Emergent literacy instruction:
the continua of biliteracy among recently immigrated adolescents
in Sweden

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Content

1. Background
2. Previous research
3. Purpose and research questions
4. Theoretical perspectives
5. Method
6. Presentation of one of my articles

Background

- Increase of young immigrants to Sweden

- 16-19 years old - Schooling in language introductory groups in order to attain a degre for upper secondary school (*Språkintroduktion*)

- Limited or no previous schooling experience (USA: SLIFE or SIFE)

- The overarching aim of my thesis is to investigate the education and development of emergent literacy for these students

Why focus on this group of students?

- Urgent need for in-service education for many teachers on how to teach beginners (especially adolescents) in reading and writing (Skolverket, 2016b).

- Some international studies have focused on this particular group of students: Freeman et al (2001); Bigelow (2010); Bigelow & King (2014); De Capua et al (2009; 2011) ; Brown, Miller, and Mitchell 2006); Bartlett (2013); Wedin (2012, 2013, 2015)

… but more knowledge is needed (Young-Scholten, 2015; Brown et al 2006: Tarone, 2008).

A challenge – to avoid a deficit perspective (Bigelow & Vinogradov 2011)

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the students engage in the literacy practices of the instruction and how they are supported by their teachers.

Theoretical perspectives on literacy

<u>Literacies as social and interactive practices</u>
Barton (2007); Street (1984); Hornberger (1989); Martyn Jones & Jones (2000); Freebody & Luke, (1990); Wallace (1992); Janks (2009; 2010); Gee (2015); Scribner & Cole; Heath (1983); Cazden & Kalantis, m.fl. 1996; Kress (2014)

Definitions of literacy

- *Literacy* - the ability to handle and relate to written (or oral) and multimodal texts

- Literacies - social practices, literate activities that might vary for different individuals in different situations (New literacy studies, Critical literacy, Multiliteracies, Transnational literacies)

- Emergent literacy: basic literacy or functional literacy (UNESCO 1958; 1978)

OECD's definition of functional literacy

"A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development." (OECD, 2019)

Literacy according to the Global monitoring report (UNESCO 2005:15)

'These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.'

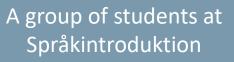# Education for all – global monitoring report (2006)

- Literacy is a right and a key to other rights

- There are many understandings and definitions of literacy, couched in terms of skills (e.g. reading, writing and calculating), practices (the uses of literacy) and transformation (personal, social and political)

- Literacy is best viewed as a continuum of skills rather than a simple dichotomy between 'literate' and 'illiterate'

A group of students at Språkintroduktion

Method: why etnographic approach?

Ethnographic studies are useful to

- Describe and understand the complex processes of a classroom culture (Walford, 2009; Willis & Trondman, 2000)

- Collect first-hand information about what people do and say in particular contexts (Hammersley, 2006).

- Take the other person's point of view (Walford 2008)

- Point out power relations in different cultures (Pierides, 2010; Willis & Trondman, 2000).

Method: study with ethnographic approach

- I follow one group for one school year (17/18)

- 13 students from Somalia, Afghanistan and the Gambia,

- one experienced teacher, "Elisabeth"

- language tutors of Farsi and Somali, "Mohammed"

Data collection

- Field notes and audio recordings during lessons (in total 165 hours)

- Field conversations with teachers and students

- Interviews with students (individually or in pairs, with or without an interpreter, starting with colouring of language silhouettes (Busch, 2012)

- Written and oral student production

Data collection: participant observation

•Participate for a longer period, but avoid to "go native"

"The essence of ethnography is the tension between trying to understand people's perspective from the inside while also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly (…)" (Hammersley 2006, s. 11)

•Theoretically informed ethnographic studies (Willis & Trondman 2000, s.6) – abductive method

•"Conceptual memos" (Heath & Street 2008) to find recurrent patterna in the data

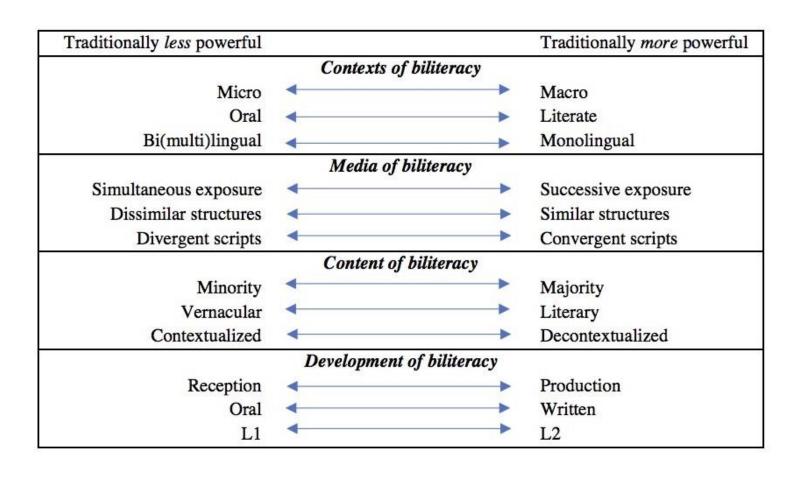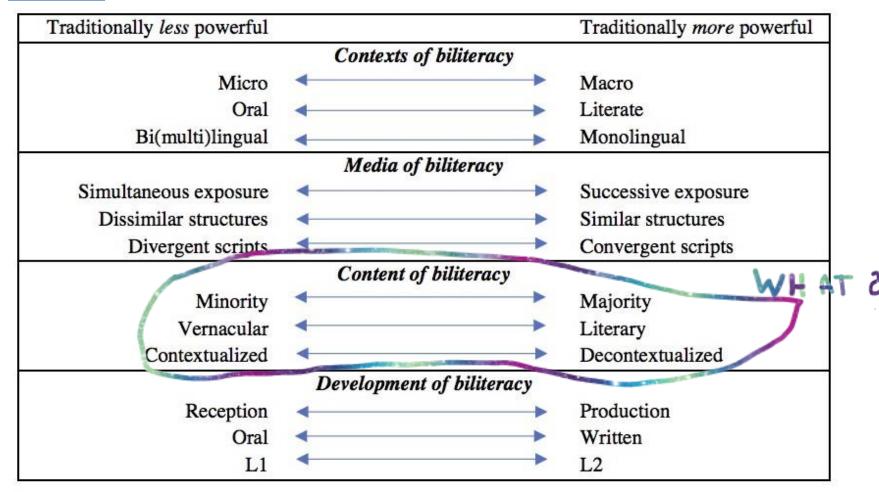•*Sentizising concepts* – hitta "ett mönster i vardagsväven" (2000:7).

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The continua of biliteracy
(Hornberger & Skilton Sylvester 2003)

Traditionally *less* powerful		Traditionally *more* powerful
Contexts of biliteracy		
Micro	⟷	Macro
Oral	⟷	Literate
Bi(multi)lingual	⟷	Monolingual
Media of biliteracy		
Simultaneous exposure	⟷	Successive exposure
Dissimilar structures	⟷	Similar structures
Divergent scripts	⟷	Convergent scripts
Content of biliteracy		
Minority	⟷	Majority
Vernacular	⟷	Literary
Contextualized	⟷	Decontextualized
Development of biliteracy		
Reception	⟷	Production
Oral	⟷	Written
L1	⟷	L2

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WHAT 2

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How?

Results 1

Moving along the content of biliteracy

Previous experiences - knowledge

- The teacher is holding up laminated slips with geographical names: "Sweden? Is that a country or a continent? How about the Gambia? Who's from the Gambia? Is that a country or a continent?" Elisabeth has cut out miniature pieces shaped like countries and attached them to the whiteboard. Zubeyr is asked to put them in the right location on the map. (Translation of field notes 20170919)
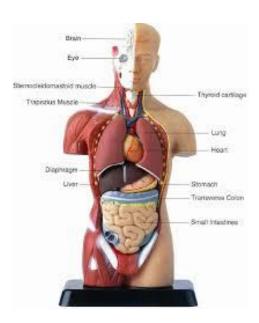
The immediate surroundings and excursions

- 'What's this river outside the window called?' The teacher loftily raises her eyebrows and sweeps her hand in a movement of nonchalance at the window. The students give the correct answer in a choir. 'You see', she's turning towards me speaking so that the class can hear her. 'These students don't just say "water", but they know the name of the river.' (Translation of field notes 20170926)
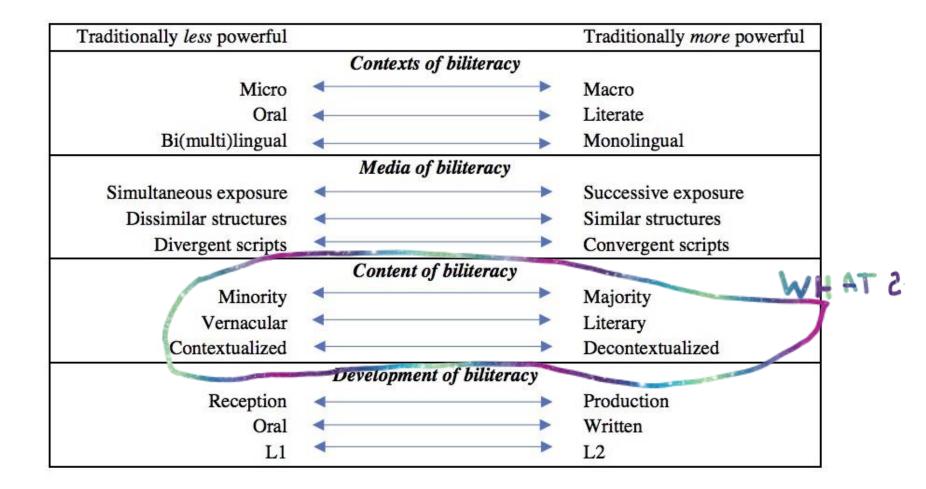
Starting from concrete objects

Encouraging a Literary language

- Can you repeat after me? "The skeleton holds the body upright." You should repeat this even when you go to bed at night. She's showing the function of the skeleton with help of Balqis scarf which is "standing" on its own supported by a ruler. (Translation of field notes 2018-02-22)

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WHAT 2

Results 2

Moving along the development of literacy

(https://www.kompetansenorge.no)

L1-L2

- Mohammed explains the subject of Social Sciences in Somali, mixed with Swedish. Suddenly he says in Swedish: "And what we will talk about now is Sweden". They seem to talk about the Swedish geography, cities, the capital Stockholm, inhabitants, the highest mountain and the rivers, filling in concepts in their booklet. I hear him say in Swedish: "there is no desert in Sweden". (Translation of field notes 20171115)

Other semiotic modes: Elisabeth's use of her body

- She stamps her foots in pace with the syllables and waves her arms graciously in a pseudo-oriental dance and keeps repeating 'An-tark-tis, An-tark-tis'. The class laughs. (2017-09-12)

Anna: So, you say that she's explaining well, she's repeating the same sentences two or three times. And what else does she do?

Hamid: Explains very well

Anna: Yes? In what way is she explaining?

Hamid: (laughing) Difficult!

Anna: Yes, it's difficult to explain [to me].

Hamid: On dance or [...] then many students understand. Not just read two three times

(Translated interview from Swedish, Hamid, 2018-06-01)

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How?

Results 3

- *The realm of the beside: interpersonal relations in instruction*

Building relations

- They are talking about what the persons in the photos look like. "Are they smiling or laughing? What's this called?" asks Elisabeth. "A jetty", some students respond. "Wow!" She looks impressed by their knowledge. "Look here now" (pointing at the whiteboard). [---] "They talk about the streets, the jetty, people, water. [---] "Here come three pretty girls," Elisabeth says while walking in a 'feminine' way, moving her hips. The class laughs. "Everybody is happy, they have nice shoes, nice boots, nice dresses, striped and patterned. Right, Adam? Aren't they pretty?' (Translation of field notes 20170926)

Affection 1

- Samia: Teacher, today we finish at 11?

- Elisabeth: Yes, I was going to tell you now. But I was thinking maybe I shouldn't tell you, so that we could be alone here all day. You know, I am so fond of you and I want to spend many hours with you. She's pretending to cry. Elisabeth sad, says Zubeyr. Yes! She's nodding confirmatively. (Translation of field notes 2018-01-25)

Affection 2

- Elisabeth: Now I want you to copy the homework for Wednesday.

- Zubeyr: that's good, very cleaver teacher. I love you! Oh! Elisabeth looks happy and touched. Looks towards me: So, I come here in the morning and am told that I am good and that the students love me. Say it one more time! One more time! Laughter. But you know Zubeyr, I think it's because I love you too! (Translation of field notes 2017-10-10)

Discussion:

- Ethnographic insights + interviews with the students - Movement along the scales of the intersecting continua of the *content* and *development* of biliteracy,

- Not only a *majority*, *literary* and *decontextualized* content, and a development of biliteracy towards *written production* in the *majority* language…

- …but also room for *minority*, *vernacular* and *contextualized* content in *oral* and *L1* forms, where also *reception* and multimodal meaning making is valued.

- This movement to the left of the scales seems to give the students the understanding, motivation, and security that they need to be able to move to the right on the scales, but they also have a value of their own.

What are the literacy practices here?

- Not only about writing and reading in the traditional sense, but about using a variety of interacting modes.

- Permits the students to use their strengths and resources, which can support their agency within the school system and the set curriculum

- Motivates them to engage with the norms of educational institutions (Canagarajah 2013, 9).
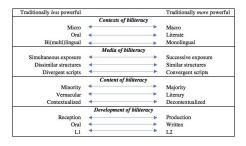
- Interpersonal relations seem important in this process

Potentials for Learning?

- The back and forth movement on the continua seems to carry a potential for learning

- The teachers' support, characterized by an effort to use the students' resources while simultaneously being quite demanding, seems to facilitate these iterative movements

- Importance of a tutor speaking the student's L1 is apparent in this context

The model?

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- The *continua of biliteracy* helps illuminate that contextualizing new knowledge and making content concrete renders the processes of educational institutions intelligible to students

- Helps to avoid a deficit perspective

- Interpersonal relations seem to facilitate the movements

- Through this mutually respectful relationship, Elisabeth pushes the students to expand their linguistic repertories

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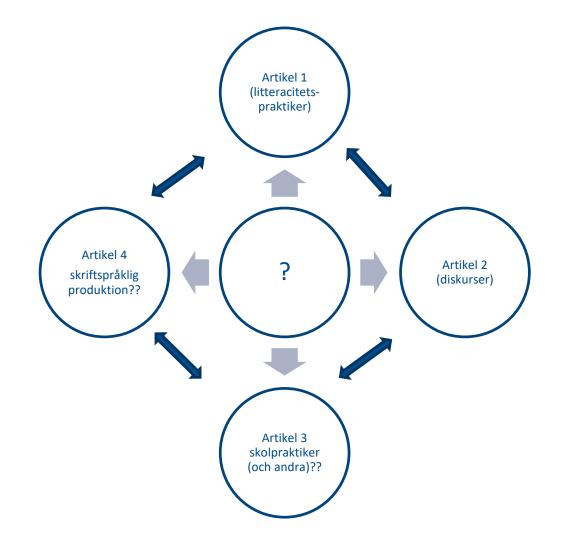
- Questions?

- Ideas of other research I should know about

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