Whose needs exactly? – Large scale needs analysis in a Danish multilingual university setting

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In 2013 the University of Copenhagen launched the project ”More Languages for more students” which aims at improving university students’ language skills in e.g. English, German, French, Arabic and Danish as L2. The implementation of the project falls into two phases. Firstly, it focuses on assessing the needs of students and other relevant actors through surveys and focus groups (Long 2005, Kaewpet 2009). Secondly, it deals with implementing language-supporting activities across different programmes and faculties.

There are certain methodological challenges in this project. One important issue is how to collect and organize complex large scale data. Another central issue is to decide who exactly the users of the language strategy are (students, instructors, administrative staff, labour market) and how to accommodate their sometimes conflicting needs. A third problem is how to include Danish minority background students in the analysis without exposing them as a group that needs special consideration. This complex net of users and political actors challenges the data collection and the development of tailor-made pedagogic activities.

The project’s theoretical point of departure are two core sociolinguistic concepts: linguistic repertoire and communicative competence (Gumperz and Hymes 1972). It also draws on Blommaert and Backus (2011) who argue that ”knowing a language” today is about ”knowing a language by degree” where the relevant skills and competences are functionally distributed, comprising a patchwork of available resources.


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