarding multilingualism and multilingual students. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers (1990) describe this procedure as, in practice, a means of exploring what cultural elements tend to be voiced in conjunction with each other thus providing a further level of interpretation. In the current study, the subdivision into understanding and pedagogy does justice to the complex nature of the studied teachers’ beliefs.

Various sources, such as academic literature, popular science magazines, educational policy documents and discussions with teachers were used in an unstructured way to gather a variety of items containing various discourses of multilingualism. Four domain experts and two experienced Q researchers were then approached to evaluate the statements, which were reformulated in a language the participants were likely to use and understand (Dryzek & Holmes, 2002) and represent the nuanced thoughts of teachers as closely as possible. All experts focused on the same criteria: simplicity, clarity, wording, and breadth and depth (Paige & Morin, 2016; Watts & Stenner, 2012). This procedure is especially important for the de-contextualised Q statements and resulted in a reduction of the items and the creation of two separate Q samples which were piloted with twelve teachers and teacher trainers. After some further adjustments, the Q samples for the current study were finalised. While the first component study (called understanding in this paper) comprises a 39-item Q sample, the second (called pedagogy in this paper) is a Q sample comprising 32 items.

**Data collection**

In 2017, the researcher visited all the schools and was present during the collection of the empirical data. The participants were provided with explanatory information about the research project and signed a consent form. They then completed a short questionnaire supplying additional demographic details. Next, the participants were asked to perform a card-ranking activity using the 39 items on understanding. Each item had to be assigned a hierarchical position in a forced-choice, quasi-normal and symmetrical distribution according to the extent to which the statement was felt to describe the participant’s understanding of multilingualism and multilingual students. The face-validity dimension among which the items had to be sorted was labelled as ‘most disagree’ to ‘most agree’, and the most negative value (−4) represented the left pole while the most positive value (+4) was located on the right pole. The aim of this dynamic procedure was to generate a single and holistic configuration of all the items, consisting of each participant’s constant comparison between the items. The product is considered to be a dynamic representation of their viewpoint on the subject. Some participants added one or several reasons for their choices of items at +4/−4 by writing on the back of the page. The procedure was repeated with the 32-item Q sample about pedagogy, the second component discussed in this present paper.

**Analytical procedures**

The data for the 40 participants was statistically analysed using the dedicated software, PQMethod (Schmolck, 2014). The software offers a variety of by-person factor-extraction and rotation methods and provides the researcher with a number of statistical measures. After properly exploring the data by engaging with the process of factor rotation in an
investigatory fashion (Watts & Stenner, 2012), the most informative solution for each component was chosen, which resulted in the application of different data-reduction techniques. Q sorts on understanding were subjected to principal components analysis and centroid factor analysis was used for the related Q study on pedagogy. One can refer to Kline (1994) for a point-by-point comparison between principal component analysis and centroid factor analysis. For both components, the automatic varimax procedure was used to rotate the factors according to statistical criteria and account for the maximal amount of opinion variance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). After the elimination of factors with insufficient statistical strength, three accounts of understanding (Factors 1-U, 2-U and 3-U) were identified, which, when taken together, explain 56% of the opinion variance. A simple equation outline in Brown (1980, pp. 222–223) was used to calculate each Q sort’s significance at the $p < 0.01$ level: $2.58(1/\sqrt{\text{no of items}})$. For this first component, factor loadings of at least $+/− 0.41$ were significant at the $p < 0.01$ level and 26 of the 40 Q sorts loaded significantly on one of these three factors. In the related pedagogy study, three factors (Factors 1-P, 2-P and 3-P) were extracted, accounting for 55% of the opinion variance. Here, 31 of the 40 Q sorts loaded significantly ($+/− 0.45$ at the $p < 0.01$ level) on only one of these three factors. All Q sorts loading significantly on the same factor were merged to a single ideal-typical Q sort according to a procedure of weighted averaging. This shared, distinct understanding of the subject matter is called a factor array. Figure 1 shows the factor array for Factor 1-P on pedagogy. The top line represents the values (−4 to + 4) and the numbers in brackets show how many items could be allocated per value.

To move from the factor arrays to the factor interpretations, a careful and holistic inspection of the patterning of items within a factor array was applied by using the crib sheet method (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Apart from the three items on top and at the bottom of the factor array, the crib sheet also focuses on items, which are ranked higher or lower in a particular factor array relative to other factor arrays. As a consequence, even items ranked zero (indifferent) in one factor are important for the interpretation of this factor if the same item is given extreme scores on other factors (Dryzek & Holmes, 2002).

**Results**

Three sets of teachers’ beliefs have emerged in the current research project. Each of these sets consists of one factor in each of the two components. Despite their varying explained
opinion variance indicating their statistical strength, all three emerged factors in the *understanding* component and all three emerged factors in the *pedagogy* component meet sufficient statistical criteria to be included in this study. The respective explained opinion variance and significant loadings, separated by gender and school context are shown in Table 1.

The following result section is structured according to the three sets teachers' beliefs which have emerged. A short quantitative description including the statistical connection between the components is followed by a summary of the underlying understanding of multilingualism and multilingual students (component 1) and a more detailed narrative of the suggested pedagogical action (component 2). In these qualitative interpretations of the single factors, which have been given titles for mnemonic reasons (Stenner et al., 2000), the numbers in brackets represent factor item rankings. Taking Factor 1-P for example, we can see that (20: −1) indicates that item 20 was ranked in the −1 position by the merged average of all participants significantly loading on this factor. Relevant comments by participants are also cited in the interpretations, followed by the number of the Q sort in parentheses.

The Q-sort items and the allocated values for each of the three factors in the second component are presented in Table 2 at the end of the results section as a reference. The single Q-sort items and allocated values for the first component on *understanding* can be requested from the author.

**Table 1. Quantitative summary for all factors.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-U</td>
<td>2-U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explained opinion variance</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant loadings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers’ belief set 1 (TBS1) – let us help you exercise your right to be multilingual!**

A total of 14 respondents load significantly on Factor 1-U, explaining 28% of the opinion variance in the *understanding* component and 15 respondents load significantly on Factor 1-P, which explains 26% of the opinion variance in this second component. Twelve out of the 14 respondents aligning with Factor 1-U also load significantly on Factor 1-P, illustrating the clear connection between the two components. Five of these 12 are however listed as confounded, because they also show a significant loading on Factor 3-P. One teacher loads on Factor 2-P and one on Factor 3-P.

Due to the high-explained opinion variance of Factors 1-U and 1-P, it can be concluded that this first teachers’ belief set represents the group consensus, which mainly draws from the common disciplinary socialisation that teachers share.

**Understanding Factor 1-U**

Participants loading strongly on Factor 1-U have a highly positive understanding of multilingualism and do not identify any negative changes that occur at school with the presence...
of multilingualism. In the view of these teachers, multilingual students generally do not experience problems at school. On the contrary, they believe multilingualism develops verbal skills and produces cognitive advantages.

The teachers representing Factor 1-U consider the mother tongue spoken at home to be a crucial aspect for students’ educational success and correspondingly believe that the Swedish competence of the parents of multilingual students is irrelevant. They regard multilingual students as a valuable resource for society and multilingualism as a positive influence on their own teaching practices.

**Pedagogy Factor 1-P**

Teachers loading on Factor 1-P do not treat every student the same but rather individualise their pedagogical practices according to the students’ mother tongue (20: −1). This is due to their awareness of the needs of multilingual students and the respondents’ acknowledgment that individual support in the students’ mother tongue is needed (26: 3). However, they do not believe that multilingual students need reduced individual learning objectives (25: −2) or any additional support to learn Swedish (4: 0). Teaching Swedish as a second language to multilingual students and not integrating them in standard Swedish

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**Table 2. Q-sort values for items in pedagogy.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>1-P</th>
<th>2-P</th>
<th>3-P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  It is important that students with low motivation can withdraw from foreign language classes</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−4</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Multilingualism is an important topic of debate in education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  A common language is important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Multilingual students need additional support to learn Swedish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Multilingual students should not learn additional languages but rather focus on the ones they already know</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Everybody should be functionally trilingual</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Multilingual students need special education support</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Multilingual and monolingual students should learn Swedish separately</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Multilingualism is a right at school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Multilingual students should be evaluated in their mother tongue</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Schools should have access to multilingual material</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Competence in more than two languages is unnecessary. One foreign language is sufficient</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Cooperation with the multilingual students’ parents is vital for the students’ success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Teaching materials should include multilingualism as a topic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 A common attitude towards multilingualism is important among the teaching staff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Schools ought to change their way of teaching due to a society’s increased multilingualism</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Separate languages should be taught separately</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Students should be encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 The school needs more concrete guidelines concerning multilingualism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 I treat every student the same regardless of their mother tongue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Here, Swedish is the norm and not the students’ multilingualism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Students with a migration background should be excluded from foreign language classes</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Multilingualism should be a part of teacher education programmes</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Multilingual students should take a preparatory course before they take part in regular classes</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Multilingual students often need reduced individual learning objectives</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Multilingual students have the right to receive individual support in their mother tongue</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Teaching staff should receive information about multilingualism to distribute to parents and students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Being allowed to use all their languages during lessons helps multilingual students in their general learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 We need a ‘Swedish only’ policy in our public schools here</td>
<td>−4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 I don’t understand the students’ mother tongue, so I don’t want them to use them</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Teachers of different language subjects should collaborate closely</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 A central task of the teacher is the systematic support of the students’ multilingual self-perception</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
classes is clearly opposed (8: −3), for example because of the missed chance to provide good linguistic examples for weaker students (Q sort 21). Also, the idea of sending such students to preparatory courses before they are permitted to take part in regular classes is rejected (24: 0).

Most important for these teachers is the idea that multilingualism is a right at school (9: 4), and they hold that all schools ought to adapt their teaching practices in response to society’s increased multilingualism (16: 2). Although they do not see multilingualism as a high priority topic for schools (2: 1), a common attitude towards the topic among the teaching staff is considered to be of prime importance (15: 3), as this is considered to communicate a positive signal to students (sort 3) and promote closer collaboration among language teachers (31: 2). Nonetheless, according to Factor 1-P, there is no need for more concrete guidelines concerning multilingualism (19: 0).

This factor clearly opposes the idea of a ‘Swedish only’ policy in public schools (29: −4). On the contrary, these teachers believe that multilingual students’ use of all their languages during lessons will assist them in their general learning (28: 3), and therefore, Factor 1-P respondents are in favour of allowing translanguaging strategies in their classes (30: −2) and encourage this multiple language use (18: 2).

Despite their view that functional trilingualism is not considered entirely necessary (6: −1), teachers loading on this factor clearly want all their students to learn more than two languages (12: −3) and hold that multilingual students should learn additional languages rather than focus on the ones they already know (5: −3).

**Teachers’ belief set 2 (TBS2) – you’re tolerated. Now adapt!**

At total of 7 respondents load significantly on Factor 2-U, explaining 12% of the opinion variance in the understanding component and 9 respondents load significantly on Factor 2-P, which explains 10% of the opinion variance in this second component. Four out of the seven respondents aligning with Factor 2-U also load significantly on Factor 2-P. One teacher loads on Factor 1-P, one on Factor 3-P and one participant shows no significant loading in the pedagogy-component. TBS2 consists of a comparatively high percentage of male respondents. Moreover, in the understanding component, teachers from the rural schools outnumbered their colleagues from the urban school, despite the much smaller numbers of participants.

**Understanding Factor 2-U**

The topic of multilingualism is considered to have gained too much prominence in schooling. The aligning respondents doubt if their engagement with questions of multilingualism broadens their horizon as a professional. However, they expressed the view that increased multilingualism among students does make their task to communicate social values more difficult.

Teachers loading on this factor believe that children who are raised monolingually can become multilingual and that multilingualism can be a resource for learning additional languages. However, they do not believe that multilingual children have a bigger vocabulary nor any particular cognitive advantages or any higher cultural awareness.
Respondents aligning with Factor 2-U do not believe in the benefits of speaking the students’ mother tongue at home and the Swedish competence of multilingual students’ parents is considered to be crucial for any successful collaboration between schools and parents.

**Pedagogy Factor 2-P**

According to Factor 2-P, multilingualism should not be an important topic at school (2: 1), while a common language is vital (3: 3). The normative assumption that the use of Swedish language should be an uncontested reality in Swedish schools (21: 3) is confirmed by the comment that the students’ educational success is more likely if their Swedish language competency is good (Q sort 8). The logic of these positions is that multilingualism essentially constitutes a problem, which undermines the assumed monolingual norm, where students are painted in terms of deficit. The suggestion of implementing a ‘Swedish only’ policy in public schools is not categorically opposed by the respondents loading on Factor 2-P (29: 0), and moreover, multilingualism is not necessarily seen as a right at school (9: 1), which means that no school ought to change its teaching practices due to society’s increased multilingualism (16: −2). It follows from these beliefs that it is not the teachers’ central task to systematically support the students’ multilingual self-perception (32: 0).

According to the belief system of this factor, multilingual students are essentially considered problematic because they usually require additional support, for example, to learn Swedish (4: 2) or to even be able to participate in regular class activities (24: 3). Although drawing a distinction between subjects called Swedish and Swedish as a Second Language is strongly opposed (8: −2), Factor 2-P holds that multilingual students should be well prepared before they meet monolingual Swedish students. Yet, they often need reduced individual learning objectives (25: 0), which seems to be rather disturbing to the teachers loading on this factor, as they want to treat every student the same, regardless of their mother tongue (20: 4). Therefore, it is not surprising that these teachers regard it as absolutely unimportant that students with low motivation may be excluded from foreign language classes (1: −4). Perhaps they should not be excluded (22: −3) because school is not a place where the student can choose subjects but rather receives the same schooling as everybody else. A different interpretation for this strong statement against the possible exclusion from language subjects is provided by Q sort 32, which states that all students of migrant backgrounds should be obliged to participate in Swedish classes. It is implied that respondent 32 means Swedish when referring to the foreign language for non-Swedish students.

Without the support of teachers and well-functioning cooperation with their parents, multilingual students will not achieve similar levels as native Swedish students and will not be successful (13: 2). At the same time, respondents who align with this factor prefer to receive information about multilingualism that can be distributed to parents and students (27: 0) rather than include multilingualism in teaching materials (14: −1) or in teacher education (23: −1) thereby keeping the responsibility to inform their students. Moreover, there does not need to be additional collaboration among teachers (31: −1), and a common attitude towards multilingualism within the teaching staff is not considered to be particularly important (15: 1).

The formulation of this factor does not permit any translanguaging strategies during lessons. Students should not be encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire (18: −1). Teachers loading on this factor do not wish to hear mother tongues unknown to
them during lessons (30: 2) and believe that it does not facilitate the students’ learning process (28: 0); additionally, the evaluation of multilingual students in their mother tongue is unthinkable for this factor (10: −3).

These teachers acknowledge the necessity of competence in more than two languages (12: −3) but are not convinced that everybody needs to be functionally trilingual (6: 0), and particularly, that multilingual students may be better off focusing on the languages they already know (5: −2).

Teachers’ belief set 3 (TBS3) – why make such a fuss? Everyone will be fine

At total of 5 respondents load significantly on Factor 3-U, explaining 16% of the opinion variance in the understanding component and 5 respondents load significantly on Factor 3-P, which explains 19% of the opinion variance in this second component. Four out of the five respondents aligning with Factor 3-U also load significantly on Factor 3-P. One of them shows however a confounded viewpoint with an additional significant loading on Factor 1-P. One teacher loads on Factor 1-P and one participant shows no significant loading in the pedagogy-component. No teacher from the schools in the rural area aligns with Factor 3-U and only one with Factor 3-P.

The factors in TBS3 share a relatively high inter-correlation with the first factors in their component (Factors 1-U and 1-P), indicating that those factors are not mutually exclusive and could statistically be considered two different manifestations of the same consensus factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, in terms of content, Factors 3-U and 3-P represent different viewpoints and are therefore kept as an independent set of teachers’ beliefs.

Understanding Factor 3-U

Although Factor 3-U adherents do not believe mass immigration to be the reason for society’s increased multilingualism, they state that children are either monolingual or multilingual and that it is impossible to become multilingual. At the same time, these teachers see many benefits of being multilingual, such as the enhanced development of general verbal skills and the increased capacity to use effective reading strategies. According the teachers loading on Factor 3-U, multilingualism also produces cognitive advantages and permits children to gain new perspectives on their surroundings. In general, multilingualism here is seen as the key to effective communication, contacts and an asset towards gaining employment.

These teachers see the school as heavily and positively influenced by the students’ individual multilingualism and do not consider that additional efforts are required, most likely because any potential problems of being a non-native Swedish speaker are opposed by this factor.

Pedagogy Factor 3-P

Arising from principles of personal integrity and to avoid discrimination, teachers loading on Factor 3-P want to treat every student the same regardless of their mother tongue (20: 4). They see equal treatment as a fundamental principle of a teacher’s professional practice (Q sorts 4, 5 and 9). At the same time, equal treatment does not mean identical teaching. A distinction between these notions is key to the reasoning underlying this factor. Given that students’ individual multilingualism is considered normative (21: −3) and multilingualism
is seen as a right at school (9: 3), the idea of a ‘Swedish only’ policy at public schools is therefore strongly opposed (29: −3) and multilingualism is considered to be an important topic of debate in education (2: 2). However, no additional support for multilingual students is considered necessary, which is a main distinction in relation to TBS1. Other special measures such as preparatory courses (24: 0), additional support to learn Swedish (4: 0), special education support (7: −2), mother tongue instruction (26: 0) or reduced individual learning objectives (25: −1) are all deemed unnecessary. Teachers loading on this factor also oppose the separate learning and teaching of Swedish as a second language from regular Swedish (8: −2). At the same time, they adhere to the view that multilingual students should be excluded from foreign language classes altogether (1: −1) if they show low motivation. Students with migrant backgrounds should generally be excluded from these lessons (22: −1) and focus on the languages they already know instead (5: −2). These items correspond well with a low agreement with the statement that everybody should be trilingual (6: −3) and that one foreign language is sufficient (12: −1). Q sort 4 underlines this by saying that students do not necessarily feel better with more languages and they should be able to choose themselves if they wish to learn an additional language.

Teachers aligning with this factor consider the systematic support of students’ multilingual self-perception as a central task (32: 3) and that learning about multilingualism should also be included in teacher education programmes (23: 2). Although respondents loading on this factor believe it is important to present a common attitude towards multilingualism as the teaching staff of a school (15: 2), they are unsure if schools should adapt to the society’s increased multilingualism (16: 0). There does not necessarily need to be an increase in the cooperation between the multilingual students’ parents and the teachers (13: 1), not even in the form of external information be provided to parents (27: 0).

Teachers loading on factor 3-P see extensive benefits in students’ use of their full linguistic repertoire during lessons (30: −4), as they believe that this aids the students in their general learning (28: 2). They consider that students should be actively encouraged to draw on all their available translanguaging strategies (18: 3), and they could even accept evaluating students in their mother tongues (10: −1). Q sort 40 states that it is the teacher’s own problem if they do not understand the students and not the students’ duty to use the dominant language.

**Discussion**

The main objective of the present paper is to investigate the spread and depth of the beliefs shared by teachers on the understanding of and suggested pedagogical approaches to multilingualism and multilingual students in Swedish primary school. The patterns in the two components are highly similar and lead to clear connections between the factors across the components, which allowed the creation of three sets of teachers’ beliefs, consisting of information from both components.

**Summaries of teachers’ belief sets**

TBS1 falls largely in line with the current state in educational linguistics, which is generally favourably disposed towards a pluralistic approach to teaching. In this approach,
the concept of translanguaging, which promotes a better understanding of class content, creates a stronger home–school connection and allows for better participation between weaker and stronger learners in mixed-ability classes is supported (Paulsrud et al., 2017). TBS2 serves as the antithesis to TBS1, as it takes a critical stance towards the subject matter of multilingualism, displaying a more personal and political identity rather than the professional viewpoint found in the other two belief sets. The illustrated rather traditional understanding of language education rooted in a monolingual ideology is typical to nation-states and their construction of ‘the recognition/accommodation of linguistic diversity as a threat to the maintenance of national cohesion and related notions of social and political stability’ (May, 2017, p. 3, italics in original). Teachers loading on TBS3 agree with their colleagues aligning with TBS2 that there is no need to change their professional practice due to the increased societal diversity in Sweden, however, they see multilingualism as a benefit and do not show a deficit-oriented view of multilingual students.

**Context**

The high percentages of teachers in the rural areas of Sweden loading on TBS2 indicate that professional experience in terms of student population has an influence on how multilingualism and multilingual students are received. On the one hand, the lack of engagement with non-native speakers of Swedish obviously nurtures insecurity about the topic and scepticism of more pluralistic approaches to teaching. However, on the other hand, all teachers except for one from the rural schools that significantly load on Factor 1-P also load on Factor 1-U in understanding. Ultimately, this means that if teachers have a positive understanding of multilingualism, even if they rarely work with multilingual students in their daily professional context, they will opt for a more pluralistic way of teaching. Generally, school affiliation seems to be more predictive in the understanding component, where only 18% of the teachers in the urban school load on Factor 2-U compared to the 44% in the rural schools. However, in pedagogy, the difference of 3% between urban and rural educators loading on Factor 2-P is miniscule.

**Consensus across the teachers’ belief sets**

The three teachers’ belief sets align closely on certain topics. A finding which stands in clear contrast to current teaching practices and education policy in Sweden, is the explicit disagreement with the separation of languages by all sets. While a critical discourse about the subject of Swedish as a Second Language exists, the single-language subjects are generally not questioned (Rosén, 2017). Another consensus across all the sets is the positive attitude towards the acquisition of new languages by multilingual students. However, the European Commission’s (2004) recommendation that at least three languages should be taught from an early age receives a rather low ranking by all teachers’ belief sets in the present Q study, confirming the dominant language constellation in Sweden and the Swedish understanding of the term multilingual student which only represents people with another first language than Swedish.
**Complexity awareness as a prerequisite for change**

The results of the current research study suggest that the discrepancy between language policies promoting more pluralistic approaches to teaching and teachers’ pedagogical decision-making in classrooms is at least partly based on teachers’ beliefs rooted in monolingual and traditional ideologies. Bearing in mind that ‘belief change during adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon’ (Pajares, 1992, p. 325), a complexity lens was applied to gain awareness of the underlying structures of these predominant sets of teachers’ beliefs, because a better understanding of how teachers think is a prerequisite to deconstruct and rebuild teachers’ beliefs in favour of multilingual education (Young, 2014). As research shows, awareness of the complexity of concepts such as multilingualism is ‘critically important for practicing teachers who work with diverse populations of pupils’ (Aronin & Jessner, 2015, p. 287) in order to ‘acknowledge the individual differences among learners, which call for differentiated instruction’ (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, p. 232) and eventually prepare them for our diverse world, where multilingualism is more complex than simply positive or negative.

**Final remarks**

The current study indicates that pluralistic approaches to language teaching, including translanguaging as a recent concept with a growing acceptance in the literature (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017), are, on a conceptual level, well-accepted among teachers at Swedish primary schools investigated in this study. There is no intention to claim that the results of the current study are statistically representative for all Swedish primary teachers. Yet, a genuine representation of factors discovered in Q studies can be seen to exist in a larger population (Brown, 1980; Dryzek & Holmes, 2002). Further research is needed to explore the representation of the various teachers’ beliefs in practice.

Several misconceptions about multilingualism were revealed, which are often based on monolingual ideologies still predominant in the Swedish nation-state. The fact that all students and not just those who are already multilingual, can benefit from pluralistic teaching practices (Molyneux, Scull, & Aliani, 2016) calls for an intensified collaboration between policy makers, schools and families in order to help all students become successful language users. Moreover, the findings in current study are in line with Young (2014), who states that ‘the absence of a declared language policy referring explicitly to plurilingual pupils, who are not new arrivals, is leaving ordinary class teachers in limbo’ (p. 167). In addition, the clear connections between the two components in this study indicate that the more well-informed the teachers are about multilingualism, the more fitting their proposed course of action at a pedagogical level becomes. The main implication of this study is that an intensified pre- and in-service teacher education about benefits and challenges of current multilingualism as a complex phenomenon is needed. The ultimate aim is to educate more benevolent gatekeepers in terms of language variation (Boyd, 2003), more multilingual development in the classroom (Aronin, 2015) and an open public debate about the unique Swedish view of multilingualism.
Notes

1. The term ‘plurilingualism’ is often used when referring to individual language repertoires. To ensure continuity with earlier research, in this paper, the terms ‘multilingualism’ and ‘multi-lingual’ are used to refer to both individual and societal multilingualism.

2. Although the results of principal component analysis as an extraction option are usually called components, the term factors will be used for improved readability.

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