VARFÖR GÖR DE PÅ DETTA VISET?
Kommunikativa praktiker i flerspråkig språkundervisning med svenskt teckenspråk som medierande redskap

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract


Applying a human rights perspective on plurilingualism as a national as well as a transnational concern, with a focus on the interaction taking place in foreign language teaching and learning practices at a Swedish Special Needs School for pupils with deafness or impaired hearing, the overall aim of this study is to describe and discuss this interaction in performative terms, i.e. in terms of what is said by whom, to whom, why, and with what consequences. Although extensive research has already been carried out within the field of plurilingualism, for example from linguistic, sociological and political points of departure, research on plurilingualism with regard to foreign language teaching and learning interaction in Swedish sign language contexts has been largely missing. The ambition of this work, therefore, is to add to the diversity of research on plurilingualism. It is also hoped that this work will contribute to the debate in educational politics concerning a human rights perspective on plurilingualism, especially with regard to modern European languages as a transnational issue.

Methodologically, an ethnographic approach has been employed to document, by means of two video cameras in combination with field notes, the practices of communication emerging from teacher-student interaction. Using notions from Conversational Analysis and alongside established conventions of sign language transcription, a model of transcription was designed for the specific purpose of describing, in detail, the plurilingual interaction where Swedish sign language is used as a mediating tool.

Three lessons in English and four lessons – or lesson extracts – in Spanish, at secondary level in a Special Needs School for pupils with deafness or impaired hearing, have been documented and analysed. The analyses were carried out in two different steps, one describing and one discussing the results of the empirical investigation.

The institutionally formalised interaction observed appears to have contributed to the heavy dominance of the teacher, and of the IRE sequence used during the lessons, to a much greater extent than students’ deafness or impaired hearing. Although the aims and objectives of the curricular texts intended for these students, as well as for hearing ones, are expressed in communicative terms – for example, learning to read texts of relatively high complexity, or developing writing skills for communication across linguistic boundaries – almost all the lessons that were investigated concerned the translation of isolated words into sign language, often taken out of their English or Spanish context. Nonetheless, the students took part in the classroom interaction when protesting, joking, asking questions and helping each other. Thus, the teacher dominance noted does not imply suppression, but rather a tendency on the part of the teacher to underestimate the students, as well as reflecting a selective tradition within foreign language teaching and learning practices in a general Swedish school context. However, when viewed from a human rights perspective on future plurilingual European citizens, using their language skills to reach out into the world for mutual understanding, the students involved in the language teaching and learning interaction observed in this study may hardly be expected to reach out across linguistic boundaries, at least not as a result of the language education they have experienced.

Keywords: human rights perspective, plurilingualism, Swedish Sign Language, practises of communication, performativity, ethnography.

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