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Monolingual-Bilingual-Multilingual Tensions in Higher Education

In the Nordic countries, university language policy and planning centers on balancing the use of the national language(s) vis-à-vis English (Hultgren, Gregersen & Thøgersen, 2017), whereas less attention has been paid to the roles played by other languages. The present study focuses on how space was negotiated for different languages in real time by a university language-policy committee while crafting a draft policy. Using an ethnographic discourse analytical approach (Barakos & Unger, 2016; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), interactional and textual data were collected over 10 months during committee negotiations. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Saldaña, 2015; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) in applying Ruiz's (1984) orientations to language: language-as-problem, language-as-right and language-as-resource, and Blommaert's (2007) concept of 'scale'. Analysis revealed that English, Swedish and other languages were variously positioned as problem or resource: English as problem in undergraduate teaching and in performing certain University ceremonies, and as resource in communicating research and in communication with international students, staff and external reviewers. Swedish was framed as problem in the domains of research communication and in communication with international staff, students and reviewers, but as resource on the institutional scale. Other languages, notably 'Scandinavian', were positioned as resources in restricted areas of University operations. Individual multilingualism was framed as resource, whereas institutional multilingualism was positioned as problem. Parallel-language use (Swedish and English) was framed as being the only solution to the tension between the Swedish Language Act's requirement of Swedish in legally binding documents and the requirement of English in the University's international operations. In sum, this presentation illustrates tensions between a Swedish University's need for monolingualism, parallel-language use and multilingualism on the individual and institutional scales, as well as languages named and identified as problems and resources on the institutional, research-discipline and individual scales.

Summary

This study focuses on how space was negotiated for different languages in real time during language-policy negotiations at a Swedish university. Tensions are revealed between the need for monolingualism (Swedish), parallel-language use (Swedish and English) and multilingualism (Swedish, English and other languages). Languages were variously positioned as problem or resource.