

# The Politics of Language Testing: Critical Perspectives on Assessment and Language Education for Migrants

## Abstracts of the contributions

### **Language Testing in Municipal Elder-Care Recruitment: Framing, Assessment and Governance**

*Jasmine Bylund & Clara Palm, University of Gothenburg*

An increasing number of municipalities in Sweden have introduced Swedish language tests in the recruitment of staff in elder care, yet little is known about how such testing is legitimised in municipal policy or how these tests operate as assessment instruments.

This presentation draws on an ongoing research project examining (1) how language testing is represented and legitimised in municipal policy, and (2) how municipal language tests are designed and how they align with principles of validity and fairness.

The first study analyses policy motions and preparatory documents from three municipalities using Bacchi's (2009) *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) approach. It examines how language testing is advanced as a solution to perceived language-related problems in elder-care recruitment. The findings show that testing is framed in relation to quality, safety, and patient security and is often presented as a taken-for-granted measure, with limited scope for alternatives.

The second study analyses three municipal language tests using Kunnan's (2004) Test Fairness Framework and a critical language testing perspective. The findings indicate limited alignment between test tasks and communicative practices, unclear or absent assessment criteria, and risks of construct-irrelevant bias, with little evidence of systematic validation or attention to fairness.

Overall, the findings highlight tensions between how language testing is framed in policy and how it operates as an assessment instrument, pointing to its role as a governance technique in a politically charged area of migration and welfare policy.

### **What Language Introduction Does: Practice Architectures and Educational Trajectories for Students with Slow Progression**

*Anna Winlund, University of Gothenburg*

Recently immigrated adolescents in Swedish upper secondary Language Introduction Programmes (IMS) form a heterogeneous group whose educational trajectories often diverge from policy intentions. Although IMS aims to support linguistic and academic development for transition into national programmes, only about one third of students become eligible (Skolverket, 2018). Many experience slow progression, prolonged stays, and limited access to academic subjects. This study examines how local IMS practices enable or constrain trajectories for students with slow progression within a

practice-based research collaboration between a school and the University of Gothenburg. Rather than focusing on individual backgrounds, the study explores how institutional arrangements, interprofessional collaboration, and everyday routines shape learning opportunities and transitions.

Theoretically, the study draws on Practice Architecture Theory (Kemmis et al., 2014), analysing how cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements structure practices. It is complemented by Biesta's (2015) educational functions—qualification, socialisation, and subjectification—to understand what these practices achieve educationally.

The study addresses three questions: which trajectories are enabled or constrained; which activities, understandings, and relationships shape them; and what tensions emerge in professional collaboration.

By integrating institutional and educational perspectives, the study aims to generate insights into how IMS can better fulfil its compensatory mission and support equitable educational transitions for newly arrived students.

### **References**

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Kemmis, S., J. Wilkinson, C. Edwards-Groves, I. Hardy, P. Grootenboer & Bristol, L. (2014). *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Singapore: Springer.

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## **Who understands what? Expectations, feedback, and participation in SFI Study track 1**

*Dimitrios Papadopoulos & Karin Lumsden Wass, University of Gothenburg*

This presentation addresses challenges in Municipal Adult Education in Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). Our specific focus is on Study track 1, which targets learners with limited prior exposure to formal education, facing significant challenges in navigating a new language, educational system, and social context. Previous research and policy reports highlight persistent issues of low completion rates and limited goal attainment within SFI, pointing to a need for deeper understanding of classroom practices and student experiences.

The presentation draws on a recently conducted project, in which classroom observations, group interviews with students and teachers, and reflective discussions with teaching staff were conducted. The analysis focuses on how lessons are structured, how participation

is facilitated, and how students interpret expectations and feedback in the learning environment.

By bringing together teacher and student perspectives, the findings indicate key factors influencing engagement, participation, and learning. Attention is given to feedback and the alignment between instructional design and students' needs and expectations, which challenge the often taken-for-granted routines of classroom practice.