On AILA Europe

Jonas Granfeldt* and Britt-Louise Gunnarsson

ASLA: Association Suédoise de Linguistique Appliquée

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Abstract: The Swedish Association for Applied Linguistics, ASLA (*Association suédoise de linguistique appliquée*) was formally founded as an autonomous Swedish affiliate of AILA in 1966. The constituting meeting was held at Lund University on April 12, 1966 during which the first chairperson, Professor Bertil Malmberg, was elected. This means that ASLA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016. However, according to available documents from the time, the original initiative came from Max Gorosch, Professor of Spanish at Stockholm University, who had already started to prepare the way for the establishment of the new association in 1964. Professor Gorosch was appointed secretary on the first board and Dr. Alvar Nyqvist-Goës, became its first treasurer.

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1 A short history of ASLA

The Swedish Association for Applied Linguistics, ASLA (*Association suédoise de linguistique appliquée*) was formally founded as an autonomous Swedish affiliate of AILA in 1966. The constituting meeting was held at Lund University on April 12, 1966 during which the first chairperson, Professor Bertil Malmberg, was elected. This means that ASLA will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2016. However, according to available documents from the time, the original initiative came from Max Gorosch, Professor of Spanish at Stockholm University, who had already started to prepare the way for the establishment of the new association in 1964. Professor Gorosch was appointed secretary on the first board and Dr. Alvar Nyqvist-Goës, became its first treasurer. In fact ASLA was founded more or less at

*Corresponding author: Jonas Granfeldt, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University,
E-mail: jonas.granfeldt@rom.lu.se

Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, Department of Scandinavian Languages, Uppsala University,
E-mail: britt-louise.gunnarsson@nordiska.uu.se

the same time as AILA. It was also in Sweden that the meeting was held in October 1963, which led to the founding of AILA in 1964. The context was a meeting of an expert group advising the *Council of Europe* on matters to do with modern language. In a paper looking back at the history of modern languages within the *Council of Europe* between the years 1954–1997, John L. Trim writes:

At the Meeting of Experts on audio-visual aids for the teaching of modern languages at University level in Stockholm 22–25 October 1963, the decision to set up an ‘International Association of Applied Linguistics in Modern Languages’ (AILA) was taken. [Trim, 2007].

In line with the understanding of applied linguistics at the time, ASLA focused from the beginning on issues related to language learning, language teaching and language assessment. In reports and documents from ASLA’s meetings during the 1960’s, it is repeatedly noted that after the end of World War 2 international mobility and cooperation increased in Europe which, in turn, put higher demands on the effectiveness of language teaching for a wider audience. Members of ASLA sought to contribute to this challenge by conducting research on their own, by developing and testing new methods of language teaching and by disseminating international research to a national audience during conferences and in publications.

Another key issue for the first ASLA boards was the establishment of Applied Linguistics as an independent subject area at university level. From the very beginning of its existence ASLA closely collaborated with teachers, principals and other representatives of upper secondary schools and also with representatives of the government, the Ministry of Education and the Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolöverstyrelsen*). Half of the members of the first ASLA board came from universities, half from the wider community.

Since its beginnings in the 1960’s ASLA has profoundly broadened its scientific focus to include a wide range of domains in applied linguistics, including translation, terminology, language use at the work place, language policy, language for special or specific purposes, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, psycholinguistics, language technology, and minority language issues. At the same time, various aspects of language learning and language teaching have remained important issues to the members of ASLA.

In 1965, soon after the foundation of ASLA, a committee was established under the name of ASLa, *Comité de Coopération des Associations Scandinaves de Linguistique Appliquée* to promote collaboration between the three Scandinavian Associations for Applied Linguistics in Denmark (ADLA, *Association Danoise de Linguistique Appliquée*), Norway (ANLA, *Association Norvégienne de Linguistique Appliquée*) and Sweden. The committee was active during the 1960s and 1970s and organised several joint conferences and summer courses, as well

as sharing information and knowledge via their respective networks. Of the three associations only ASLA is still active today. More information on the foundation and the activities during the first ten years of ASLA can be found in Gorosch (1979).

Table 1 provides an overview of the chairpersons of ASLA from its foundation in 1966 and onwards.

Table 1: Chairpersons of ASLA 1966 – today.

Chairperson	Period
Bertil Malmberg	1966–?
Alvar Ellegård	?–1976
Jan Svartvik	1976–1979
Kenneth Hyltenstam	1980–1983
Gunnel Källgren	1984–1985
Britt-Louise Gunnarsson	1986–1992
Elisabeth Ahlsén	1993–1995
Moirá Linnarud	1996–2001
Britt Erman	2002–2004
Eva Larsson Ringqvist	2005–2007
Jarmo Lainio	2008–2009
Camilla Bardel	2010–2012
Jonas Granfeldt	2013–

It took 18 years for the first woman, Gunnel Källgren, Professor of Computational Linguistics at Stockholm University, to be elected chairperson of ASLA. Källgren was followed by Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, Professor of Swedish at Uppsala University, and since then women have dominated as chairpersons of ASLA. Among the former and current 13 chairpersons of ASLA, 7 have been women.

Several members of ASLA have served on AILA’s Executive Board. Between the years 1969–1972, Bertil Malmberg served as AILA’s Secretary General and Max Gorosch held the function of AILA’s Executive Secretary General. Professor Jan Svartvik, Lund University, served as Vice President 1978–1981 and as President 1981–1984, and Britt-Louise Gunnarsson was appointed Member at Large 1990–1993 and served as Vice President 1993–1999.

ASLA’s annual or, since 2010, biennial symposia have been held under the auspices of a variety of different universities in Sweden. Some examples include: Stockholm (1968, 1972, 1973, 1990, 1999 and 2008), Uppsala (1987, 1988, 1991,

1992 and 2001), Linköping (1989, 1997 and 2012), Göteborg (1993 and 2000), Karlstad (1994 and 2002), Lund (1995 and 2007), Södertörn (2004 and 2014), Växjö (2005 and 2012), Umeå (1996), Örebro (2003), Eskilstuna (2006), Falun (2010). The upcoming symposium in 2016 will be held at Uppsala University.

From the beginning each symposium has had a specific theme such as “Children’s Bilingualism” (1987), “Discourse and the Professions” (1992), “Translation and Interpretation” (1998), “Language Policy” (2000), “Language, Culture, Rhetoric: Cultural and Rhetorical Perspectives on Communication” (2003), “Language Acquisition, Language Teaching and Technology” (2007) and “Language in Teaching” (2012).

In 1981 ASLA and Lund University hosted the sixth AILA world congress. The Chair of the Organizing Committee was Jan Svartvik.

2 ASLA’s concept of Applied Linguistics

As evidenced by the variety of themes of ASLA’s past and present symposia (see examples in the previous section), ASLA has promoted a wide understanding of the notion of Applied Linguistics. On its website (www.asla.se) ASLA states that the aim of ASLA is:

[...] to promote research concerning practical problems to do with language, facilitate contacts between language researchers in Sweden and other countries and encourage participation in AILA’s research networks. Applied linguistics encompasses many areas, such as language development, language teaching and language learning involving both children and adults. Other areas include language use in working life, health care and public life in general. Add to these translation, corpus and computational linguistics, speech pathology, etc. [www.asla.se/en/]

Central to ASLA is the focus on language *in use*. The primary object of study in applied linguistics is not language *per se*, but rather the ways in which language is learned, taught and used in variety of settings.

3 ASLA’s scope of activities today

Today, ASLA has just under 100 members. Its regular activities include the organization of a conference. Starting in 2010, the annual conferences have taken the shape of biennial ASLA symposia. ASLA’s first biennial symposium took place at Dalarna University (Falun) and focused on language for the future. It was also the last symposium to be held in autumn. As of 2013 the biennial symposium is

held during the spring, in April or in May. The symposium in 2014 at Mälardalen University focused on Language and Identity.

ASLA's biennial symposium attracts between 100 and 200 participants from all over the country and from abroad, especially from Sweden's neighbouring countries. In ASLA's early years, the annual conference attracted even more participants. As is probably the case in many other countries, applied linguistics conferences compete nowadays with an increasing number of national, European and international associations focusing on specific sub-areas of applied linguistics. In the Nordic countries the biennial conference *Svenskans beskrivning* (The description of Swedish) attracts many participants, the association *NORDAND* (Nordens språk som andraspråk, the Languages of the Nordic countries as second languages) organises a biennial conference, and the *European Second Language Association* (EUROSLA) organises an annual conference attracting many scholars from Sweden. Other examples are *Nordic Language and Gender Conferences* and the conference for *Language for Specific Purposes*. In the past ASLA probably represented one of the few over-arching associations where scholars in different domains of applied linguistics could meet and discuss their research. Today, there is a wider variety of conferences, many of which focus on specific fields of research, so competition is harder.

The conference proceedings *ASLA årsbok – Rapport från ASLAs symposium* has been edited by ASLA since 1987 and publishes a selection of papers from the preceding symposium. Since 2010 it has been published both as a printed book and as an electronic publication at this website: <http://asla.se/skrifter/arsbocker/>. The proceedings are peer-reviewed by the scientific committee of the preceding symposium.

ASLA provides topical information on its website, which has existed since the beginning of 2000, and was re-launched with an improved design in 2013 (see <http://www.asla.se>). Since 2014 ASLA has also been present on Facebook. Apart from the *AILA Review*, members of ASLA also receive a discount on the registration fee for the biennial symposium.

In view of the upcoming 50th anniversary and in an attempt to encourage students interested in applied linguistics, the current board has recently decided to establish a prize for best thesis at master's level. The first prize will be awarded at the 2016 symposium in Uppsala.

4 Applied Linguistics in Sweden

Research in applied linguistics has a long tradition in Sweden, a tradition which in many respects begins with and is still closely associated with ASLA. However,

as has probably been the case in many AILA affiliates in Europe, the founding members of ASLA were linguists working in language departments or in general linguistics. Applied linguistics, and in particular language learning and language teaching, were (re)emerging research interests in the 1960's and ASLA became the national forum for this research. As pointed out in the introduction one of the initial aims of ASLA was to establish applied linguistics as an independent subject area at university level and to create departments of applied linguistics. Looking back over the past 50 years, we find that this has not happened. This does not mean, of course, that content that would fall within a general definition of applied linguistics is not taught, but the use of the actual term is rare when the main universities' lists of courses are considered. When the term is used it seems to be mainly in Swedish language departments or departments of education.

Partly for the above mentioned reasons it is impossible to give a complete picture of applied linguistics in Sweden today. Gunnarsson (2011:23–24) finds in a survey paper that “[m]edical discourse, communication in the professions, workplace interaction, intercultural negotiations, forensic linguistics, language and the media, immersion education, adult language learning, language and education in multilingual settings, discourse and technology, and language and gender are examples of AL areas in the 2000s”. Research in all these areas and more are currently being carried out in Sweden. A review of published research in applied linguistics in Sweden and Finland between the years 2006–2011 was published by Ringbom (2012). Ringbom ends by concluding that “[o]n the whole, the studies listed here show that applied linguistic in these countries is well and thriving, and there has been a marked rise in publication activity in the past few years” (Ringbom, 2012: 507).

5 Contact information

Den svenska föreningen för tillämpad språkvetenskap (Association suédoise de linguistique appliquée)

Website: <http://www.asla.se>

E-mail address: jonas.granfeldt@rom.lu.se

President: Prof. Jonas Granfeldt, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, Box 201 221 00 Lund /E-Mail: jonas.granfeldt@rom.lu.se

Treasurer: Dr. Susan Sayehli, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University. /E-Mail: susan.sayehli@ling.lu.se

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