

Learning08: Methodologies and Practices for Approaching Learning as a Social Phenomenon Inside and Outside of School

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The relation between multilingual children's languages – status and meaning in activities

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how multilingual children position themselves regarding competence and use of different languages in local contexts. The empirical material consists of longitudinal video recordings from multilingual six- and seven-year-old children's everyday interaction in and outside a Swedish-medium school, and at home, in a strongly Finnish-dominated area in Finland, where most of the children are bilingual in Swedish and Finnish. By using Conversation Analysis (CA) we are closely following how a multilingual girl, with a different linguistic background than Swedish and Finnish, develops her Finnish competence in interaction with her class mates. In a participant perspective, it is of special interest to discuss the status and meaning of the situations where she is using Finnish – in contrast to the children's use of English. The results show that Finnish, in relation to English, is expected everyday knowledge. Finnish words are used especially in games and in media-inspired activities. The competence in Finnish, and the knowledge about others' competence, is also highlighted by the children themselves, who even use (lacking) competence as a tool in conflicts. Both English and Finnish have status, but in different ways. Whereas learning English is done (at least partly) with paper and pen and by repeating after a more competent child, learning Finnish is a much more subtle activity.