How and where Heritage Swedish was acquired and learned in Kansas: Education, ideologies, and heritage language anchors

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Abstract. This study traces the learning opportunities children and young people had for learning Swedish in a heritage community in Kansas, 1870 to 1974. Reasons for knowing Heritage Swedish varied across this time-period, as analyses of historical materials, written and spoken, show. Despite the different reasons—among them, being able to speak with family members and neighbors, becoming a member in the Swedish Lutheran immigrant church, competing in oratorical contests, gaining employment in certain professions, and later, knowing elementary Swedish grammar—the educational opportunities were made possible by *heritage language anchors* who helped counteract verticalizing forces from elsewhere.

Keywords. historical sociolinguistics; heritage languages; heritage language anchors; verticalization; heritage Swedish

1. Introduction. The verticalization framework (Warren 1978) offers explanatory power for the movement of a community from its heritage language to the language of the wider community (Brown & Salmons 2022: 20). When horizontal networks, local in their structure, are permeated by verticalizing forces, which are external, the use of heritage languages in some domains of language use may give way to the majority language. Sometimes, however, as organizational structures in a community verticalize, horizontal networks may actually *gain* some strength, at least for a period of time. The present study traces how efforts to teach and support Heritage Swedish were mobilized at the same time as early verticalization forces were in place.

American schools were early forces for literacy training in English for children in Swedish immigrant communities. Alongside American schools and other verticalizing forces, however, horizontal community structures supported the use of Heritage Swedish in the domains of *homes*, *neighborhoods*, *churches*, and s*chools*/*colleges* and continued to do so for several generations after the initial period of immigration. These domains were influenced by language ideologies. Language ideologies are understood as "… rely[ing] on underlying belief systems shared by group members to varying degrees, which in turn are mobilized by certain individuals, and legitimated and reproduced within institutional frameworks" (Horner & Bradley 2019: 298; Kroskrity 2000). I use the term *heritage language anchors* (cf. Milroy 1987) to refer to individuals who mobilized the teaching of Heritage Swedish in horizontal social networks. In the immigrant speech communities, many of these anchors were teachers, college professors, and pastors, who also accessed internal verticalized networks.

This study is an exploratory historical sociolinguistic investigation of Lindsborg, Kansas, which was founded by Swedes (Lindquist 1953). While Swedish continues to be learned and taught in some ways in this town to the present-day, the scope of this particular study is a one-hundred-year period beginning in 1870, when written documentation appears. The study aims to identify (1) how and where learning opportunities in Heritage Swedish were available and (2) how the community worked to maintain proficiency in the Heritage Language and to anchor

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it to later generations of Swedish Americans, despite the greater use of English in the wider community and strong currents of verticalization.

An overview of the community and materials is provided in §2. The methods are outlined in §3, and §4 gives an overview of some historical evidence from various domains. The discoveries relating to educational opportunities and the heritage language anchors are brought together in §5.

2. Lindsborg in McPherson County, Kansas, and historical materials. When Kansas was admitted as a state in the Union in 1861, frameworks enabling migration for European settlers to Kansas soon followed. In 1868, The First Swedish Agricultural Company bought land in central Kansas from the Kansas-Pacific Railroad. Tracts of land were also available from the government in the same region for homesteading (Nelson 1943: 273). Thousands of Swedes migrated to Kansas, with most of them settling in a swath of land of approximately 500 square miles situated in the Smoky Valley in northern McPherson and southern Saline Counties (Nelson 1943; Lindquist 1953). The focal point of the Swedish settlements was Lindsborg, a community founded in 1868/1869. Swedish-born settlers quickly populated the town and the surrounding townships, each approximately six by six American miles, shown in Figure 1.

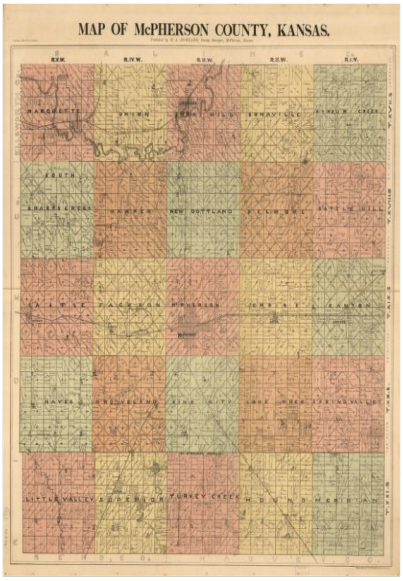


Figure 1. Map of McPherson County, 1898

Verticalizing forces in the state were developing when Swedes began to settle the prairie. Early verticalization is linked to the Kansas State Board of Education, in Topeka, the state capitol, which in 1874 established compulsory schools for children between the ages of 8 and 14. While further research is needed to know whether Swedish immigrant children in Kansas attended any public schools prior to 1874, it is likely that their parents, given their own upbringing in 19th-century Sweden with growing institutional support for literacy training, had a strong role in teaching their children to read in the early years. In Sweden, education in parish schools had been compulsory beginning in 1842. The Swedish Parliament first required a minimum of four years of schooling in its *folkskolestadga* 'public school charter' before expanding the number of years to six in 1882 (NE 2023). The support for literacy training for young people in Sweden had parallels in the Swedish immigrant communities. Two Swedish-American publishers headquartered in Illinois, namely The Augustana Book Concern and The Engberg-Holmberg Publishing Company, began publishing and distributing books in the US as early as 1860. One

of the primers was *Hemskolan. Första kursen A. B. C.–bok* 'The Home School First Course ABC Book' (1876), published by Engberg-Holmberg.

An overview of the materials with connections to the Lindsborg community and consulted for the present study appear below.

Community-specific materials:

- Transcribed oral histories recorded in Swedish and in English. Most respondents were born between 1888 and 1910. Interviewers were Folke Hedblom (1964), Elston Flohr (1980s), and Angela Hoffman (1990s). Hedblom was a Swedish-born dialectologist, while Americans Flohr and Hoffman were members of the community.
- Township map of McPherson County, 1898.
- Records from Bethany Lutheran Church, including details about Sunday School and confirmation classes.
- Bethany College academic catalogues indicating the course offerings and language(s) of instruction. A selection, 1890s.
- Bethany College student yearbooks, *The Daisy*. A selection, 1908 to 1946.
- Lindsborg High School student yearbooks, *The Viking*. A selection, 1964 to 1974.

Published materials donated by local families to Lindsborg archival collections:

- Sunday School materials published by the Augustana Book Concern, Rock Island, Illinois.
- Books published by the Engberg-Holmberg Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois.

This overview is not a comprehensive list of all possible source materials in Lindsborg. For example, records from a Swedish Methodist congregation, also founded by Swedish immigrants, are available in a local museum. Those records, however, were not analyzed for the present phase of my investigation, as it was difficult to make systematic observations about the participation of Methodist children in Sunday School and confirmation activities. In the community overall, digitization projects are increasing, so additional educational records may become accessible and provide further insights.

3. Methods. I began my qualitative investigation by reading and coding the content of dozens of transcribed oral histories. The interviews recorded in the 1980s (by Flohr) and 1990s (by Hoffman) are mostly in English and have transcriptions that are in searchable, electronic files. Although oral history interviews recorded in the 1980s and 1990s extend beyond the time-period examined, these sources are important as the respondents shared information about their childhood and their years of schooling. To locate information from the respondents about their educational opportunities and other experiences in the Swedish language, I ran searches in the transcriptions for such words as *speak, talk, learn, read, Swedish, English, language*, *teacher*, *school*, and *college*. Once I gained a broad understanding of the respondents' experiences, I then aimed to identify archival collections with documentation connected to the respondents' backgrounds. I accessed and checked church records, college academic catalogs, and college and high school yearbooks. Some but not all of the records, catalogs, and yearbooks are available in digital form. Close reading was the main method, and this detective work yielded incremental gains towards understanding how Heritage Swedish was learned in the community and who the educators were. College and high school yearbooks were good sources for finding some, but presumably not all, of the names of people who taught Swedish.

Further inductive work concerning heritage language anchors in the Lindsborg community was possible by consulting descriptions, some of them eyewitness accounts, written

by Emory Lindquist (Lindquist 1953; 1975), who was a heritage speaker of Swedish who was born in the Smoky Valley. His books include biographical details about some of the pastors and teachers in the community. As Lindquist had served as president of Bethany College, he had in-depth knowledge of various connections linking the college, Lutheran churches, and local schools. Therefore, information in Lindquist helped consolidate my understanding of educational opportunities in the different domains in the community. As a historian, Lindquist did not use the term *heritage language anchors* nor terms relating to social networks, such as *core members* and *linguistic insiders* (Chambers 2009: 93). Even so, Lindquist's analyses of the Swedish-American community are valuable for my historical sociolinguistic study as he provided some accounts of the use of Swedish, individual speakers, and organizations. Regarding the role of so-called insiders, Chambers notes that "What [insiders] have in common with the core members is a high degree of involvement in the affairs of the group" (2009: 109). Details supporting the threads of these observations appear below.

4. Historical evidence. Children and young people learned Swedish in Lindsborg in *homes*, *compulsory schools*, *Lutheran churches*, *the Lutheran college*, and *the high school*. The social networks of these domains overlapped considerably as has been discovered thanks to the details from community interviews pieced together with content in histories written by Lindquist (1953; 1975). One reason for the overlap (or density) of the networks is that buildings were used for more than one purpose, and the persons who were heritage language anchors served more than one role in these places. For example, as reported by respondents in dozens of community interviews (Flohr 1980s) on the countryside, one-room schoolhouses doubled as the venue where Lutheran pastors conducted Sunday services in Swedish for rural families. Schoolhouses were often used in the summers for Swedish parochial schools. One of the compulsory schools in the town of Lindsborg was built on the campus of Bethany College. The Sunday School superintendent for Bethany Lutheran Church, Anna Albertina Carlson, a Swedish heritage speaker, not only taught courses on Christianity at the college but also supervised the teacher education programs.

Children and grandchildren of Swedish immigrants spoke Swedish at home, as explained by dozens of respondents who participated in Lindsborg oral history projects (Hedblom 1964; Flohr 1980s; Hoffman 1990s). For example, Wesley (born 1900) explained that Swedish was the only language spoken in his family until he and his siblings attended the neighboring one-room schoolhouse. Another respondent, Roy (born 1901), who grew up on the countryside, said that his parents spoke Swedish to each other but mainly used English with their children. Even so, Roy spoke Swedish when he lived with his grandmother during the years he was a high school student in town. Therefore, even though some Swedish-American parents elected to speak English with their children, Swedish-American networks had the outcome that most children spoke and understood Swedish.

As mentioned above, children from farm homes attended one-room schoolhouses for elementary school. Close inspection of the township map of McPherson County shows that there were a few one-room schoolhouses in each rural township (Figure 1). Reuben (born 1906) described some of the workings of the horizontal networks on the rural townships. Swedish was the language of his childhood home and of his neighbors. The one-room schoolhouse he and his siblings attended was "on our ground, practically." He recollected that his family and neighbors also used the school for Sunday School and for worship.

(1) Reuben, interviewed in 1985

Elston: How far did you live from school?
Reuben: It was on our ground, practically.
Elston: You didn't have far to walk.
Reuben: Half a mile or a little more.
Elston: Easy walking distance (...) What do you remember about church?
Reuben: Well, we didn't go in to town for church. We had church and Sunday School in our schoolhouse every Sunday. (...)
Elston: When you were little you learned Swedish at home?
Reuben: Yes, in the home. I couldn't even say Good Morning in English until I was seven.

Many of the schoolteachers who served the rural schools had grown up in the community and were fluent in Swedish, as they also had spoken Swedish at home. So they were Swedish language anchors on the countryside.

Children who lived in the town of Lindsborg attended either *Public School No. 3* or a school on the Bethany College campus. To support the teachers' training programs of the college, Bethany had established a compulsory school, known as *The Model School*, and a secondary school, *Bethany Academy* (Nelson 1943: 280). Evidence about the dual use of English and Swedish in The Model School comes from an interview with Karin (born 1905).

(2) Karin, interviewed in 1981

> I can remember starting kindergarten because we used Swedish entirely in our home when we were smaller, and the teachers all spoke Swedish, so I don't remember learning English. And I can remember my teachers in kindergarten and first grade, everything was Swedish. Of course we had English too, but then we had one hour a day when we had Swedish, so I don't remember when I switched from Swedish to English.

A description in the Bethany College yearbook, *The Daisy,* hints at the way the two schools on the college campus supplemented training in the English language with Swedish. One can read, for example, in the description of the Model School that "[t]he course of study is that laid down for the common school of Kansas by the State Board of Education. In addition to this instruction is given in Christianity and in Swedish. During the last term of each school year a kindergarten class is maintained" (*The Daisy* 1917: 41).

Congregations supported Swedish proficiency and literacy, not the least through using the Swedish-language Bible and hymnals but also through the language of the liturgy and the sermons. Sunday School materials in Swedish were readily available for young people in the US for many decades. The Augustana Book Concern, mentioned above, published numerous books for readers of all ages, but some of the titles, such as *Söndagsskol-bok. För den kristliga söndagsskolan* 'Sunday School Book. For the Christian Sunday School' (1880) and *I barndomsdag. Till nytta och nöje för de små* 'In Childhood Days. For Benefit and Pleasure for the Little Ones' (n.d., ca. 1917), were specifically for youngsters. An annual series entitled *Korsbaneret* 'The Banner of the Cross' in print between the years 1880 and 1950 was geared to older youth and adults. The contents in *Korsbaneret*, entirely in Swedish, ranged from Christian verse and prose, news about churches, clergy, Lutheran schools, and to mission work. Incidentally, many of the extant copies of the above-named books contain handwritten inscriptions in Swedish by Sunday School teachers to their students.

These books printed in Illinois by the Augustana Book Concern (Rock Island) as well as others published by the Engberg-Holmberg Pub. Co. (Chicago) were part of the long arm of internal verticalization within the Swedish-American community (cf. Johnson 2022). Substantial horizontal networks led by Heritage Swedish anchors supported Swedish in the local congregations. Pastors and Sunday School teachers lived in the Lindsborg community. Evidence in the Bethany Lutheran Church record books shows that the congregation, founded in 1869, strongly supported Heritage Swedish. For more than six decades, the official order of service for performing ministerial acts (e.g., baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals) was in Swedish (Hasselmo 1974), and pastors used Swedish for church records and when filing annual reports. The heritage language was used in teaching Sunday School classes and for catechism training that led to confirmation. Starting from 1870, when the very first group in Bethany Lutheran Church was confirmed, young people were confirmed in the Swedish-language catechism and Swedish-language Bible. After 1907, however, students could choose, if they wished, to use English as their language of confirmation (Bergin 1919). It is therefore possible to say that in the period from 1870 to 1907, Swedish clearly had an instrumental function as it was the language through which young people became formal members of the congregation. The use of Swedish in the congregation also had a symbolic function. Some of the members viewed the heritage language as the way the immigrant congregation was linked to the mother church in Sweden.

The influence of the Lutheran church in the Smoky Valley extended to the countryside, and it was the organization that sponsored summer parochial schools. Julius (born 1900), accounted for the weeks in the summers that he and his siblings attended so-called "Swede Schools". The family lived on land between two one-room schoolhouses close to the village of New Gottland, southeast of Lindsborg.

(3) Julius, interviewed in 1985

> [I]n New Gottland they had what they called parochials in the summertime. The church council was in charge of that. They uh hired teachers, I don't how many, must have been probably six schools out there, rural schools that would teach Swedish (…) during the summertime, including Bible history and catechism. (…) For six weeks. We got stuck with 12 weeks because we had one school two miles southwest of us and one two miles northwest, they had the same teacher, and our father being a minister, we had nothing to do at home, so we had to go to both of them[.]

One of the main reasons Bethany College was founded (1881) was to provide pre-seminary training for future ministers in the Lutheran Church, especially so that they could serve congregations in the Augustana Synod. The college's academic catalogue of 1892–1893 described the academic programs and listed the sequences of courses. Reasons for studying Swedish range from being able to read "noble literature" to being able to advance one's career in the ministry, schools, and business, as exemplified in (4).

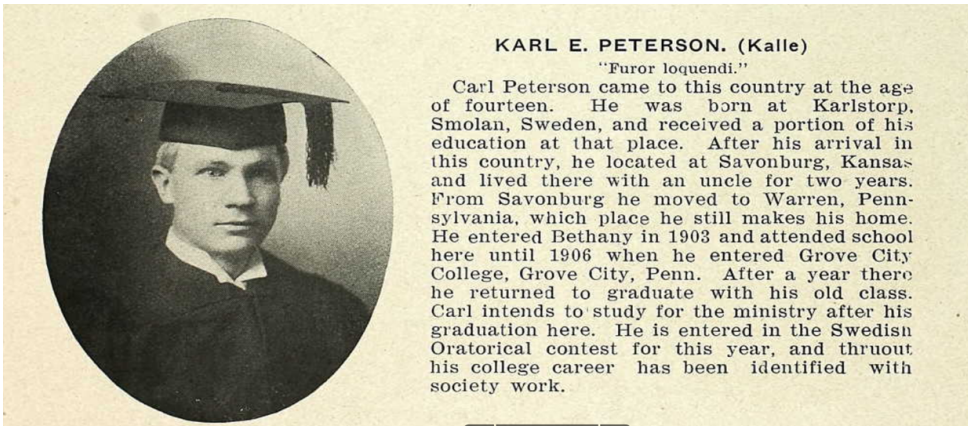
(4) Bethany College Academic Catalogue (1892–1893: 22–23)

> **Swedish.**
>
> "[…] but the Swedish language is also cherished and taught because it has a noble literature, because it is a most valuable aid in the scientific study of the English and other Germanic languages; because even in this country there is, and will for a long time be, a demand for Swedish-speaking ministers, teachers and business men.

> […] The Collegiate course in this subject comprises a systematic study of Rhetoric and the History of Swedish Literature. Special attention is given to essay writing, and to the study of prominent authors, both of poetry and fiction. The annual contest in Swedish Oratory is held May 1st. To students of other nationalities the study of Swedish is optional."

Valorization of the study of Swedish at Bethany continued for decades. The college yearbook, *The Daisy*, edited by students, gives glimpses into ways proficiency in Swedish was highly respected. Students could receive accolades in the annual yearbook for their skills in Swedish, and winners of oratorical contests received prizes from a former member of the American diplomatic corps to Sweden (*The Daisy* 1908: 123).

A yearbook portrait of college senior Karl E. Peterson (Figure 2), born in the province of "Smolan" (= *Småland*), Sweden, includes his nickname, "*Furor loquendi*" 'Talking Fury'. The biographical details mention that he would be participating in the annual Swedish Oratorical contest, which involved competing against Swedish-speaking students from other Swedish-American Lutheran colleges.



KARL E. PETERSON. (Kalle)

"Furor loquendi."

Carl Peterson came to this country at the age of fourteen. He was born at Karlstorp, Smolan, Sweden, and received a portion of his education at that place. After his arrival in this country, he located at Savonburg, Kansas and lived there with an uncle for two years. From Savonburg he moved to Warren, Pennsylvania, which place he still makes his home. He entered Bethany in 1903 and attended school here until 1906 when he entered Grove City College, Grove City, Penn. After a year there he returned to graduate with his old class. Carl intends to study for the ministry after his graduation here. He is entered in the Swedish Oratorical contest for this year, and thruout his college career has been identified with society work.

Figure 2. Graduating senior, Karl E. Peterson, in *The Daisy* (1908: 31)

In the early 1900s, the college yearbooks show evidence that the Swedish language in the curriculum was becoming associated with performance and not limited to traditional studies of literary texts. Students received training and mentoring from Swedish-speaking Bethany professors, some of whom were recruited from Sweden. *The Daisy* (1917) describes one of the professors of Swedish with the following glowing terms:

(5) Professor Gustav Adolf Peterson. *The Daisy* (1917: 13)

> Swedish culture has become a recognizable factor in our country to-day. Its music, art and literature is being ranked with the best that the world has produced. It is imperative that from Bethany College as a center of Swedish ideals shall radiate the inspiration which will influence the people of the west.
>
> Much of what is being done here is due to Professor Peterson's unfailing enthusiasm and support. As a teacher he is an inspiration, and by his precept and example he radiates appreciation of all that is Swedish.

Peterson, whom students had nicknamed *Swede Pete* to disambiguate him from a professor of Greek and philosophy known as *Greek Pete* (i.e., Walter Peterson), taught Swedish language and literature at Bethany College from 1907 to 1924. Thereafter he became a minister in the Augustana Lutheran Church (Lindquist 1975: 139–149). The academic teaching of Swedish at

Bethany College may have started to wane at approximately this time point, but it did not disappear entirely from the curriculum in the 1900s. More about this may be the focus of a future WILA paper.

The full extent to which Swedish was taught in the local high school, *Lindsborg Rural High School*, later known as *Lindsborg High School*, is unknown to me at present. Some annual yearbooks, *The Viking*, from the 1960s and 1970s, show that Swedish was occasionally taught by Lucile Holmberg, one of the foreign language teachers who also was a heritage speaker of Swedish. Her courses seem to have been geared to introduce the elements of basic Swedish grammar for the students in the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s. While it is likely her students would have known some Swedish words for traditional foods and for the names for family relationships, it is unclear whether they had conversational skills in the heritage language from their homes. A photograph in *The Viking* (1964) shows Lucile Holmberg wearing a Swedish folk costume and standing at the chalkboard in a classroom where she had written the noun phrases *svenska flickor* 'Swedish girls' and *svenska pojkar* 'Swedish boys'. A yearbook photo printed in the 1973 yearbook shows some of her students standing at the chalkboard. The yearbook caption reads "Participating in a Swedish contest at the board […]."

5. Conclusion. When Swedes settled the Smoky Valley, the use of Swedish was unrivalled for many years in homes, neighborhoods, and in the immigrant churches. The regular use of Swedish was maintained, even though English was the language of the county, state, and federal administrations. Immigrants sent their children to English-speaking public schools, and English was the language used in instruction. Extensive verticalizing forces were clearly in place, but these were not the only influential forces when it came to language use. Respondents in the oral history interviews mentioned that their teachers were also speakers of Swedish. Most of the teachers in the Lindsborg area had been born in the community, raised in Swedish-speaking families, and educated locally. They contributed to anchoring Heritage Swedish in the one-room schoolhouses and in the schools operated on the campus of Bethany College.

There were also internal verticalizing forces (cf. Johnson 2022) that supported the learning of Swedish, not the least through publishers in the US who produced Swedish-language materials supporting literacy training in Swedish. The reading materials were extensively used in the churches, Sunday schools, confirmation classes, and in summer parochial schools. The textbooks used in Swedish-language courses at Bethany College were likely to have been published by these companies. The main publishers were headquartered in Chicago and Rock Island, Illinois. So the publishers, while not headquartered in Kansas, were subscribed to by the speech community in Lindsborg. Those who selected the Swedish-language materials were Sunday School superintendents and teachers, pastors, public school teachers, and college professors—persons who were heritage language anchors and whose professional roles involved work in different venues in the community.

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