



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

English for Others

Power and Othering in
The Language Introduction Program in Sweden

Jenny Bergström

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Fakulteten för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap, Jyväskylä universitet, Finland.

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Jenny Bergström

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English for Others: Power and Othering at The Language Introduction Program in Sweden.

Abstract

This thesis investigates English-language education at The Language Introduction Program (LIP) in Sweden. LIP is an individual transit program for newly arrived migrant students at upper-secondary school level, designed to ensure a fast transition to further education or the job market (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013). The methodology used in this thesis is based on linguistic ethnography (Copland & Creese, 2015), with observations and interviews conducted at two schools – Slope Hill High School and Meadow Hill High School (fictional names) – over the course of one school year. Observations in classrooms, at meetings, and of the school environment were conducted. In addition, semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, principals, and other members of faculty were performed.

The theoretical framework for this thesis is Foucault's (2002) perspectives of power, with a particular focus on Foucault's concepts of biopower and governmentality. In addition to Foucault, postcolonial perspectives of Bhabha (2004) and Said (2003) are used to analyze othering. This thesis also investigates language ideology (Kroskrity, 2000), language hierarchies (Josephson, 2018), and learner identity (Norton, 2013) in a multilingual context. Moreover, this thesis explores the connections between power structures linked to individualization, isolation, governmentality and othering.

The results show that power structures limit the ability of teachers to collaborate, evaluate, and develop their teaching practices. Interwoven in all these structures are monolingual language ideologies and perceptions of LIP students as lacking prior knowledge and capabilities. Furthermore, the thesis shows that students' first languages (L1s) are not used as a resource when learning English at the LIP, and that the importance of proficiency in English is rarely discussed with LIP students. Instead, the local language (Swedish) is prioritized by the organization. The results also show that, through governmentality, lack of proficiency in English is a gatekeeper to future transitions for LIP students. This thesis shows that all these factors in combination position English as a school subject at LIP of less priority for LIP students, disfavoring English both in regard to resources and support.

Keywords

English-language education, The Language Introduction Program, power, othering, language ideologies, language hierarchies, language learning, panopticon, individualization

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