



UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

LANGUAGE POLICY FOR UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

Type of document:	Policy
Date:	5 February 2019
Reg. No.:	FS 1.1-2467-18
Approved by:	the Vice-Chancellor
Validity:	Until further notice
Field:	Decision structure, delegation and organisation
Office in charge:	Communications Office
Replaces document:	Language Policy for Umeå University, 2012, reg. no Umu 100-2034-12 (Sw. <i>Språkpolicy för Umeå universitet</i>)



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1. Description

Language and communication are matters of quality and credibility in the operation of Umeå University. The purpose of the Language Policy is to increase awareness of the importance of language and the laws and regulations that Umeå University must follow as a public authority. The Language Policy describes the university's common language guidelines based upon aspects such as plain language, the role of Swedish, bilingualism and linguistic diversity. The Language Policy is the all-embracing document to be used to create a common vision for language usage and promote successful communication.

2. Background

This Language Policy for Umeå University replaces the former Language Policy from 2012, both of which were drafted by the university's Language Council and approved by the Vice-Chancellor. In sum, the revisions clarify the purposes of having a language policy, and limit the policy to describing general guidelines for language use that Umeå University must endeavour to follow. The Language Policy is aimed primarily at members of staff, but also to students at Umeå University. Related to language in the university, there are some laws to consider: the Language Act (2009:600) and the National Minorities and Minority Languages Act (2009:724).

3. Introduction – why is a language policy needed?

3.1. Language is our common toolbox

At Umeå University, a multitude of cultures and nationalities meet on a daily basis. In this multinational environment, language is what enables tuition, learning, research, collaboration and communication. The university needs to relate to its surroundings, and proficiency in other languages than Swedish, not least in English, is necessary for its members. One objective of this Language Policy is to raise awareness of the importance of language for all parts of the organisation.

3.2. Language is regulated in laws and international agreements

In 2009, Sweden passed a Language Act (2009:600). This act states that Swedish is the main language in Sweden and that the language used in the public sector must be “cultivated, simple and comprehensible”. The Language Act and the National Minorities and Minority Languages Act (2009:724) also state that the public sector has a particular responsibility to protect and promote the national minority languages. Through public service agreements, Umeå University has been assigned to offer education in Sami and Meänkieli. Both the EU and the Council of Europe have established recommendations with the objective of promoting multilingualism for individuals and society. *The Declaration on Nordic Language Policy* contains agreements aimed at safeguarding mutual understanding between the Scandinavian countries. One objective of Umeå University's Language Policy is to raise awareness of the importance for the university as a public authority to follow certain laws regarding language.



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3.3. Language is a matter of quality

Umeå University strives to be a leading and attractive university, both nationally and internationally. Language and communication are integral to high quality in education, research and collaboration. One objective of this Language Policy is to safeguard Swedish as a scientific language and promote internationalisation. The policy should also support staff in questions concerning language and communication.

4. Language guidelines

This section covers all parts of the university's activities: education, research and collaboration, as well as the university's role as a public authority and workplace.

4.1 Umeå University's communications are characterised by plain language

Internal and external written communication at the university must be characterised by plain language, defined as cultivated, simple and comprehensible language. Clear communication promotes efficiency, and well-written texts contribute to the university's good reputation. Plain language is both a matter of quality and successful communication.

Plain language means that the university's communication must be:

- adapted to the recipient
- well-structured
- clear and unambiguous
- cultivated, simple and comprehensible
- accessible and inclusive
- respectful in tone.

The above is valid for IT systems, learning platforms, course syllabi and all other communication. This also includes personal meetings, emails to individuals, phone calls and other oral communication. All staff should use a clear and understandable language.

The university must, in line with the above, strive for gender-neutral language, for instance in the choice of words and pronouns.

4.2 Umeå University is a Swedish-speaking university

Umeå University is a Swedish-speaking university, and Swedish must be the primary language for administration, education and – whenever possible – research. Any deviations from using Swedish as a working language and in official communications must be well-founded..

One of the objectives of Swedish language policy is that "Swedish should be a complete language, i.e. be possible to use in all areas of society" and Swedish public authorities have a particular responsibility to ensure that Swedish terminology in their various areas of expertise is used and developed. The foundation is laid in education, during which students should be given the opportunity to develop their communication skills in Swedish, both verbal and written. In research, this can mean that Swedish-speaking researchers contribute to the development and use



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of Swedish technical and specialised terms. Using Swedish in scientific contexts also increases accessibility and collaboration with society.

International students, doctoral students and staff should be given the chance to develop their Swedish language skills if necessary.

4.3 Umeå University strives for parallel language use

Parallel language use primarily refers to how students, teachers and researchers should be able to use Swedish as a scientific language and still have sufficient mastery of English to contribute to the international academic community. This should be achieved by giving students the opportunity to practise their English language skills during their studies.

Working towards parallel language use can have different implications for different faculties and departments. Departments that currently work primarily in English need strategies to strengthen Swedish as a scientific language and as a workplace language in Sweden. Departments that work primarily in Swedish should strive towards developing the international elements.

Parallel language use must be strived for at all levels of administration and management. University-wide policy documents must always be written in Swedish. Steering documents of fundamental importance to students and staff must be translated into English. This presupposes that there is staff responsible for promoting parallel language use in all parts of the university.

4.4 Umeå University encourages linguistic diversity

Umeå University must encourage students and staff to attain multiple languages in accordance with EU and Council of Europe language policy. Beside parallel language use in Swedish and English, the use of other languages should be encouraged where suitable. With good command of several languages, our students and staff become attractive and competitive nationally and internationally.

Another aspect of linguistic diversity is to protect and promote the national minority languages, particularly Sami and Meänkieli, in which Umeå University has a national responsibility to provide education. Umeå University must particularly safeguard and promote the presence of Sami in the university organisation.

5. Language work is a part of operational planning and follow up

As part of the university's quality management, questions of language must be a natural part of the planning and following up of the university's operations.

The university must offer adequate language support and competence. Umeå University must have a supportive function in the form of a language council or equivalent with representation from all faculties, the University Management, the University Administration, the University Library and the student unions.