Sociolinguistics of language education: Adult Language Education and Migration – Challenging Agendas in Policy and Practice

This colloquium will critically examine policy and practice in language education for adult migrants in Finland, the Netherlands and the UK. The three presentations address – in turn – policy discourses and aspects of practice in each of the nations covered. In an age of globalisation the linguistic, political and pedagogic dimensions of language learning in migration contexts are changing fast. Populations of adult migrants have a need to gain access to the powerful languages of their new home. At the scale of national policy in the developed West, responses to linguistic diversity vary hugely. Such responses have often been contentious: the imposition of language tests for migrants and successive cuts to the funding of language classes for adults particularly so. In-migration frequently outpaces the development of policy and infrastructure which might address the presence of new migrants. And policies shift and are in flux, responding in uneven and often contradictory ways to the dynamic diversity associated with migration. The presentations examine the discourses of migration policies and the ideologies which inform them. At the same time, practitioners are developing novel ways of meeting the language needs of adult migrants, as also described in the presentations. These emergent pedagogic practices involve the adoption of a critical stance, whereby language learning content is not restricted to the development of linguistic competence. Rather, the aim is to enable migrant language learners to develop a voice, enhancing the capacity to question the inequalities inherent in their lives. The colloquium draws attention to a fundamental disjuncture in language policy in migration contexts. On the one hand the hegemony of the nation state is supported by the regulative norms of ‘one nation one language’. This discourse is at odds with the interconnected, rhizomatic, transnational social forms of contemporary migration on the ground. The concomitant use and learning of the dominant language by migrants as part of a multilingual communicative repertoire fundamentally challenges the monolingualist and monolingualising ideologies of much top-down policy formation. The session will appeal to those attending SS20 because: the presentations address language policies relating to adult migrants in countries with different dominant languages and migration trajectories they address situated and theoretically-grounded aspects of practice that will be relevant and relatable for a broad audience they present a critical perspective which links policy and practice.


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