Linguistic identities in the making – multilingual and multimodal perspectives

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Language learning in a multilingual environment is an interesting process, which is influenced by the personal characteristics and the particular linguistic environment of the learner. Most often, our linguistic environment consists of spoken languages, but how do the language learning process and the linguistic environment look like if one of the languages involved is a signed language? Learner beliefs have been recognized as a valuable source of information on language learning (e.g. Kalaja et al. 2008) and can be seen as dynamic (e.g. Dufva 2003). Learner experiences of signing students have been examined by Csizér and Kormos (2009), English in the everyday life of FinSL signers by Tapio (2013), and learner beliefs of signing students by Kelly (2009) and Kelly et al. (2015).

This qualitative case study focuses in detail on the language identity and learner beliefs of a Finnish Sign Language (FinSL) signer studying at the university. In Finland, Finnish Sign Language is a minority language. However, English as an international language as well as internationally used sign languages enable the student to take part in international communities. The data in this study consists of two interviews and relevant course work at a compulsory English course at the University Language Centre. The focus of the interviews is on how the student sees her language identity and her views on learning languages. Since language identities appear not to be static, but they seem to be evolving and developing, gaining a better understanding on how the multimodal and multilingual environment form a part of the language learning process can also bring new insights on how signing students should be taught languages.

Keywords: Finnish Sign Language, learner beliefs, language identity.