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Imagining the homeland: mother tongue tuition in Sweden as transnational space

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ABSTRACT

In this article images of and narratives about a specific homeland, heritage and culture in Mother Tongue Tuition (MTT) in Sweden are analyzed in order to discuss if and how the MTT classroom is constructed as a transnational space. In the Swedish context, MTT is a voluntary school subject with the aim to support students to develop knowledge in and about the mother tongue, namely languages other than Swedish used in the home setting. Through a modified nexus analysis of policy documents, field notes and photos from observations and semi-structured interviews with Mother Tongue teachers, a picture emerges of MTT as a transnational space. However, while the discourses of official curricula express a simplified view of the relations between language, culture and the geopolitical space perceived as the homeland, the analysis of the linguistic landscape of the classrooms and the MT teachers’ voices exposes the complexity of such relations in a globalized world. The analysis revealed that the construction of the homeland is not limited to relations between two geographical places, as expressed through the national curriculum, but rather the discourses in place may include varied diaspora communities as well as complex national situations in the perceived homeland.

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Introduction

The official language policy in Sweden expressed through the Language Act (SFS 2009:600) and Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages (SFS 2009:724) states that the public sector has a responsibility to protect Swedish and a particular responsibility to protect and promote the national minority languages and Swedish Sign Language. The right to develop and use one’s so-called mother tongue is stipulated in the Language Act (SFS 2009:600), stating that ‘persons whose mother tongue is not one of the languages specified in the first paragraph [concerning national minority languages] are to be given the opportunity to develop and use their mother tongue’ Furthermore, the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) states that all children that use a language other than Swedish at home

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have the right to attend Mother Tongue Tuition (MTT). Hence, in the Swedish school context, MTT refers to tuition in all oral languages, other than Swedish, that are used by the children in the home setting.

Previous research has emphasized the need for students with a migrant experience to be given the opportunity to use and develop their varied linguistic repertoires in school (Cummins 2017; García 2009). One of the most important factors for school success for students with experiences of languages other than the dominant school language is the availability of what is called Mother Tongue Tuition (MTT) in Sweden, or other forms of educational support for multilingual students (Seals and Olsen-Reeder 2019). In the Swedish context, MTT is a voluntary school subject which is usually given for a selected group of students once a week in otherwise mostly monolingual Swedish schools (Hyltenstam and Milani 2012). MTT is offered as a school subject in primary school, secondary school and upper secondary school. According to the Swedish national curriculum for compulsory school, MTT should ‘aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge in and about the mother tongue’ (SNAE 2018, 86). In MTT students are also to be given an opportunity to develop ‘their cultural identity’ and ‘to develop their knowledge of cultures and societies where the mother tongue is spoken’ (SNAE 2018, 86). Hence, MTT has developed as a subject where students’ relations to a presumed other culture, language and geopolitical space are negotiated. The aim of this article is to analyze how a transnational space is discursively constructed in Mother Tongue Tuition (MTT) in the Swedish school context through images of and narratives about a specific homeland, heritage and culture.

The empirical material consists of national educational policy documents, field notes and photos from observations and semi-structured interviews with Mother Tongue teachers (MT teachers). The study is part of the ethnographic project Mother Tongue Tuition and Study Guidance in Mother Tongue in Compulsory School – Practice, conditions and pedagogy. Hence, the analysis, inspired by nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 2007), focuses on intersections of discourses in play through national policy, the historical bodies of the MT teachers and the interaction order displayed through visual signs in the MTT classrooms. Through nexus analysis the relations between micro and micro levels are in focus. Thus, our interest lies in how discourses are produced and negotiated in constructing MTT as a transnational space.

The number of students in the Swedish school system that use another language or languages other than Swedish in the home setting is increasing; in 2018 26% of the students that entered compulsory school were categorized as having a mother tongue other than Swedish and 42% of all students in compulsory school that were eligible for MTT participated in the instruction (SNAE 2019).

Despite the strong support for MTT in policy, reports (School inspectorate 2010; Spetz 2014) and research (for example Avery 2017; Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Reath Warren 2013) show shortcomings in its implementation, such as in the marginalization and low status of MTT as a school subject (Wigerfelt 2004), the organization (Avery 2017; Nilsson and Bunar 2016), the role and competence of MT teachers (Ganuza and Hedman 2015; Reath Warren 2013; Wigerfelt 2004), educational aspects (Ganuza and Hedman 2017) and availability (SNAE 2008). Furthermore, Bajqinca (2019) shows how MTT has been developed in relation to national interests in historical and political contexts. He studied the recontextualization of mother tongue education discourse and his results show that
there is a strong continuity in the official policy stating that MTT is important for students whose MT is not Swedish. Furthermore, the study shows that MTT is valued in relation to societal issues such as migration, diversity and employment and that this shifts over time (Bajqinca 2019). Moreover, Salö et al. (2018) have analyzed and compared the development of MTT in Sweden and Denmark from a historical perspective. They show that relations between actors from the academic and political fields can explain differences between the two countries. In Sweden, a strong position of actors from the academic field in relation to political stakeholders has influenced policy making, while the question of MTT in Denmark has mainly been political with less influence from the academic field. While the policy in Denmark has mainly been politically motivated, it has also been influenced by political shifts and in recent years MTT has weakened (Salö et al. 2018). Although tuition in what is a mother tongue, home language or heritage language is provided in different contexts, for example by complementary schools (Creese and Blackledge 2010), the state mandated tuition regulated by a national syllabi is uncommon. In this article, our aim is not to evaluate the implementation of policy but rather to explore cycles of discourses constructing MTT as a transnational space. This study adds to previous research by contributing with knowledge of a hitherto not researched perspective on MTT, that of how a transnational space can be discursively constructed in the MTT classroom through images of and narratives about a specific homeland, heritage and culture.

We will start with the theoretical and methodological base, transnational space and nexus analysis, before we present the material used. The findings present discourses in place first through national curricula and then in the MTT classrooms, followed by historical bodies of MT teachers. Finally, we discuss how MTT is constructed as a transnational space through cycles of discourses.

Theoretical and methodological framework

The article takes its departure in transnationalism through the concept transnational space in combination with nexus analysis.

Transnational space

In a globalized world with cross-border flows of people, texts and ideas, essentialist ties between language and nationality have become more fluid (Blommaert 2010). The transnational approach builds on the idea that migrants continue their contact with their countries of origin and communities when they settle in a new country and often maintain relationships with their relatives and create new ties to the so-called ‘home country’. Similar to the concept of diaspora, transnationalism highlights questions of displacement and attachment to the idea of a nation or homeland. However, according to Quayson and Daswani (2013, 4) ‘transnationalism encompasses not only the movement of people but also of notions of citizenship, technology, forms of multinational governance, and the mechanisms of global markets’. Basch, Nina, and Cristina (1994, 7) define transnationalism as ‘the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement’. A transnational approach according to Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer (2013, 7) recognizes ‘the multi-stranded and
cross-border ties of individuals, groups and organizations and their sometimes simultaneous engagement across the borders of national states’.

Increasing mobility with people shuttling across borders both legally and illegally, as well as electronic communication has resulted in increasing complexity regarding relationships between language, nation-state and transnationalism (Sung-Yun Park and Wee 2017), with multiple language ideologies intersecting with material conditions, shaping and mediating discussions about relations between language, nation-state and transnationalism. While migrants were expected in the past to be uprooted from a perceived home country, increasing globalization and connectivity means that it may be more relevant to talk about ‘transmigrants’ that depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and identities related to more than one nation-state (Sung-Yun Park and Wee 2017, 49; see also Glick Schiller, Linda, and Blanc-Szanton 1992 and Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013). Moreover, ideologies of language that mediate the role of the nation-state in transnationalism are always multiple and diverse and need to be analyzed for the contradictions and tensions they engender.

Increasing mobility implies that language education, for example heritage language or home language instruction, may be perceived as contested spaces. As was shown by Blackledge and Creese (2008), there may be controversies and disagreements within the migrant community as to what language properly represents their heritage, raising fundamental questions about the nature of heritage language.

Canagarajah (2013) suggests that younger generations may not hold a specific nation state as a point of departure for their identity work but rather that ‘They are able to address their personal interests of socioeconomic mobility by constructing hybrid identities, without abandoning affiliation with their heritage language and ethnic community’ (Canagarajah 2013, 152). According to Sung-Yun Park and Wee (2017), it is important to recognize how transnationalism offers both challenges and opportunities for heritage language education.

Transnationalism can be understood as a social phenomenon and as a process involving border crossings in terms of more or less permanent connections, actions, activities and exchanges of ideas (Faist, Fauser, and Reisenauer 2013), which means that transnational social spaces constitute social formations that cross and challenge national, geographical and cultural borders. Daswani (2013, 45) suggests that ‘transnationalism can be described as a process that involves trans-border engagements and simultaneity between two or more nation-states a social field that connects one or more migrant communities through the flows of communication technology, goods, finance and people’, while diasporas are often engaged in ‘transnational circuits of exchange an circulation, include a different order of spatial temporality the makes it possible to become a diasporic subject’.

In the present study of MTT, our point of departure lies in social constructivism and we discuss MTT as a transnational space which may also include a diasporic space where diasporic identities are constituted.

**Nexus analysis**

In order to analyze how MTT in the Swedish school context is constituted as a transnational space and to explore how images of and narratives about a specific homeland, heritage
and culture is discursively constructed, we have been inspired by nexus analysis developed by Scollon and Scollon (2004, 2007).

Nexus analysis has developed mainly from an ethnographic tradition, Scollon and Scollon (2004) emphasize how social action, as the unit of analysis, occurs in the intersection between the discourses in place, the participants’ historical bodies, and the interaction order produced. They suggest that nexus analysis ‘entails not only a close, historical examination of the moment under analysis but also a historical analysis of [...] trajectories or discourse cycles that intersect [at a given] moment as well as an analysis of the anticipations that are opened up by the social actions taken in that moment’ (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 8). Nexus analysis can be regarded as a type of multi-dimensional discourse analysis that incorporates historical and ethnographic dimensions in the analysis (Hult Francis 2010). Nexus analysis has been analyzed in combination with linguistic landscape (Hult Francis 2014; Pietikäinen et al. 2011) and as argued by Hult Francis (2014) linguistic landscape can be enriched by the three focus of discourse in place, interaction order and historical body used in nexus analysis. In relation to education, Brown suggest that the linguistic landscape projects ‘ideas and messages about what is officially sanctioned and socially supported within the school’ (Brown 2012, 282) and hence an analysis of how MTT in the Swedish school context is discursively constituted as a transnational space should include also the visual signs in the classroom.

In this study we draw on nexus analysis by analyzing discourse cycles intersecting in the MTT classroom by focusing on the national policy, the visual signs in the linguistic landscape and the voices of the MTT teachers. Here, the social practice of MTT is the nodal point from which we analyze the socio-historical discourses intersecting the historical bodies that are constituting as well as being constituted in that practice.

**Empirical material**

The analysis draws on data from a larger research project which took an ethnographic approach to explore mother tongue education and support through study guidance in the mother tongue in Swedish compulsory schools. The project focused on every-day practices and the lived experiences of the participants in the sociocultural context using ethnographic tools such as observations, photos and interviews together with official and local policy documents of various kinds.

The research data used here consists of national curricula and syllabi for MTT, semi-structured interviews with 21 MT teachers, photographs of the physical environment and observations of 15 MTT lessons in five schools in two municipalities.

For the analysis of discourses in place in the linguistic landscape, analytical tools from schoolscaping have been used together with policy documents. For the schoolscaping three classrooms were chosen, one Kurdish and two Somali MTT classrooms. These three were chosen because they exemplify the few cases of MTT being located permanently in one classroom with one MT teacher respectively being responsible for the room. In most of the cases, MTT is provided for in different rooms, often sharing a room with other activities such as special needs education, and sometimes outside the regular schedule. Choosing these three classrooms gave us a possibility to observe and take photographs in rooms more permanently occupied by MTT. Hence, the MT teachers could design the classrooms to represent a Kurdish and a Somali classroom respectively,
constructing heritage and culture in the material space. For the schoolscaping analysis, visual material with linguistic or cultural signs (e.g. letters, alphabetic characters and pictures) has been documented with a digital camera and video camera. The data consisting of video-recordings and digital photos have been analyzed by focusing on how homeland, heritage and culture are expressed both in text, symbols and other visual signs in the classrooms.

The policy documents used for the article consists of national curricula for MTT (until 1997 Home language instruction) from 1978, 1980, 1994 and 2018, and has been analyzed both with regard to the frequency of central concepts, such as heritage, origin, culture and home, and to how such concepts are used to describe the objectives and content of the subject. The concepts were chosen in relation to the focus of transnational space. Since all Swedish schools are obliged to work in accordance with the national curriculum, the document both constitute and reflect discourses in place of the social actions in the MTT classrooms. To include not only the current curriculum is motivated by the importance of a sociohistorical perspective (Rosén, Straszer, and Wedin 2019).

The historical bodies have been analyzed through interviews with 21 MT teachers. While some of the teachers were employed in the schools, most of them were moving between different schools in the municipality. Several were teaching Arabic, Somali and Kurdish but other languages such as Thai, Finnish and Tagalog were also included. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted by the researchers or a research assistant either in the schools or the municipal center for MT teachers. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and transcribed by the researchers and the research assistant. They were then analyzed through content analysis to identify expressions of transnational relations, with a focus on homeland, heritage and culture.

Results

The analysis of the discursive construction of a transnational space in the context of MTT will start with an analysis of discourses in place, first through policies on a national level, and then by the linguistic landscape of the three classrooms. As a second step an analysis will be made of the historical bodies of the MT teachers through their voices. This will then form the base for the analysis of the construction of a transnational space.

Discourses in place: heritage, origin, culture and home in the national curriculum

In this section, we present an analysis of how discourses of heritage, origin, culture and home are constructed in the contemporary curriculum as well as historically. The right to MTT is regulated in the Swedish Education Act which stipulates that ‘a student with a guardian with another mother tongue than Swedish should be offered mother tongue tuition in this language if 1) the language is used on a daily basis at home, and 2) the student has basic knowledge in the language’ (Education Act, see SFS 2010:800, chapter 10, 7 §, authors’ translation).

Sweden has a long tradition of providing state mandated MTT and the so-called home language reform in 1977 could be regarded as a landmark for MTT becoming an eligible subject in Swedish schools (Hyltenstam and Tuomela 1996). As a result of the reform the national curriculum stated that ‘students should be given the possibility to keep and
develop their home language, and take charge of their cultural heritage and in the future be able to freely choose in which society they want to reside’ (NBE 1978, 24). The subject was further motivated by the relations between language and students’ ability to develop their personalities and belong to more than one culture (NBE 1978, 24; see also Rosén, Straszer, and Wedin 2019).

In the 1980 syllabus for the subject MTT, at that time called Home language instruction, it is expressed that the subject is part of the national curriculum because ‘a harmonic comprehensive development requires that the individual masters his/her own language and that students with a home language other than Swedish should be able to consolidate their home language in order to maintain their contact with the home country’ (NBE 1980, 145, authors’ translation). Hence, the concept of home is used both to refer to a specific language, home language, and to a specific place, home country. Overall, home language instruction is motivated by the need for students to maintain relations and belonging to culture and language, and to help them manage the stress of belonging to a minority group. The syllabus states that, through home language instruction, students can form their standpoint in relation to the cultural values of both the country of origin and Sweden and develop their own minority culture (NBE 1980). There is a strong intertextuality between national immigration policy (which emphasizes equality, freedom of choice and cooperation) and the syllabus (see Rosén, Straszer, and Wedin 2019). Even though culture is tied to specific spaces, as Sweden and the home country or homeland, the curriculum expresses a dynamic view of culture where students are able to develop their own minority culture based on their experiences. In line with the immigration policy at the time, students are given the freedom of choice how to identify themselves in relation to language and culture.

Cultural belonging is also emphasized in the 1994 syllabus for Home language instruction. The syllabus states that the mother tongue is essential for the individual’s development of language, personality and thought and ‘a key to the cultural heritage and the literature of his/her culture (Ministry of Education 1994, 24, authors’ translation). Three of the goals of the subject also relate to culture, as students should 1) gain knowledge about the history, traditions and society in their culture of origin and be able to compare it with Swedish conditions, 2) gain strong self-esteem, identity and double cultural belonging as well as the possibility of anchoring in their minority culture in Sweden, and 3) establish good reading habits by reading, get to know part of their cultural heritage and to be able to relate their reading experiences to themselves and their own situation (Ministry of Education 1994). The syllabus states that the core of the subject is language with a focus on literature and knowledge about culture. Regarding culture, students should ‘gain knowledge about their cultural background, traditions, religion, history, people and country’ (Ministry of Education 1994, 25, authors translation). The concept heritage is used four times in syllabus, referring to cultural heritage.

The word culture*3 (’kultur*’ in Swedish) is frequently used in the syllabi, often with ‘his/her’. On the one hand, the student is positioned to have and belong to a specific culture (his/her cultural background, his/her minority culture) while on the other hand is expected to learn about his/her culture. Thus, although students are positioned as having a cultural background, they are not given the agency to negotiate and transform it. In 2015, a new syllabus for MTT was introduced which divided the subject into two parts: one syllabus for MTT for all languages apart from the national minority languages, and one part with syllabi...
for MTT for each of the five different national minority languages (in total six different syllabi, see also Rosén, Straszer, and Wedin 2019). While the MTT for languages other than the minority language is mainly described as a language-focused subject, MTT for minority languages is strongly tied to questions of heritage and culture. Looking into the frequency of specific concepts in the syllabi, culture* is used more frequently in the syllabus for MTT the national minority languages than in MTT for other languages.

The word origin* (‘ursprung*’ in Swedish) is not used in the syllabus for MTT for other languages but is used ten times in the syllabus for MTT in Finnish as a minority language, although in regard to the origin of the language per se. The syllabi for the minority languages take their point of departure in the position and history of the national minorities in Sweden. The syllabi also emphasize the need to strengthen the position of the national minority languages and hence the importance of language instruction. In the syllabus for MTT in Finnish as a national minority language, it is stated (as well as in the syllabi for the other national minority languages):

Languages are important cultural assets that express shared experiences, values and knowledge that unite the national minorities in Sweden with people who speak the same language in other parts of the world. Possessing skills in the language and knowledge of the minority’s culture can provide new perspectives on a person’s own identity and strengthen opportunities to participate in social life in Sweden and other countries. (SNAE 2018, 95)

This can be compared to the introduction of the subject MTT except national minority languages:

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Through language people develop their identity, express their emotions and thoughts, and understand how others feel and think. Rich and varied language is important in being able to understand and function in a society where different cultures, outlooks on life, generations and language all interact. Having access to their mother tongue also facilitates language development and learning in different areas. (SNAE 2018, 85)

The syllabi further state the aim of the subject and for MTT except national minority languages, and one goal that refers to culture and heritage can be found, stressing that students within the MTT subject should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to ‘reflect over traditions, cultural phenomena and social questions in areas where the mother tongue is spoken based on comparisons with Swedish conditions’ (SNAE 2018, 85). The syllabi for MTT for minority languages instead state that students within the MTT subject should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to ‘reflect on social, historical and cultural phenomena in areas where the language is used, and to reflect on the origin, development and present status of the language’ (SNAE 2018, 96).

To sum up, the analysis has shown how the discourses in place, produced in the national curricula and syllabi for MTT, all reflect and reproduce an understanding of languages as tied to specific cultures and geographical places. Hence, the subject itself has been motivated especially at an early stage by the need for students to maintain relations to a specific culture and language. Still, a dynamic understanding of culture is expressed in the curricula. Although the discourses have shifted over time towards a more language-focused subject, the need for MTT is still motivated by their importance for students’ identity. An important shift in the discourses produced in the syllabi is that the culture and traditions in the 2018 syllabi are tied to the language per se rather than the student (his/her).
The schoolscape the MTT classroom

The analysis of national curricula and syllabi exposed the discourses in place and in this section we look into how such national policies are negotiated and transformed through the schoolscape of the MTT classroom. We have analyzed three MTT classrooms using schoolscaping by linguistically mapping the classroom as a space. We analyze how discourses of home, origin, heritage and culture were represented on the walls, as well as through teaching materials in the two classrooms. The chosen classrooms are one for Kurdish (Kormanji) and two for the Somali language. These cases of Kurdish and Somali are particularly relevant here since the relations to a specific national state are complex and they both have large diaspora communities. The nation of Kurdistan is geographically divided between the territories of Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Armenia, while what was earlier Somalia is today not a political entity, so what is perceived as the ‘homeland’ may be either the former republic of Somalia, or what is referred to as the Horn of Africa. Even though Kurdistan is not recognized internationally as a nation state, and only partially has borders, there are groups exercising the pressure for autonomy and the creation of a national state.

Material representations of a nation-state were displayed through maps on the walls geographically locating the nation and its borders. The map on the wall in one of the Somali classrooms, see Figure 1, may thus be understood as a representation of what was the former Republic of Somalia or as an imagined Somalia.

The poster with the map of Somalia (Figure 1) includes text that could be recognized as Somali and English, and shows the different crops and fruits grown in Somalia. In the right corner, the name of the publisher is displayed, a publisher of Somali material located in Sweden. According to the publisher’s webpage (in English), the company is a leading publisher of Somali language material providing mainly public libraries in Scandinavia, the UK, Canada and the US. Hence, the poster both displays a map of the geopolitical borders of the former state of Somalia, text in English and Somali, and photos and pictures of fruits and crops which could be understood as representing Somalia as a country of resources and prosperity.

In the classroom for MTT in Kurdish, posters on the wall resemble nationality based on cultural and social values, ethnicity and language. The posters were made by students and hence the content has been chosen by the students in cooperation with the teachers. A direct relation to Kurdistan as a geopolitical state and its borders is expressed in two ways. One is in the form of a map of Europe (Figure 2) including a flag of Kurdistan and a part of the perceived Kurdistan, the part that is in Europe. The map of Europe, only showing part of Kurdistan, indicates the perspective of the students, locating Kurdistan in relation to their location in Sweden. The other is through a poster that, according to the teacher, was made by earlier students, and that is stuck to the wall (Figure 3), where the geopolitical space perceived as Kurdistan is marked in color. There is also another student-made poster (Figure 4) with a flag representing Kurdistan, pictures of the nature and landscape as well as the national anthem.

Even though Kurdistan is not recognized internationally, the map in Figure 2 may be understood as representing the ambitions among some groups perceiving ethnic, linguistic, historical and cultural unity as Kurds to create a politically autonomy Kurdish state and also partly belonging to Europe. Furthermore, the map indicates a strong relationship between the language tuition taking place in the classroom and the geographical place.
In the other Somali classroom, there are similar student-made posters on the walls. In the posters in Figures 5 and 6, students have created displays of their work on Somali life, history and culture.

In both Somali classrooms, Somali nationality is expressed through a flag, which is the flag that first represented what was called Italian Somaliland from 1954 and then since 1960 the Republic of Somalia. Many of the students who study Somali in these classrooms have never been in the area that is perceived as their homeland, and which is represented here by the flag. Thus, in both Somali classrooms, the imagined homeland is displayed through pictures representing what is perceived as Somali traditions, cuisine, handicraft, flora and fauna, and national symbols.

Thus, in all these three MTT classrooms, heritage is expressed by national symbols such as the flag and maps positioning heritage and origin to a specific geographical place and displayed through posters representing cuisine, handicraft, flora and fauna, and national symbols. The question of nationality in relation to a political state becomes complex in these cases as students in MTT are expected to reflect over traditions, cultural phenomena and social questions in areas where the mother tongue is spoken based on comparisons with Swedish conditions according to the curriculum (SNAE 2018, see above), while the
geopolitical space perceived as the homeland in both cases (Somalia and Kurdistan) is debated and contested.

**Historical bodies of the MT teachers**

In this part of the analysis, we zoom in on the voices of the MT teachers to identify expressions about transnational relations. As MT teachers, they are often positioned as representatives of the language, heritage and culture. During the interviews, the teachers were asked to state the aim of the subject and many described the importance of language in order to keep and develop transnational relations mainly involving relatives and kin as well as journeys to what was perceived of as the homeland. Many also stressed the importance of the subject for the students’ possibility to maintain contact with
relatives, both in a specific country, *homeland*, and in other parts of the world. This communication may be both through visits to what they call the home country or homeland and through social media.

**Figure 4.** Posters made by students of Kurdistan.

**Figure 5.** Posters made by students on Somali life, history and culture.

**Figure 6.** Posters made by students on Somali life, history and culture.
However, as one teacher of Arabic expressed it, knowing the language is not enough during such visits and this teacher stressed the importance of understanding the world view of the family:

It is important to know the language so that when you come to the home country you can understand how the family there thinks. (MT teacher in Arabic)

Another teacher that had students whose mothers had migrated to Sweden and had married a Swedish-speaking man stressed the importance of identity development for students, especially during visits to the home country:

Many of the pupils have a Swedish father and sometimes travel to the Philippines on vacation and then it is important that they know their identity. They should know what is similar and different [in Sweden and Philippines]. (MT teacher in Tagalog)

Some teachers have classes including both students who are newly arrived and those who were born in Sweden and hence the knowledge about and experience of a specific home country is varied, as expressed by one Kurdish teacher.

Teacher: […] now we have worked with the third graders, we compare the fall in Kurdistan with the fall in Sweden.
Interviewer: Aha ok
Teacher: So sameness differences between these two
Interviewer: Do they know how it is in Kurdistan?
Teacher: Yes yes they travel and parents tell so much, yes those who are born often they know a bit less but those who are newly arrived are pretty good

Some of the teachers work with languages that have previously been subject to oppression and shaming. They express the complexity in attitudes toward the language in question that may exist among students and parents. Here is the voice of a teacher who is teaching Finnish as mother tongue:

Many are third generation immigrants and the marginalization of Finnish that previously existed is still visible since many are still ashamed. Some pupils come [to MTT class] because the Swedish speaking parent forces them to participate in MTT. Many adults are ashamed because they don’t know Finnish, or too bad to dare to use it. (MT teacher in Finnish)

The MT teacher of Finnish express a complex relation to the language, where the parents of the students did not learn the language due to its low status in Sweden at that time now feel ashamed because their lack of competence and therefore put pressure on their children to learn the language. Similar to the case of Finnish, teachers in Kurdish talk about the language as being stigmatized in two ways. One way is through their grandparents in the home country, where their language is oppressed, and thus has become mixed with the majority language, Turkish. The other way is that, as third generation immigrants in Sweden, they find that the variety of Kurdish that their parents use in their home is stigmatized among first generation immigrants of Kurdish speakers in Sweden, who find it too much mixed with Swedish. This illustrates how MTT, as a transnational space, becomes a space where complex power relations are enacted. One Kurdish teacher also expressed the importance of students keeping the language due to their minority position, saying:
They think that is really good they think that it is really important that they keep their language because yes, this group Kurdish and Yazidis is a small group so that’s why they want to keep the language because the religion too you know. (MT teacher in Kurdish)

Furthermore, teachers talk about how they use the Internet and social media to create, access and exchange teaching material in relation to a specific country and also to interact with diaspora communities all over the world. One of the Somali teachers, for example, said that she uses a newspaper distributed four times per year through a Swedish university including news and stories for children in Somali. Teachers in the diaspora develop and share instructional videos, exercise sheets and educational suggestions. Through the Internet, for example through YouTube, these are made available for teachers round the globe, and also textbooks and other teaching materials are produced and shared. Some material is available for free, such as YouTube clips produced in the form of tutorials ready-to-use, and copy-sheets with text-material with or without study questions and teachers’ manuals. Others are distributed via web-shops, like the one in Figure 7, that is from a web page with Somali material (see above for more information about the publisher’s webpage).

These materials are many times not specifically from the geopolitical space that is perceived as the homeland but created in communities and by other teachers in the diaspora and distributed through transnational networks.

While most of the interviewed Somali teachers say that they do not commonly travel to Somalia or the Horn of Africa because of the security situation, the interviewed Kurdish teachers talk about how they exchange experiences with teacher colleagues during visits to the region and also order teaching material through friends.

In the summer I was in Turkey and I met some friends who are teachers. It is important that I as an MT teacher know different dialects and how you say in the different ones. My pupils come from different countries and bring different orthographies. Some pupils are newly arrived and some are born here. Our teaching materials come from different countries so there is no unified standard. I have ordered books from friends in Turkey. There they mix with some Turkish, in Syria with Arabic and in Iran with Farsi.

(MT teacher in Kurdish)

Figure 7. Example of a web page where Somali teaching materials may be ordered by the Somali MT teachers.
While Somali teachers do not have a functional school system in the former Somalia where they can expect support, Kurdish teachers talk of how they exchange materials and ideas both with individual teachers and teacher organizations in Kurdistan.

The analysis of the teachers’ historical bodies expressed through teachers’ voices shows that transnational relations are perceived as an important motivation for retaining and developing the mother language. Thus, the MT teachers become important mediators of languages and cultures in relation to the students. Moreover, transnational relations with teachers round the globe construct an important resource for teaching materials used in the MTT.

Discussion

The analysis of MTT in the Swedish context as a transnational space, inspired by nexus analysis, adds new knowledge in a hitherto under-researched area. The analysis revealed that discourses in place emphasizing heritage, origin, culture and home are central both in national curricula, the material space of the MTT classroom and the historical bodies of the MT teachers. However, while the discourses produced in the curricula express a simplified view of the relations between language, culture and the geopolitical space perceived as the homeland, the analysis of the linguistic landscape of the classrooms and the MT teachers’ voices expose the complexity of such relations in a globalized world. Although the curricula locate specific languages to specific geographical places, the reality for many MT teachers and students is often more complex and may include relations to diaspora communities in Sweden and elsewhere. An example of that is the case of the MTT in Somali, where teaching material was used from a Swedish publisher and from texts and videos from teachers around the world. As argued by Blackledge and Creese (2008), there might also be disagreements within the migrant community as to what language properly represents their heritage. Thus, MT teachers have a delicate position mediating and negotiating which language variety and cultural aspects as well as whose heritage is to be given space in the classroom.

The analysis revealed that the construction of the homeland is not limited to relations between two geographical places as expressed through the national curriculum, but rather the discourses in place may include varied diaspora communities as well as complex national situations in the perceived homeland. Moreover, students’ linguistic repertoires and linguistic identities may often be more complex than one mother tongue and Swedish. Languages as well as cultures are neither static nor tied to specific geopolitical places. As suggested by Shi-xu (2016, 2) ‘culture is integral part of the life practice and of a social community in relation to others, complex and dynamic, rather than fixed to people or place or time’. The analysis makes visible tensions between discourses as expressed through official policy documents, with featured traditions, cultures and languages treated as objects to be learned, classroom discourses in the form of the linguistic landscape of the classrooms and the historical bodies of the teachers. This was exemplified by the Kurdish and Somali cases, where what was perceived as the homeland, represented through maps, flags and other symbols, was not a political state and did not have borders that are officially recognized by many countries or the UN. For minorities in such a marginalized position, the representation of a homeland may be even more important. However, our analysis of historical bodies of the MT teachers shows that...
they and the students were positioned as agents in the construction of culture, rather than as transmitting and receiving a static culture and perceptions of a homeland. The importance of transnational relations central for the subject MTT is made visible through the teachers’ voices, where to share an image of the homeland among diaspora communities may become more important than the relation with the specific geographical places per se. While the curricula stress the importance of the MT for school learning, teachers rather emphasize the importance of relations with relative and kin, including questions of identity and cultural traditions.

Although the focus of the MT subject in official discourses has shifted from a focus on culture and identity towards a more language-focused subject, the present study highlights the need to rethink the aim and content of MTT in a society characterized by globalization, mobility and diversity. The view that appears here of MTT as a transnational space where nationality, homeland and culture are negotiated positions MTT as a space where complex images and relations to the geopolitical spaces perceived as the homeland are negotiated.

This means that the subject MTT has the potential to become an important space not only for its teachers and students, but also to constitute an important space for the school as a whole. Thus, there is a need for increased awareness of the complexity, and questions raised here need to be approached in a more nuanced way in official curricula. This also raises the question of teacher education for MTT teachers to better prepare them for their demanding task. By treating questions related to language and culture in a more dynamic way, MT teachers have the potential to become important in the development of schooling that to a higher degree is aligned to contemporary societal changes. This calls for more research into the teaching and learning of the MTT classroom, as well as into how collaborations may be increased between various teachers, such as MTT teachers, classroom teachers and teachers in Swedish as a second language.

Notes

1. We will use *mother tongue* for language used in students’ homes here, as that is the concept used in Swedish official policy texts. We use it as a synonym to *heritage language*, which is more widely used internationally.
2. We use *Kurdish* here for what is often called ‘North Kurdish’ or ‘Kurmanji’, as that was the Kurdish variety that dominated. Teachers and students used *Kurdish* to denote the language and in the few cases where students used other varieties, such as Sorani this was included in the Kurmanji setting.
3. The mark * is used to show that the word may have varied endings, such as in *cultural*.
4. [https://www.scansom.com/](https://www.scansom.com/).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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