Institutional academic spaces enabling and/or disabling multilingual and multimodal meaning-making in a Finnish Sign Language study programme

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Does an environment with a long history in higher education designed for spoken and written modalities afford multilingual, multimodal semiotic resources for Finnish Sign Language (FinSL) users? The poster will present a research project which aims to answer such question by exploring multilingual and multimodal meaning-making in the academic, institutional context of the FinSL study programme at the University of Jyväskylä. It will do so through Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) and its practical research procedure, nexus analysis, which stands on the ethnographic research paradigm, offering an analytical framework to reach large scale discourses by examining small-scale, situated actions (Scollon & Scollon 2004). The goal is to map the focal social actions of the students of the study programme through ethnographic fieldwork, navigating the discourses around those actions and examining multiparty signed interaction from a multimodal perspective. The study will attend to how actions and discourses are influenced by spatial layout and to how academic spaces enable and/or disable the multilingual, multimodal repertoires of FinSL signers (Blommaert et al. 2005). It uses ethnographic data, including observations, interviews, and video recordings of multiparty interaction, aiming to scrutinise how semiotic resources cooperate in multimodal action; also, how such resources relate to each other. This project resides in the multimodal approach stemming from MDA (Norris 2004) and in research into interaction arising from conversation analysis and social semiotics (e.g. Van Leeuwen 2005, Goodwin 2000). It will deepen our understanding of signed interaction and of how human beings create meaning through semiotic resources in visually oriented settings.

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