Subjectivity and Multi-lingualism

"Don't teach anything that you don't feel strongly about, whether you hate it or love it. Too often, teachers feel that they have to be professionals, so that they don't have to put themselves forward."

Claire Kramsch

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Foreword

In this number of Sprogforum we introduce a theme that is still relatively new in a Danish and Nordic context: *Subjectivity and multilingualism*. Inspired by Claire Kramsch's book *The Multilingual Subject* (2009), we feature a number of articles that give an account of new research and attempts at teaching that make the subjective experiences of language and learning the participants have the driving force in the classroom.

The first article of this theme number is an interview with Claire Kramsch where, in highly tangible fashion, she explains what it means to focus on the subjective aspects of language and language learning. To Claire Kramsch, language students are individuals with bodies, emotions, histories and hopes for the future. Language is more than a dictionary and structures – it has aesthetic qualities such as sound, rhythm and poetry. To learn a language, and to learn one well, depends on which emotions – positive or negative – learners connect with the language as well as how it sounds to their ears. Via language our social identity is shaped: we adapt – willingly or of necessity – to the society of which we wish to or are to be a part. But the social aspect is not the whole story. Via language we also shape our subjectivity, not only through our first language but also through our second language and the foreign languages we learn later in life. To learn a new language is a new opportunity to make a subjective change, to think, feel and act in new ways and to become the person we wish to be.

Second language teachers experience this cohesion between language and identity every day in the classroom. As Kirsten Kolstrup explains in her article, the students' participation in the class, their ways of relating to the teaching and their greater or lesser level of success have roots far back in their personal migratory histories and may influence their social lives in the labour market and the family – often a paradoxical social reality where the acquisition of Danish is defined as an indisputable requirement and a sign of the will to integrate, while everyday life often offers few changes of integration in the second language. It is important for teachers to realise that

students' success in language acquisition is only partially dependent on what takes place within the four walls of the classroom. At the same time, it is necessary to try to organise teaching in which participants can introduce their histories as a resource for their learning. There are examples of this in the present number, e.g. 'The art of learning language', which deals with an attempt to use art as a medium for learning language by utilising the potential of visual art to evoke memories and interpretations in the learners.

Multilingualism is another key concept in the theme of this number. This means that attention is shifted from exclusively being focused on the target language being taught in the classroom, irrespective of whether it is a second or a foreign language, to including the entire linguistic luggage the participants bring along with them. From having been positioned as non-competent speakers of the target language, the participants can now position themselves as competent speakers of several languages that they have acquired early or later in life. Pedagogically speaking, this opens up new possibilities to include languages learnt earlier as a resource for the learning of new languages, possibilities which the learners make use of on their own – as is demonstrated in Elina Maslo's article – but which will also be able to be used actively in the teaching, providing that the learners have the necessary education. The recognition of the bi- or multilingualism of the participants is an important step on the way to better teaching; it is a recognition that those involved in Danish politics have hesitated to give – which has had highly detrimental consequences for the learners. A great deal needs to be caught up on, but there are also many who are extremely eager and willing, as the feature article to this number amply illustrates.

The inspiration to look at language, learning and teaching with fresh eyes comes from many quarters. Language and subjectivity is not only an important issue for adult immigrants but also for pupils and students learning a foreign language in the classroom – and the many young people who move between various languages and cultures, the so-called 'international' students. Young students' language autobiographies, as Véronique Simon analyses in her article, show to what a great extent they are aware of how their life is shaped by the languages they have learnt and are learning, by dialects, standard languages, second languages and foreign languages. For them, language is not only a formal construction but also a lived reality; language is a medium for the conflicts they experience, for

their losses and for their dreams about the future. The language autobiographies provide a glimpse of what – to use Claire Kramsch's expression – is taking place beneath the 'teaching radar': beneath or alongside all the assignments and exercises the learners discover how via the acquisition of a new language they create their subjectivity in new ways. It is this blind spot that the articles on the theme of this number shed light on in various ways, and which is a challenge to teaching in practice.

Have an enjoyable read!
The editors

SOFIE PALUDAN

Language teaching targeted at multilingual learners

[Målrettet sprogundervisning til flersprogede elever]

Abstract

This article presents 'Københavns Private Gymnasium', a new upper secondary school in Copenhagen that opened in 2011. Most of its students grow up as at least bilinguals, and they use several languages every day. Their language education must be designed especially for this condition, which is unusual for Danish teenagers. The language teachers need to design their teaching to suit bilingual teenage learners, which requires the language teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge of language acquisition for this group. This has led to consultation of the experiences of others, including studies by Prof. Jim Cummins, which seem to confirm the view that the students should develop all their languages in upper secondary school. Furthermore, we have found support in the assumption that we would do right in recommending the students to specialise in languages rather than other school subjects. The article suggests that a linguistically well-equipped education may be an adequate tool in globalization, and that a shift of focus away from formal linguistic matters may need to be revised in order to enable the development of language awareness and language competences that are at a sufficient level for inhabitants of a globalized society.

The Multilingual Subject

[Det flersprogede subjekt]

Abstract

This is a shortened version of an interview that Claire Kramsch has given to the journal of the American association of teachers of German. She speaks about her book *The Multilingual Subject*, and her intentions with it. For Kramsch, language learners are individuals with bodies, emotions, histories and hopes for the future. Language is more than lexicon and structures; it has aesthetic qualities such as sound, rhythm and poetry. Learning a language is dependent on which emotions – positive or negative – learners associate with the language, and how it sounds in their ears. Through our language we form our subjectivity, not only through the first language, but also through the second language and the foreign languages we learn later in life. Learning a new language is a new chance for subjective change, for becoming what we would like to be. Kramsch emphasizes that she is not introducing a new concept of teaching that can be transformed into materials and methods, but an approach to teaching that also involves the subjectivity of the teacher

VÉRONIQUE SIMON

Acquisition, loss, dreams:

(Re)construction of identity through language autobiographies

[Læring, tab, drømme. Identitetsdannelse gennem sprogselvbiografier]

Abstract

This article aims to present and briefly analyse language autobiographies (LAs) written by 17 foreign students at Uppsala University during Spring 2011. The type of LA that constitute this corpus, and which may be compared to the biography included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, stresses the non-evaluative aspect. The texts written by the students are analysed according to different topics: Content as well as narrative aspects (openings, chronology, for example) are taken into account, exposing some of the main concerns expressed by the students: emotions, language learning in formal and informal contexts, and the construction of individual or social identities through language learning.

KAREN-MARGRETE FREDERIKSEN

Finding your voice in Danish

[At finde sin stemme på dansk]

Abstract

It is a general experience of foreigners in Denmark that Danes and other speakers of Danish tend to switch to English when the foreigners try to use and practise their Danish. In this article, I focus on foreign knowledge workers working at Danish universities and how they experience finding their voice in Danish in an environment where English is frequently used.

At CIP, Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use, we are developing a format for Danish courses aimed at foreign knowledge workers. Central to the development of the course is how to make it possible for the participants to practise their Danish and have a voice in Danish outside the classroom. I discuss different reasons why people switch to English when speaking with learners of Danish and the implications it may have, both for the learners as well as for the linguistic environment in general. Moreover, I provide ideas on how to develop and implement strategies on the part of the foreign colleague and on the part of the Danish speaking colleagues. The responsibility to learn Danish lies with the knowledge worker from abroad. There can be no doubt about that, but management as well as colleagues and Danish speakers in general have a responsibility to create a linguistic environment that makes it possible and acceptable for the Danish learner to speak Danish from the beginning of their learning process without everyone switching to English right away.

MICHAEL SVENDSEN PEDERSEN

Subjectivity on the periphery

[Subjektivitet i periferien]

Abstract

Within the last decade, an increasing amount of research has demonstrated that learning a language is not only about the acquisition of communicative competence but is a social practice in which learners negotiate linguistic meaning, social position and identity (Norton 2000). This raises the question of how communicative task-based language teaching can be made to include learners' personal experience of being L2 learners and empower them "to think for themselves" and "speak for themselves" (van Lier 2004). By means of an analysis of data from a communicative classroom with adult learners of Danish as a second language I demonstrate how the learners in a task on "neighbour talk" interactively reproduce a communicative task-based language teaching format at the expense of their own personal experience of being rebuffed and positioned as non-Danish L2 speakers. I end the article by suggesting how the institutionalised learning culture can be changed in such a way that the communicative activities can be based on learners' authentic experiences.

JESSE-LEE COSTA DOLLERUP AND
TANYA LINDKVIST

The Art of Learning Language

What happens when language learning moves outside the classroom and into the museum?

[Kunsten at lære sprog -- Hvad sker der, når sproglæring flytter ud af klasseværelset og ind på museet?]

Abstract

The Art of Learning Language was an inter-disciplinary collaboration project between Sorø Museum of Contemporary Art, Slagelse Language Centre and Alfabeta Publishing (started in 2012). The project focused on developing offers of teaching, and teaching materials, for adult second-language learners through the application of art as a language-teaching tool during museum workshops using experiential and sensory-based didactic approaches. The collaboration has also resulted in the publication of an art-based Danish language teaching textbook. Drawing on principles and methodology from the fields of socio-cognitive and social constructivist learning, the workshops sought to develop students' communicative competencies and facilitate a language-learning environment which focused on strengthening students' self-confidence and sense of identity in the target language, fostering motivation to learn.

Acting as a platform for linguistic, intellectual and intercultural exchange, the museum served as an intermediary environment between the classroom and the outside world, facilitating active participation in democratic processes such as protest and debate. In highlighting community norms, values and controversies through exhibitions and collections, the museum provided language learners with a culturally-nuanced, experience-based language context, fostering a more profound understanding of linguistic terms and the target-language culture.

KIRSTEN L. KOLSTRUP

The ideal self and motivation in second language learning

[Det ideelle selv og motivation i andetsprogslæringen]

Abstract

This article studies the complexity of second language (L2) learning, exploring the case of Mulenga, a Zambian woman who moved to Denmark to marry a Danish man. It focuses on her narratives and experiences in multiple contexts, both in- and outside the classroom, conducting an analysis that builds on Dörnyei's (2009) concept of the 'L2 Motivational Self System'. The findings reveal a self-discrepancy between Mulenga's 'ideal self', namely her hopes of a better life with a romantic man from the idealized West, versus her 'actual selves', the lived realities after 10 months in Denmark. This self-discrepancy is linked to her motivation in the L2 classroom, which is shaped by a complex interplay of factors such as teaching approach, learner history and experiences outside it. This paper illustrates how global trends of marriage migration relate to L2 learning, arguing that L2 motivation extends far beyond the confines of the classroom.

ELINA MASLO

Multilingual subjects at Danish language schools

[Flersprogede subjekter på Danskuddannelsen]

Abstract

This article focuses on a new target group of learners at Danish language schools: experienced learners, knowledge workers who have come to Denmark for study and for work. These people both have long educational backgrounds and know many languages that they use in different ways in different contexts. They have experiences with learning languages which they also use while learning a new language. The article argues that these people possess some competencies that make them better learners, and which will help them to face future challenges. In a pilot project (2011-2013) inspired by Claire Kramsch's work with *The Multilingual Subject* (2009), as well as Phil Benson and David Nunan's *Learner´ stories. Difference and Diversity in Language Learning* (2004), a number of life-historical interviews were conducted with students who belonged to this new target group. A ground-breaking learning story of a Rumanian student is chosen in the article with the aim to raise a discussion about what kind of learning spaces have the potential to promote multilingual language learning and especially *learning through languages* – a competence that is needed for the future.

CHRISTINA HELLESHØJ, HANNA NIEMANN AND
LISBETH EGEROD

Test in Danish 1 Oral, Part 2

A test with consequences

[Prøve i Dansk 1 mundtlig del, Delprøve 2 – En prøve
med konsekvenser]

Abstract

In this article we look at the quality of the oral part of the Danish
language test called 'PD1'. The test measures Danish language profi-
ciency at the Common European Framework Reference level B1. This
test serves two purposes: On the one hand, it constitutes the final
exam concluding the 3-year Danish language course for immigrants
with little or no education. And on the other hand, passing this test
is necessary in order to fulfil the language requirements for obtain-
ing permanent residence rights in Denmark. As such, the test is part
of the gate-keeping process with potential social consequences for
the test taker. For this reason, the quality of the test is of some impor-
tance. We find that the focus on test reliability outweighs other
equally important aspects of the test, such as its authenticity, inter-
activity and backwash effect, thus jeopardizing the overall validity
of the test.

HELLE LYKKE NIELSEN

The language teacher as curator

[Sproglæreren som kurator]

Abstract

The large quantities of easily accessible on-line materials on the Internet, free dictionaries, translation programmes etc. make new demands on language teachers today. Instead of primarily spending time searching for relevant materials that may further foreign language learning, teachers in post-modern digital society must be able to navigate among large quantities of texts and topics, and scaffold them adequately. The article compares the new function of the language teacher with that of the museum curator, who designs learning scenarios by selecting, validating and assembling materials, thereby creating learning spaces in which language learners may make discoveries on their own. The good language teacher may act as a curator both in relation to contents and connections between them, and the article predicts that the role as curator will increase in importance as language learning is transformed into individualised processes within the framework of lifelong learning.