Summary

This work presents four case studies focused on second language learners involved in workplace learning as part of the basic Swedish language programme for adult immigrants, Sfi.

Assumptions to the effect that adult immigrants should find it easy to learn a second language such as Swedish in the workplace, and that knowledge of "vocational Swedish" and a work placement will facilitate newcomers' rapid labour market entry as well as their language acquisition, are frequently recurring themes in the public debate in Sweden. Such assumptions underlie the fact that Swedish municipalities, to an ever-increasing extent, are requesting educational providers to include practical work placements in the curriculum, also in the early stages of Sfi.

The overall aim of this work is to explore and problematize Sfi students' opportunities for interaction and language learning at work placements. More specifically, the research questions guiding the study are:

1. How, in overall quantitative and qualitative terms, can the interaction that students participate in at work placements be characterized?
2. What factors can be regarded as crucial for students' opportunities for interaction and language learning at work placements?
3. To what extent does the tuition that students participate in during work placement periods deal with content having specific, workplace-related relevance?
4. How can the learning potential in both contexts – Sfi and work placement – be mutually enhanced and consolidated?

Chapter 1 provides a brief historical survey, spanning some fifty years, of the basic language programme, along with a discussion of its wider role in today's Swedish society and working life.

In 2011, more than 102 000 students – the highest number of participants ever – were enrolled in the Sfi programme. The programme is state-funded but it is the responsibility of the different municipalities to provide Sfi as part of the municipal adult education programme or to commission private tenders. The programme ensures that adult Swedish immigrants have the right to free basic language tuition up to a level corresponding to level B1 as described in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe 2001). The goal of the Sfi programme, as presented in the Sfi syllabus, is to "provide students with linguistic tools for communication and active participation in everyday situations in society and in their working lives" (SKOLFS 2009:2, also 2012:13). The programme should be flexible and organized so as to facilitate the combination of Sfi studies and employment, work placement or other education. All syllabuses within the official Swedish educational system – including the Sfi syllabus – are criterion-referenced; there are no direct specifications with regard to content or method (see also Lindberg & Sandwall 2007, Sandwall 2010).

The study was carried out in Gothenburg, Sweden's second biggest city, between November 2007 and June 2009. The municipality's purpose in requesting tenders to include work placements as part of the programme was to make it possible for Sfi students to use and learn Swedish and to become self-supporting more quickly. Students were also expected to have an opportunity to experience teamwork, get an early insight into Swedish society and working life, and maintain and develop an interest in a line of trade or their own professional skills. Also, the municipality formally required that providers should "integrate" learning in and out of school.

Chapters 2–3 give an overview of relevant research and of concepts used in the study.

For the analysis of the students' opportunities for interaction and learning at work placements, an ecological linguistic perspective as proposed by van Lier (2004a) was chosen. This also serves as an overall framework to which relevant research on second language learning and teaching, as well as on workplace learning, is related – i.e. research on participation, learning and communication in communities of practice. Notions such as identity, agency, face work, investment and participation in (imagined) communities of practice, and power are also used (Goffman 1967, Bourdieu 1977, Brown & Levinson 1987, Wenger 1991, Norton 1997, Lave & Wenger 1998, Ahearn 2001, 2001, Kanno & Norton 2003, van Lier 2004a, 2010b).

Chapter 4 accounts for the participants in the study and the methods used for data collection. Four students, three females and one male between 23 and 45 years of age, enrolled with three different providers, participated in the study. The students had different first languages and their educational

background varied, from a very short education to a university degree. Their professional backgrounds also varied, involving cleaning, housework, driving, and statistical work. Students' second language proficiency could be described as corresponding to the level A2 (Council of Europe 2001). Further, teachers and so-called coaches, responsible for finding and arranging work placements matching students' previous experiences and future goals, as well as contacts with workplace tutors, also participated, as did tutors and fellow workers from each work placement.

During work placement periods, the students spent 1-2 days at their placement and 1-3 days at school each week. The four students' placements were at a preschool, a clothes shop, a grocery store, and as a church caretaker, respectively. Placement periods lasted between 7 and 20 weeks.

The time the students spent at their work placements was videotaped one, two or three times, respectively, at three of the work placements; for one student only audiotapes were made. The qualitative and quantitative analyses of the recordings were supported by the computer program Videograph where the prerecorded data was categorized, e.g. as regards what workplace tasks students performed and whether they were involved in interaction or carried out the tasks by themselves. Interaction was further categorized into transactional and relational interaction (see e.g. Gumperz 1964, Koester 2006), and various variables, such as instructions, feedback, questions, and comments on task or with relational purpose. The computer program also performed a quantitative assessment of the time spent on each category and variable. Further work on the data obtained, including its categorization, is described in Chapter 5.

Additional data was collected through various qualitative methods, such as the following: field notes from observations at meetings, at work placements and in school; examination of course materials and analysis of audiotaped interviews with teachers, coaches, tutors and students. The interviews and stimulated recall sessions with students were carried out with the help of interpreters. In total, the data collected comprises roughly 131 hours.

The results are accounted for in Chapters 6–8. An overall result is that none of the participants –neither the students nor the tutors, teachers and coaches – believed that the students improved their ability to communicate in Swedish during their work placements. However, the study indicates that simultaneous access to both contexts provides a potential for language development that could promote the long-term goal of active participation in society and working life.

Chapter 6 deals with the first two research questions. As to the first one, the quantitative analysis of the interaction students participated in was based on the audio and video recordings made at the work placements. The analysis shows that students participated in interaction to an extremely limited extent

during their work placements. It is important to note that "participated in interaction" does not here imply that students were actually involved in conversation, only that they interacted through speech and/or body language. Thus, the time stated also includes helping each other to accomplish a task without speaking. This means that the, approximately, 48–73 % of the interaction that was nonverbal is, for this study, included in "interaction".

Three of the students participated in such interaction between, roughly, 4 and 16 % of the total time recorded at work placements, i.e. about 7–19 minutes/day spent at the work placement. For the rest of the time, the students worked alone on the tasks assigned to them. An exception to this was the student at the preschool, who was involved in interaction about 41 % of the time, but the interaction almost always involved 2–3-year-olds in a conversation that was, to a very high degree, characterized by recurring phrases (Sandwall 2010).

The quantitative analysis further shows that the interaction can in large part be described as transactional (Gumperz 1964, Koester 2006, Nelson 2010) and situated, i.e. the interactants were focusing on the accomplishment of the workplace task at hand. These conversations were to a very high degree dominated by tutors and fellow workers, limiting students' spoken contributions to, on average, between 30 seconds and 2 minutes each day at their respective workplaces.

Relational interaction, with a social, relational purpose, like small talk, was scarce and, to an even higher degree, dominated by tutors and fellow workers. The analysis shows that the amount of relational conversation varied a great deal at work placements; between 5 and 50 % of the total time was categorized as comprising relational utterances. The study further shows that the amount of interaction decreased distinctly over time for three of the participants of whom several recordings were made.

The second question concerns the factors which turned out to be crucially related to the practices of the Sfi schools and the work placements, and the cooperation between them, as well as to the participants in the study. In Chapter 6, the results are accounted for in relation to three central factors that, according to the analysis, influenced students' opportunities for interaction and language learning: interaction, workplace tasks and relations (cf. Kemmis & Grootenboer 2008).

The qualitative analysis, from an ecological perspective (van Lier 2004a), suggests that an array of factors contributed to the limited extent of (spoken) interaction as well as to the longitudinal variation regarding its extent. The qualitative analysis also provides a basis for an in-depth discussion about the interaction's learning potential.

The interaction that students participated in can to a high degree be characterized as situated where verbal utterances concerning concrete phenomena present in the immediate context were predominant. An ecological perspective is focused on the ways actively engaged individuals relate to their surroundings and to each other. According to van Lier (2004a), when engaged in activity, we perceive and interpret the relevancies signalled by our physical and social surroundings; the context offers affordances which the individual may explore (or not) for further action, interaction and language learning.

The situated nature of the interaction means that what was said and done at work placements was dependent on the immediate context, becoming intelligible and reasonable only in relation to that context. This is illustrated through several excerpts. The first one, from the grocery store (translated for this summary), illustrates situated and transactional interaction supported by several affordances. The tutor Emma and the student Noor are involved in a workplace task.

1. Emma: Let's see, I'll just put those in there (blankets in her arms)
2. Noor: Yes. It good or no? [≈*have I put it in the right place?*]
3. Emma: I'll just pull it out, I forgot to tell you. Let's see. This is what we'll do (pulls out
4.   refrigerator)
5. Noor: Ah, ah okay
6. Emma: Then we'll open, this (opens the door) then we can just put these in here, this and this
7.   and this (puts blankets in refrigerator), and then you can close and just push it in there.
8.   Okay?
9. Noor: Yeh

Here, Emma needs to put some blankets in a big refrigerator standing on a pallet truck. However, Noor has placed the refrigerator with the door next to the wall, and Emma needs to move it to be able to open the door.

The findings emerging from the analysis suggest that as the interaction was mediated by various linguistic and non-linguistic affordances, the linguistic features of the verbal, situated interaction at work placements generally posed no problems of understanding for students (no matter how professionally specific, complex or non-norm-related the utterances were). Instead of relying on verbal utterances alone, interactants made use of an array of available resources, i.e. affordances, for interpretation and further action. In the situation illustrated by the excerpt, affordances could have been, e.g., language, the refrigerator, the blankets, the pallet truck, body language and posture, general competencies and knowledge, and the immediate physical environment. Hence, there is no need to use "full sentences" or lexical (content) words, and the participants – both L1 and L2 speakers – made use of their ability to perceive and interpret – to "read" – the situation as a "whole".

This turned out to be crucial for students' opportunities to participate in interaction, as well as for their opportunities for language learning and also for learning how to handle workplace tasks. The ample array – and participants' exploration – of affordances for understanding and acting meant that active negotiation for mutual understanding was seldom required at the work placements. Nor did participants' varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds seem to cause any problems of understanding. In sum, the restricted need for (potentially language-promoting) negotiations contributed to the limited amount of interaction and learning opportunities.

To conclude, the qualitative analysis shows that the situated nature of the interaction supported understanding and interaction, while at the same time allowing the use of limited vocabulary and syntax, which in turn contributed to reducing students' opportunities for learning Swedish.

The workplace tasks assigned to the students also turned out to be a factor influencing the extent and content of interaction. The students were primarily assigned "simpler" tasks which, as adults, they had previous knowledge about as well as experience of performing, e.g. cleaning and the placing of various items in a grocery store. Since the tutors assumed that the students were able to perform this kind of workplace task, they provided no detailed instructions; for instance, the student at the preschool received no instructions on how to read to the children, nor was the student working at the church given any specific instructions on window cleaning. Moreover, the fact that the students soon learned to manage workplace tasks, becoming increasingly confident, led to fewer opportunities for interaction.

In addition, what workplace tasks students performed was of great importance for the emergence of opportunities for interaction and language learning. For example, cleaning seemed to give rise to very little interaction with customers and fellow workers, while the unpacking of goods seemed to invite more conversation.

Students' opportunities for interaction and, hence, for language learning, were also limited by the fact that both students and tutors gave priority to the goals and continuity of the workplace practice. Workplace talk was primarily viewed as an instrument to support workplace tasks; you talked when it was necessary for getting the job done – not for practising Swedish.

Nor did coaches, tutors or students reflect on the organization of the workplace tasks or whether a change in the schedule could have led to other, more qualified, tasks and/or other forms of interaction. Coaches worried that they might lose work placements and, therefore, did not dare to make demands for variation and progression of the tasks or for tutors setting aside time for conversation with students. Also, the students had few opportunities for indirect guidance (Billett 2004), such as performing tasks together with the

tutor, and for planned observation (e.g. "walking alongside", observing without direct participation). Further, students had few opportunities to gain an overall understanding of the practice; three of the tutors spent about 1 minute in total explaining why things were done (in a certain way).

The limited guidance and the circumstance that students, to a high degree, performed the same workplace tasks for the whole of their work placement period also contributed to the fact that they did not get a full picture of the workplace practices, nor an understanding of the language proficiency needed for various tasks. This, in turn, limited their opportunities for transactional as well as relational conversations. In addition, their limited understanding of the language needed contributed to a lower motivation for further language studies for at least one of the students. In this, students' goals and their imagined communities of practice, as well as their social and professional identities, appeared to be important (cf. Norton 2001, Kanno & Norton 2003).

The focus on workplace tasks and on the perceived importance of keeping students busy also contributed to the limited extent of relational conversation. Another reason for this was the scarce opportunities for small talk since students very rarely had lunch breaks at the same time as their tutors or fellow workers – and there were no coffee breaks. Apart from talk about food and family, there was no conversation on general topics, like news or the weather. The small talk that did occur was primarily made up of comments about the workplace practice.

Also, relations between the participating individuals emerged as a central factor influencing the transactional and relational interaction that students participated in, and what tasks were assigned and performed. This factor is discussed in terms of power asymmetries and concepts such as identities, investment and (imagined) communities of practice as well as agency and face.

For example, the study shows that students found replying to tutors' relational comments difficult. The analysis suggests that this could be explained by the fact that the content in such conversations was supported by offordances only to a lesser degree. Also, power asymmetries contributed to making jokes and irony difficult for students to perceive, understand and reply to.

Further, the study provides examples of how tutors, taking students' "face" into consideration, tried to protect them from linguistically advanced workplace tasks and socially demanding situations. However, the tutors – having Swedish as their L1 or L2 – may also have felt uncertain in conversations with second language speakers. This could be due to a lack of confidence regarding their own or the students' ability to interact using "simple Swedish", a fear of an embarrassing situation or of students losing face.

The analysis further shows that the above-mentioned factors had consequences for students' opportunities to consider themselves – and to be so

269

considered by others – as members of the social and professional communities of practice at their work placements (cf. Lave & Wenger 1991). At the beginning of their work placement period, students can indeed be considered legitimate peripheral second language speaking members/novices within their communities of practice. Later on, however, their role might better be described as marginal members with very limited opportunities for learning (cf. Wenger 1998). On the very few occasions when language learning was the topic of conversation, learning at the workplace was not discussed, as opposed to learning in school or in spare time. Both tutors and students blamed themselves for the lack of language development but were unsure about what they could have done to improve the situation. Also, three of the students felt they had been used as free labour.

Chapter 7 deals with the third research question, concerning the relevance of the content of the tuition. The providers who participated in the study were all involved in a continuous effort to adjust their practice to the demands specified in the national steering documents – aimed at qualified individualized language tuition – as well as to the requests of the municipality and the labour strategy for work placements and rapid labour market entry. These goals were regarded as partly contradictory and some of the teachers also expressed doubts about the assumed advantages of the system. However, teachers and coaches did not think this could be discussed with their school management or the municipality's representatives. Therefore, the task of designing the tuition presented a great challenge to teachers and coaches.

Despite the fact that the municipality requested tenders to "integrate" students' experiences from work placements into the tuition, the study shows that very little integration took place during the lessons observed in the placement period. The reasons for this, as identified by the teachers and coaches involved, were organizational and pedagogical obstacles. However, other factors also contributed to the lack of integration, namely teachers' limited knowledge about authentic language use and about conditions at work placements. This, in turn, meant that tuition had to rely on mere assumptions about relevant language use and opportunities for learning at work placements.

Thus the content of tuition may be summarized as "probably of a general applicability" (topics like the weather, health care, TV series or news, as well as lessons on instructions, questions and verb forms) and "probably of general working-life applicability" (themes like the labour market, "hidden workplace codes", writing CVs, or job interviews, and vocabulary for various working-life phenomena).

As a consequence of this, and of providers' limited resources, tuition was to a large extent based on textbooks and other prefabricated, adapted material.

These texts differed in many ways from the authentic, situated interaction that students participated in at their work placements.

As students were assumed to talk a lot at their work placements, there was no explicit training in oral communication, e.g. regarding various communication strategies. Nor were (in)formal learning strategies treated during the lessons observed.

It is argued that general lesson content can, just like adapted texts, be used in tuition and be of use at work placements; however, with no explicit connection to the "world outside", the boundaries between the two worlds seemed to be reinforced and the relevance of tuition thus questioned. It is suggested that the absence of an explicit link between the "school world" and the "work placement world" may have contributed to students' perception of school and work placement as two separate, completely different worlds.

Hence, in Chapter 8, ways of establishing a more systematic and continuous connection between the two contexts – school and the outside world – are discussed, the aim being to make tuition more engaging and relevant to students' lived reality and long-term goals. This means addressing the fourth research question.

Despite the students' limited opportunities to participate in interaction and language learning at their work placements, the study suggests that there is an untapped potential for interaction and learning at work placements. It is implied that this potential, depending on students' access to tuition as well as a work placement, might be more efficiently exploited when working in accordance with a model in the way described in Chapter 8 (see Figure 8.1). The model illustrates a way of working where (semi-)authentic interaction at work placements is taken as a point of departure for the content of tuition. The model aims at making visible, utilizing and strengthening the learning potential in both contexts – school as well as work placement. It is based on the opportunities and limitations for learning observed in schools and at work placements within this study, hence grounded in well-tried experience and research as stipulated by the Educational Act (2010:800).

To make better use of the learning potential, two pedagogical tools are suggested within the model presented in this chapter. Firstly, the relevance of classroom activities can be made explicit by teachers' questions and students' accounts of specific conditions at various work placements. For this purpose, teachers may use questions that may be called connecting questions (cf. teacher-led contingency, Baynham 2006). These questions may, as exemplified in Chapter 8, encourage students to relate classroom activity to the work placements represented within the group. Further, the questions may contribute to developing teachers' knowledge about authentic language use and conditions that may affect learning at work placements.

The second tool, integration tasks, may also promote such an understanding. These tasks presuppose a positive view of the differences and challenges that students may experience in various contexts. The tasks are aimed at increasing opportunities for active participation in both contexts and for integration of (in-)formal learning within and between them.

Integration tasks are formulated by the teachers. In the classroom, the task is prepared through activities aimed at preparing students for conversation with the tutor. At the work placement, the task is used as a basis for a 10–15 minutes' conversation with the tutor. In school, it is used as a basis for various forms of account and for comparison of language use in various contexts (school, different work placements, workplaces, countries).

To promote the chances for interaction and learning, integration tasks are aimed at making visible opportunities for learning, hence also the interrelated factors that construct (and are constructed within) the practices of work placements and workplaces (cf. Kemmis & Grootenboer 2008), i.e. interaction, relations (aspects like identity, agency, legitimate participation in the community of practice), and workplace tasks. In the appendix, a checklist and criteria for integration tasks are provided, as well as examples of tasks and suggestions for preparatory and supplementary classroom work.

In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of setting aside enough resources for cooperation between coaches, tutors and students. Dialogues between these actors concerning various conditions for work placements – e.g. detailed descriptions of goals, working hours, workplace tasks and adult second language learning – may contribute to increased opportunities for interaction and second language learning as well as work-related skills.

This way of working also actualizes the need for an extensive and specific regular teacher training for Sfi teachers as well as for relevant, recurrent in-service programmes with a special focus on adult second language learners' need for active participation and (in-)formal learning in various contexts. Hence, what is suggested in the qualification regulation (SFS 2011:326, 33§), i.e. all teacher's degrees and 30 credits in Swedish as a second language, must be considered completely insufficient.

Based on the results of the study and society's one-sided view of Sfi as a labour market instrument, an alternative view is suggested concerning the role and responsibility of basic second language tuition. Here, a metaphor of the language programme as comprising two spaces – a critical learning space and an affirmative learning space (Svendsen Pedersen 2007) – is used.

The study shows that the basic language programme could be an imaginary affirmative space in relation to the so-called "labour strategy", provided that the programme includes work placements and takes (semi-)authentic interaction at workplaces as a starting point for teaching. In this way, tuition is supportive

of students' entry into the labour market and their access to workplace communities of practice.

However, a one-sided focus on second language teaching as a tool for maximally rapid labour market entry may lead to tuition contributing to the ethnical segregation of the labour market, where the individual's long-term language needs for active participation in society and working life are neglected. Hence, and to live up to the requirements of the Education Act and to support the individual's personal long-term development, the programme also needs to be a space for critical learning.

Within the critical learning space, teachers' and students' collective knowledge is used to examine phenomena in society and at work placements that may be important to students' identity and agency. Also, to promote students' chances of active participation on their own terms in different communities, various language structures and sociopragmatic aspects of interaction are made explicit and discussed within the critical learning space.

When teaching is designed as a common and reflexive exploration of language use and viewed as taking place within critical and affirmative learning spaces, the roles of teachers and students need to be redefined. Within such tuition it is not only the teachers who play the role of "language experts" (masters) and not only the students who are the "novices"; it is, after all, the students who have first-hand knowledge of the situated language use as they have access to and experiences from both learning contexts. In that respect, students' role may be seen as similar to that of a boundary-crossing "ethnographer" (Roberts et al. 2001). The study also emphasizes that teachers and coaches need to visit different types of work placements and workplaces on a regular basis to be able to design tuition where goals, structure, content and activities are clear and relevant to students' interaction in and out of the classroom. In short, teachers and coaches, like students, need to work in the same way as "ethnographers".

Chapter 9 gives a summary of the study's results. In Chapter 10, methodological issues are discussed in terms of, for example, credibility, translatability, and comparability. It is concluded that the ecological linguistic perspective used for the analysis (van Lier 2004a) holds a big potential for explaining the situated interaction that took place at the various work placements in relation to the study's research questions. However, the analysis actualizes an in-depth discussion about the notion of affordances. Here, the excerpts indicate that affordances not only support students' interpretation and further action, but also students' opportunities to express themselves, for example when asking questions and giving instructions, using body language and artifacts. The analysis also indicates that the use of the concept may need to be related to whether the topic of conversation concerns the "here and now" or

something "outside the situation", i.e. to various aspects of abstraction and concretion. In some situations or conversations, the individual simply cannot find affordances within the immediate context. It is also discussed whether misunderstandings and lack of understanding could occasionally be explained in terms of "lack of" or "insufficient" affordances and whether affordances involving concrete artifacts may also "lead in the wrong direction", even making interpretation more difficult.

The overall possibilities of the Sfi programme to develop a practice in accordance with all (partly conflicting) steering documents are discussed from an overall perspective in relation to metapractices that, together with and including Sfi, form a so-called ecology of interconnected metapractices (Kemmis et al. 2009), as illustrated in Figure 10.1. Relations – and power asymmetries – within and between these metapractices are argued to be of great significance for the programme's possibilities to perform its task. Here, policies of integration, labour market and education, various national and municipal institutions, as well as public debate and common-sense assumptions, play a decisive role. By contrast, the Sfi programme itself, as well as research and teacher education, is suggested to play a minor role.

As the most visible and practical component of integration policies in different periods, Sfi has often been held responsible for increasing problems of unemployment, segregation and marginalization of the migrant population, especially in times of economic recession. The fact that criticisms have often originated from politicians in power, irrespective of ideological affiliation, lends support to the assumption that Sfi is frequently exploited as a convenient scapegoat, covering up for all kinds of political shortcomings in current integration policies. The study indicates that the system of competing short-term providers and the partly conflicting goals set for Sfi seem to contribute to feelings of frustration and self-reproach among the various parties involved – i.e. students, tutors, teachers, coaches – which does not seem to promote the development of teaching and language. It also appears to contribute to the suppression of views that do not sit comfortably with the municipality, but not to critical and constructive discussion of the system in use. All in all, the overall situation cannot be regarded as being conducive to a sound development of the Sfi programme; nor does it benefit students.

Finally, it is suggested that for promoting a long-term, sustainable development within Sfi, all metapractices will need to be addressed, not only Sfi practice. The study points to opportunities for relating tuition to long-term educational, integrational and labour market goals. The investments needed to develop such tuition may, increasingly, be thought of as a wise use of resources on both an individual and a societal level, and also as an enduring tool for integration, involving first as well as second language speakers.

274