

TITLE: "It's simply a gift". Multilingualism and Identity Formation among Young People in a Multiethnic Urban Area

SWEDISH TITLE: "Jag känner mig begåvad bara". Om flerspråkighet och identitetskonstruktion bland ungdomar i ett multi-etniskt förortsområde

LANGUAGE: Swedish

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Abstract

The overall aim of this dissertation is to investigate the nature of multilingualism and its manifestations among young people in a multiethnic urban area of Göteborg. For this purpose two studies have been carried out with partly different foci, a quantitative survey among 179 pupils in a school in a multilingual area, and as a follow-up a qualitative interview study with eight of the young people who took part in the initial survey.

The results of the survey show that 94 percent of the pupils of this school had foreign backgrounds, representing 30 different countries and 29 mother tongues. All of these pupils also claimed that they spoke two or more languages on a daily basis. As for their mother tongue, it was maintained mainly through use in the home domain and through mother tongue tuition at school. As for the use and development of Swedish, the pupils' second language in most cases, it was the dominant language for a majority of informants because of its frequent use e.g. in school and among friends. The measures taken by the school in terms of support for the development of Swedish could be characterized as compensatory rather than enriching. School reports from grade nine indicate that most of the informants have not been very successful in secondary school. Statistical analyses show very few significant correlations between different background factors and school success.

In the follow-up study the interviews with the eight young people were analyzed by means of grounded theory and the results show that multilingualism, in addition to categories such as family, place, school and future plans, are of great importance for identity formation among the individuals investigated. In the final theoretical coding concepts like ambivalence, investment and empowerment were found to adequately describe the conditions for the development of syncretic identities in multilingual settings. The ambiguities of the post-modern society and the many choices it calls for can be frustrating and confusing but can also offer unique opportunities to individuals who are being confirmed and empowered in their affiliation to different languages and cultures.

KEY WORDS: Second language acquisition, multilingualism, sociolinguistics, identity formation, ambivalence, investment, empowerment.

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