The deep connection between integration and language proficiency – A survey on the need to use Finnish in academic contexts

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Academic Finnish as a Challenge for International Learners -project at University of Turku conducted in 2015 a survey on the importance of Finnish language skills and the effect of language proficiency on the life of individuals working or studying at the university. The survey (142 non-Finnish respondents) was carried out primarily in order to map the need for B and C level Finnish teaching at the university, but also in order to get a deeper understanding on integration from the perspective of language proficiency in academic contexts.

In order to reach respondents on all levels of Finnish proficiency, a detailed questionnaire was created both in Finnish and English, concentrating on one side on the need to use and know Finnish, and on the other side on the significance of language proficiency on the study, work and everyday life of the individual. In addition to the pragmatic aspects of the survey, our goal was to find out to which extent the language proficiency is focal in achieving the different dimensions of integration (cf. P. van Avermaet & S. Gysen, 2006). A multi-faceted approach, based largely on the integration theory by W. Bosswick and F. Heckmann (2006) and on the hierarchy of needs by Abraham Maslow (1943), was therefore used in order to achieve a balanced picture of the structural, cultural, social, interactive and identificational integration of the respondents.

According to the preliminary analysis it seems that there exists a need for higher level Finnish teaching at the university, also for those mastering the Finnish well. Second, a full-scale integration to Finnish society and self-fulfilment in Finland seem to be difficult to achieve without high-level Finnish skills.

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