The teacher’s role in the development of communicative competence among students of Swedish and Finnish as a Second Language

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This paper investigates students’ expectations for the teacher when learning to speak the target language in three countries: Finland, France and Sweden. My case studies focus on the teaching and learning of Swedish and Finnish as a L2 by Finnish, Swedish and French upper secondary students in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. According to my results, the reported importance of the teacher’s role for one’s oral proficiency varies clearly depending on the individual country.

In France, a large majority of the interviewed students claim that the amount of oral communication during classes coupled with the teachers’ methods have a significant impact on developing communicative competence.

In contrast, Finnish students do not generally expect the teacher to contribute to the development of their communicative competence. Teachers in both countries, however, encourage exchanges with native speakers, but the responsibility of actually doing so remains with their students.

Thirdly, it is worth noticing that Swedish students accord much more importance to their teachers’ teaching methods than their Finnish neighbours. This may seem surprising given the fact that the interviewed students have Finnish speakers in their primary social groups and therefore speak the language in their free time.

I will explain these differences by looking into students’ social networks and the ecolinguistic settings of the three countries in question. 76 interviews conducted by the author have been analysed for this paper. The study is part of my Finnish-French doctoral project dealing with issues of language teaching and learning emphasising the impact of the ecolinguistic context on students’ communicative competence.

Keywords: second language learning, Swedish, teachers’ role, language ecology, Finnish.