Skilled migrants struggling with L2 selves and professional identities at work in Finland

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Cultural and linguistic diversity is increasing in the working life in Finland, particularly in health care sector and cleaning industry. This inevitably has an effect on language policies and practices. This paper offers an insight into the tensions encountered by the international workforce when striving towards recognition and legitimization within the Finnish labour market.

Two ethnographically informed case studies will be presented to illustrate the emotionally demanding identity work of highly educated migrants struggling to become members of their work communities either in hospital or cleaning work environments in Finland. The theoretical framework is based on an ecological approach to language and learning. Identities are seen as subject positions between the individual and his/her social world, and therefore, as reshaped by power-relations (van Lier 2004, Kramsch & Steffensen 2008). The data derived from the project Finnish as a work language: A sociocognitive perspective to work-related language skills of immigrants (University of Jyväskylä) consist of 14 semi-structured interviews with a cleaner and a nursing student and members of their work communities. Narrative analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012) is applied to explore how migrants construct their L2 selves and professional identities, and how their co-workers position them.

The results suggest that both informants are considered as motivated workers and language learners. However, they get less responsibilities than their Finnish peers. Therefore, identities are not freely chosen but they indicate an on-going power play.

References:


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