

Swedish Language to Immigrants (SFI): Some Reflections on Motivation

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This paper looks at the recent debate regarding teaching the Swedish language to immigrants (SFI) in Sweden, reviewing recent articles in this area. Teaching Swedish to immigrants is seen as a key to integration and it is therefore important that it is effective and achieves its goal. However, there has been widespread criticism in terms of the results it achieves. Especially, many students interrupt their studies before they complete the highest course level. In 2010, a performance-based financial compensation system was introduced in order to make the students complete the courses quicker. As seen in many evaluation reports, this way of aiming at increasing the students' instrumental motivation has been inefficient, and the compensation system was eventually abolished. Although many factors for improvements are present in the discourse, when reviewing a number of articles it is striking that the most important factor for learning - integrative motivation - receives little attention. In order to improve SFI and the immigrants' language learning, there needs to be more research on the

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individuals' needs and their integrative motivation.

Key Words: Swedish as a Foreign Language, Swedish Language for Immigrants, Motivation, Language Attitude, Educational Psychology

1 . Introduction

In recent years Sweden has taken in more asylum seekers per capita than any other nation in Europe. In the first half year of 2014, Sweden was one out of four countries that had received most asylum applications (UNHCR, 2014). As a result, a vivid debate has started on how to integrate these asylum seekers into the Swedish society. Statistics Sweden is commissioned to study the development of efforts to integrate asylum seekers into Swedish society. One measurement of integration is how well immigrants are represented in the labour market. In Statistics Sweden's report from 2013, it concludes that the number of gainfully employed has increased between 2006 and 2011 and foreign-born persons represent 90 per cent of this increase. Although the number of gainfully employed foreign-born persons has increased, gainfully employed foreign-born persons as a share of total population has not changed appreciably. That is due to the fact that the total number of foreign-born persons has increased because of higher immigration. In 2011, 82 per cent of native-born people were gainfully employed while only 57 per cent of foreign-born were gainfully employed (Statistics Sweden, 2013).

Historically, Sweden had a very active immigration policy, and already in the 1960s the government took measures to facilitate the adaptation to the Swedish society. The integration should be built upon equality, freedom and cooperation. This was a shift from an assimilation policy towards an integration policy, where

a multicultural society was emphasized. The aim was to facilitate adaptation to the new society by supporting the individuals but not forcing them to abandon their original culture(The Swedish Government, 1997).

As a result, integration has become one of the most important issues in the political debate. Knowing the Swedish language is seen as key to integration since it helps the individual to better communicate and integrate. Therefore, there has been much focus on improving education of Swedish language for immigrants, SFI. The education has been much criticized from many points of views: didactics, structure, organization, teachers' knowledge etc. However, improvements in solely these factors might not improve the students' performance substantially. For example, changes in organization, financial support, teachers etc. might not improve the student's attitude towards the Swedish language dramatically, and therefore, the student's performance would not increase much. Instead, according to research on language learning, the most important factor for acquisition of a new language is motivation(Gardner & Lambert. 1972)

In this paper I am reflecting over a number of research articles, publications and reports on this matter, written by students and scholars linked to Swedish universities and government organizations. What are their approach to motivation, what has been focused on and what has been overlooked? When reviewing these articles, it is striking that the debate of Swedish language for immigrants has focused very much on the society's role, instrumental motivation and incentives, instead of examining intrinsic and integrative motivation among the immigrants.

2. Swedish Language Courses for Immigrants(SFI)

Swedish Language Courses for Immigrants (SFI) is a basic language programme for immigrants over the age of 16 who are registered in Sweden and

who lack basic knowledge of Swedish. All immigrants who meet these requirements have the right to participate. It comes to the municipality to arrange education in Swedish for the immigrants who are registered in the municipality. The syllabus states that the courses shall make the students develop a functioning language that can be used in practical everyday life – in work situations or societal life. The instruction should be adapted to the individual and the student should be able to combine it with other forms of education or employment. If the student is illiterate or has another writing system other than the Latin alphabet, the student should receive instruction in reading and writing.

The education is divided into three study routes: 1, 2 and 3, which are divided into courses A to D. The routes are adapted to the students' different background, where 1 is for those who have no experience of studying languages and 3 is for those already accustomed to studying. This means that a beginner can start in one of the study routes and it will be a beginning course. Thus, e.g. course B and C can be a beginning course or a continuation course. However, the requirements are the same for each course.

Course A corresponds to level A1-/A1 (Common European Framework of Reference for languages), course B corresponds to level A1/A2, course C corresponds to level A2/A2+ and course D corresponds to B1/B1+.

A student can complete the programme after respective study route, but the intention is that the student shall study up to course D. After completion the courses B, C and D there is a mandatory national test after which the student will get a grade.

In the latest decade SFI has received criticism from multiple sources. One of the main researchers on SFI, Marie Carlson, in a study published in 2002 she focuses on the educational form of SFI and what effects it implies for the students in practice. By conducting interviews with course members and analysing regulations, she scrutinizes the teaching and the course members' thoughts on the education.

Her thorough description of the Swedish school system points in one clear conclusion: the system has become homogeneous and uniform. She argues that there is no room for liberty of choice since the Swedish school system aims for equality by pre-assuming that all students have same necessary qualities and previous knowledge. The same situation goes for SFI, she argues. Both teachers and students describe this education form as “the only way”, where the right to education does not imply much of different options for the individual. Moreover, the discursive categorization of the individual does only allow a number of defined roles for the immigrants, while other roles are discarded. Carlson describes that among those immigrants there is an uncertainty about the classification notion “immigrant”. Some immigrants are working actively to get away from classifying themselves as immigrants, while others accept being classified as immigrants. This phenomenon leads to a discursive exclusion of the immigrants.

The school’s and the society’s view upon learning and knowledge has a top-down perspective and relates to a “Swedish welfare” approach. This leads to a disciplinarian attitude in education. This can also be noticed in the relation between the teacher and the student, where the teacher follows a Swedish template and has the right to define what is learning and knowledge. The students are looked upon as “traditional” and “subordinate”, while the Swedish society is considered as “modern” and “independent”. This hierarchy reduces the possibility for students to actively take part in the design of the curriculum and the courses as a whole.

The integration process should aim at introducing the immigrants to the Swedish society so that they can be a part of it, but according to Carlson it can be questioned whether this process is achieving its goals. Carlson argues that it can be discussed whether SFI leads to a border marker instead of a bridge to the life in Sweden. SFI bears the stamp of an outside perspective although the intention is to focus on the participant’s needs and qualifications. The teachers

often look upon the participants as children and the result has been that SFI educates Swedishness instead of the Swedish language.

The Swedish Agency for Public Management(2009) conducted a follow-up on those participants that begun their studies at SFI during the school year of 2004-2005. The result was proved rather disappointing in that many participants dropped out early. Approximately only one third of the participants obtained a pass on course D after the third school year. Two thirds had obtained a pass on at least one course.

With the new curriculum in 2003, it was made possible to get a grade after any of the courses. As a result, participants started to interrupt their studies after getting grade on a lower course level (A, B or C). During the school year of 2004-2005 approximately one tenth of all participants chose to leave SFI after getting a grade on a lower course level. 21 per cent of these participants tried to continue studying at SFI, but did not complete the following level. Instead they dropped out.

Approximately half of all participants interrupted their studies before they obtained pass on course D. That includes all participants who did not complete course D, or those who are still registered at the course after three school years. The reasons for two thirds of all interruptions are not explained, meaning that the reasons for leaving are not shown in the statistics. This was the largest group of drop outs. However, it should be noted that the number of drop outs has decreased during the latest ten years.

According to statistics on employment the year after drop out, a considerable number of people seem to have found a job. The share of employed was higher among those who had dropped out by no specific reason than others who had dropped out from SFI.

This is certainly not an optimal outcome. The disperse results can be explained by the fact that different municipalities have different organizational structure and different approach to the education. Moreover, different

municipalities have different numbers of participants, finances, size of the municipality, and the participants' qualifications are disperse. All this combined may play a role in the results.

The Swedish Agency for Public Management argues that when elaborating organization and management of SFI the above-mentioned factors have not been taken into account, but is instead influenced by labour market politics and educational politics. This makes it difficult to come to any conclusions on which approach is best practice.

As mentioned above, the target for SFI is educational, however politics regarding integration and employment is influencing the operation considerably. Therefore, measuring target achievement is problematic. Since the participants after 2003 can get a grade in any of the courses and subsequently finish their studies also makes it difficult to measure achievement over time.

Despite these problems of evaluation the Swedish Agency for Public Management comes to the conclusion that the results are not satisfactory. For example, there is only one out of three participants who has worked according to the definition at least one hour in November one year after finishing their studies. The agency concludes that there is room for improvements, but does not mention the participants' motivation as a reason for improvement.

Reichenberg(2015) examined operations of a teaching centre in western Sweden. The focus was both on the teachers and on the students. It was an evaluation study based on surveys and interviews with both students and teaching personnel. The students were on average satisfied with the education and the teachers were on average satisfied with their situation at work.

Some interesting findings were revealed: the higher education the students had, the less individually adapted did they think the education was. This coincides with the results from Norlund Shaswar(2014) and partly with the results from Carlson(2002) and Lundgren(2005). In the report by Reichenberg the students' motivation is mentioned once, but used from a teachers' perspective: it is a

problem for the teachers to convey the benefit of the education for the students.

Norlund Shaswar(2014) also finds that the participants' experiences are not recognized. What she noticed was that when the students themselves felt that they wanted to learn something, their motivation increased. This also follows the theoretical framework presented by Masgoret & Gardner(2003). One example of this represents one of the participants in the study by Norlund Shaswar who had no interest in learning Swedish at all, and so he didn't.

Other findings in Norlund Shaswar's study were that the students' own experiences and identity often are made invisible in the class room. For example, the students' prior education is not always taken into account when students are placed together with other students.

Moreover, according to the students, teaching focus was not on the students' everyday life and practice. Instead focus was more on the students' writing and reading skills in the classroom in order to make them pass the exam. Therefore, what the students were learning was not applicable in their everyday life. Norlund Shaswar highlights that the education does not meet the students' instrumental motivation.

The role of the society and the role of the native citizens are one aspect that is easily neglected. In a study by Lundgren(2005), which ran for two years, 15 participants learning Swedish from illiterate level were studied. The purpose of the study was to learn about the participants' perceived situation in relation to their learning. In interviews with the participants – all women – they expressed that they felt inferior in relation to the Swedish culture. Their set of values, experiences and knowledge was not highly valued in Swedish cultural communities. The women felt marginalized in the society. All this together led to reduced learning for the participants.

The same results appeared in the dissertation made by Zachrisson(2014). The teachers in her study did not acknowledge the students' experiences, since the education was not connected to the social reality the students are living in. The

teachers considered them as being children and should be brought up to become Swedes, instead of adults having their own experiences and potential. The students were seen as victims of their social and cultural background and the society's duty is to save students from being victimized.

Franker (2011) confirms the results from Zachrisson(2014) in that it is crucial to show the participants dignity. Franker also emphasizes that it is critical not to infantilize the participants, which is something that she reckons that teachers do, especially in the alphabetization process. Furthermore, she points out that the use of the Swedish word *elev*, pupil, should not be used in regard to adult students.

Rosén(2013) ascertains the facts on the development of SFI and its discourses historically. She also looks at the categorizations and identity positions that are constructed and negotiated in SFI. Main focus is in categorizations and identity in relation to gender, language and national belonging. The study shows that there are shifts in the discourses, specifically in the description of the immigrant's role in society. During the 1960s, when SFI was in a phase of starting up, the immigrant was described and looked upon as a person in a vulnerable position, and it is the society's role to strengthen the immigrant's position in the society. At that time SFI was seen as a right for the immigrant and as a means to integrate in the society.

However, in the 1990s, focus in the discourse shifted to the complex of problems resulting from the immigrants' shortcomings, and especially in relation to the targets put by the society. In that period of time the immigrants themselves were depicted as responsible for problems such as segregation and alienation. It is the immigrants' inadequate knowledge in Swedish that creates problems, and the Swedish language is seen as a bridge to inclusion in the Swedish society. It is only when the immigrant fully knows Swedish that he or she can leave the exclusion and be fully integrated.

In the 2000s focus shifted once more, now that there is a desire to make immigrants enter the labour market and get a job. Learning Swedish became

more of a means to achieve this goal, rather than learning Swedish being the ultimate goal. The Swedish language is no longer seen as an instrument for becoming included in the society, but instead is seen as a way of making the immigrant more attractive in the labour market. Employment is also seen as a factor for improving the language. According to this discourse it is seen as inefficient to first learn the language at SFI and then enter the labour market. Immigrants who study at SFI are also perceived as a financial burden to the society, and it is therefore better to making the immigrant getting a job. In this latest discourse the immigrant is seen as a burden rather than a resource. This shift to a discourse of the society's perspective has probably reinforced the focus on instrumental motivation.

In a thesis by Ramlund Almkvist(2015), the author studied an integration project run by the municipality of Kalix. The project introduces newly arrived immigrants with limited education to the Swedish working life. The project combines introduction, guidance and teaching the Swedish language. This project gives an example of the discourse mentioned above. In the project the belief of learning the language by activating the immigrants in the working life is omnipresent. The project manager claims that it is not feasible to integrate the participants by schoolroom teaching – the participants must enter the working life. He asserts that repetitive cramming in a schoolroom is inefficient and demotivating for both students as well as teachers. The method of learning must be transformed.

All interviewed participants in the project emphasize that knowing the language is a key component to get a job, and vice versa – they have learnt the language by participating in the working life, which was made possible through this project. The participants stress that the most important outcome of the project was the fact that they learnt Swedish.

The participants agree that their learning of language and understanding of Swedish society mainly emanate from work experience. They support the project

since it is a way of getting acquainted with Swedes and understanding their thoughts. Some participants mention body language combined with verbal language at work as a way of developing their language skills. The project manager highlights the importance of the participants' different qualifications, knowledge and experiences. These factors form the basis of the individual activity plan. This also comply with the government's reform for immigrants' establishment in Sweden.

The results from this case study show that this new learning model leads to improvements of SFI, which is of utter importance in the integration process. The learning model in the project gave more opportunities for the newly arrived immigrants to enter the labour market by using a more efficient way of learning the language. All participants believe that this work-related way of learning the language has been much more efficient than by only studying the language at school. 14 out of 49 participants got jobs after completing the project, and they share the opinion that the project either has contributed to this or has been the main reason for them getting the job.

Although not mentioned in the case study, the results show that it is the participants' integrative motivation – the interaction with Swedes and the participants' own willingness to learn – that have played the most important role in learning the language. The everyday contact with Swedes, the possibility to practice and develop their language, has been essential in the learning process.

3. SFI Bonus

In order to stimulate students to complete the SFI programme quicker and enter the labour market earlier, the government introduced on the 1st of July 2010 financial compensation, in everyday speech called “SFI bonus”. It was a performance-based financial compensation, and a student could in general apply

for this performance bonus after completing courses B, C or D. After successfully completed course B the student could receive an amount of 6,000 SEK, after course C 8,000 SEK and after course D 12,000 SEK free of tax.

After less than four years after introduction this financial compensation was abolished. Engdahl & Åslund at The Swedish Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy(IFAU) published an evaluation report in 2012 on trial operations performed in randomly selected municipalities. The trial operations lasted from the 1st of July 2009 to 30th of June 2010 in 28 municipalities. The results did not indicate to have any significant general positive effects of participation rate in SFI. Nonetheless, in Stockholm municipality there was a tendency of higher participation rate in the long term, and more students chose to continue their education to more advanced performance bonus eligible courses.

In regard to learning outcomes more students in Stockholm completed the courses as a consequence of the financial compensation. Out of 100 newly arrived immigrants there were 3 more people than before who obtained a pass. The results were the same for males and females, but more significant for younger people than for those a bit older. The reason for these different effects are not fully understood, but one theory is that immigrants in Stockholm begin the courses earlier and therefore perceive the performance bonus more achievable for them. In other municipalities there were no effects after the introduction of financial compensation.

The introduction of financial compensation has been wildly debated in Swedish media. One criticism is that it is easier to acquire a new language if you have recent experience from studying. Moreover, the amount received is higher for courses directed towards those already accustomed to studying. According to many, this means that the bonus goes to those immigrants who already are highly motivated and have strong background in education in their home countries. This and other criticism levelled against SFI as a whole is seen

as the main reason to unsuccessful integration.

Many other studies conducted in recent years show the same results: financial remuneration is not effective as an incentive, it has only marginal effects on the students' motivation. Frantz (2010) examined the SFI bonus from motivational perspective. The study reveals that the idea behind the introduction of the SFI bonus was based on either obsolete or not empirically substantiated assumptions about the relationship between financial incentives and adults' motivation, which also imply an obsolete view on the human being and knowledge in general. In addition to this, Frantz argues that the introduction of the SFI bonus can be interpreted as a part of a social discourse on adults immigrants' motivation, meaning that the government views that there exists a group of unmotivated students, and the government's duty is to create motives. This in turn constitutes a sort of stigmatization of the immigrant group and shifts the motivation problem to the individual instead.

Moreover, Frantz claims that in research on second language learning there is no evidence supporting that the time limit of one year would be optimal for evaluating language acquisition. Instead, second language acquisition is a time consuming and complex process and diverse among students, depending on educational background etc. The study made by Frantz also confirms this to some extent.

Despite the fact that the study indicates that financial incentives can improve the students' motivation, the author herself questions the results from the study since the survey shows shortcomings in reliability, validity and generalizability. Some of the interviewed teachers in the survey points out that the SFI bonus can even have negative effect on achieving the goal at the appointed time, those students who lack the qualifications in the first place.

Fakhro(2011) conducted a survey in which she interviewed ten Arabic-speaking immigrants, participating in SFI and also seven people working at SFI or in related field. Her focus was on motivation in relation to social

allowance, the SFI bonus, meaningfulness and security. The respondents all had generally positive thoughts about the SFI bonus, but they did emphasize that the bonus is not completely fair, because of the different requirements students have, indicated above. They mention that students' purpose can be to getting money instead of acquiring the language. Some of the respondents argue that the bonus system stigmatizes the students. For most of the participants it is perceived as illogical and absurd that the bonus system would urge the students to study harder and finish their education earlier. This is also something that the interviewed professionals express.

Onkamo(2013) conducted a study to explore what factors have effect on students' motivation. This is one of the few studies that really deals with motivation and looks at both integrative and instrumental motivation. The respondents all express a will to "be part of the Swedish society". They want to be able to work, study, have Swedish friends, and actively take part of the Swedish life. Thus, integrative motivation is an important factor for these students. They are aware of the fact that it is hard to get Swedish friends and to fully understand the Swedish society if they don't know the Swedish language well.

They all pronounce a will to get a job. According to them, this is a strong motivation to learn Swedish. They reckon that you cannot find a good job without knowing Swedish, and the job should preferably correspond to the education they have from their home countries. The possibilities to make a career in Sweden increases their motivation.

Three of the respondents want to study further in Sweden. Thus, they want to acquire Swedish quickly. All respondents are generally positive about the SFI bonus, however, none of them is directly affected by the it. They think it's a good possibility to get some extra money, but only one of the respondents says that it has affected his motivation to study harder.

The study approaches both instrumental and integrative motivation, and the

author's conclusion is that the chance of getting a job is the main motivation for the students. Consequently, their instrumental motivation is strong. However, one should bear in mind that in this very study all respondents except one had been studying Swedish in their home country before coming to Sweden. They also had connections to Sweden before moving, which can imply that they already had good knowledge of the Swedish culture and society.

Grip(2010) discusses conformity and dis-conformity in integration and what notions the Swedish integration policy is based upon. She examined the integration policy of four Swedish municipalities and had interviews with politicians, officials and immigrant women who were active in different associations. Her results show that many immigrants experience problems in getting involved in the Swedish society and problems in acquiring the Swedish language, i.e. being accepted in Sweden. Other respondents in the survey were saying that they didn't feel like immigrants any longer. A common idea on the differences between immigrants and Swedes and expressed by the respondents is that the Swedish woman is independent and active, while the immigrant woman is subordinate to the man.

The municipality workers expressing their views in the survey point out the importance of employment for integration. Those immigrants who haven't been in Sweden for a long time emphasize employment and knowing the language as key factors for being integrated in the society, while those immigrants who have been in Sweden longer argue that it is not enough having a job and knowing the language in order to be integrated in the Swedish society. Many immigrants realize that it is very difficult to get a job in Sweden nowadays, even if you have excellent Swedish and a university degree.

Many interviewees articulate that immigrants' motivation is something much more effective than the initiatives made by the municipality. According to the interviewees, the motivation is directly linked to language acquisition and possibilities to getting a job. They also express that it is utterly demotivating not

to get a job quickly and being locked out of the labour market. Many immigrants are reduced to low-wage occupation, which is not corresponding to the education they have. One reason to this suggested by the author is that immigrant women are more motivated to work which in turn makes them take the first job offered.

4. What more needs to be done?

When going through the studies above many reflections can be made on the education of Swedish for immigrants. We can see that there are some problems in the education and many possible reasons for this have been mentioned earlier. The analysis revolves around how to increase the turnout of students quicker so that they can reach the labour market.

The studies indicate that if motivation is in the discourse at all, the focus is on instrumental motivation. Lack of motivation is recognized as a problem for the society as a whole and for the teacher, not necessarily for the student. The logical consequence is to improve instrumental motivation, and therefore, financial incentives were introduced. Although financial compensation can be effective in theory, the cases studied above did not unambiguously point in that direction. Other forms of instrumental motives are prevalent in the students' everyday life but have not been applied on the education.

Moreover, introducing financial compensation as a means to make the students study harder can also be interpreted from the students' point of view as if they were unmotivated. This way the bonus can be perceived as a stigma and alienate instead of being a means of inclusion into society. For the students, this can instead be demotivating.

The students themselves express that what drives them to study harder and learn faster is their integrative motivation, and this is also supported by science

within this area. When students have an intrinsic wish to learn, they learn quicker and more effectively. This has been exemplified by a number of studies in this paper. This can involve getting to know Swedes, “be part of the Swedish society” or having a genuine desire to learn the language for the sake of it.

SFI has both labour market politics and educational politics targets – higher employment rate and increased integration. In order to reach these targets, it would be desirable with more research on the intrinsic motives among immigrants to learn Swedish. In the discourse there has been a societal perspective, where the motives for teaching emanate from the society, instead of examining whether the motives of the immigrants and the society might coincide.

When analysing the studies discussed in this paper we can see a pattern where successful learners’ own motives have not been fully explored and explained. Clearly, much more remains to be investigated in this field in order to improve SFI. The findings of this current study have merely scratched the surface.

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<국문초록>

이주민을 위한 스웨덴어 교육(SFI): 동기부여에 대한 고찰

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본 논문은 ‘이주민을 위한 스웨덴어 교육(SFI)’과 관련된 스웨덴 내의 최근 논쟁을 살펴본다. SFI는 이주민의 스웨덴 사회로의 통합에 결정적으로 중요한 요소로 간주되므로 이것이 효과적으로 수행되는 것이 매우 중요하다. 그러나 그 성과와 관련하여 광범위한 비판이 있어왔다. 특히 많은 학생들이 최상위 코스 수준을 달성하기 전에 학습을 중단한다. 2010년에 학생들로 하여금 학습 코스를 더 빨리 완료하도록 고무하기 위해 성과기반 재정적 보상 제도가 도입되었다. 그러나 많은 평가보고서에서 나타난 바와 같이, 학생들의 학습동기를 강화하기 위한 이 제도는 비효율적인 것으로 드러나 이 제도는 결국 폐지되었다. 비록 학습동기 개선과 관련된 많은 요인들이 논의되고 있지만, 학습동기 개선과 관련된 가장 중요한 요인인 사회통합 동기는 거의 주목받지 못해왔다. SFI의 성과를 개선하기 위해서는 개인들의 요구와 사회통합 동기부여에 관한 연구가 더 많이 필요하다.

주제어: 외국인인을 위한 스웨덴어, 이주민을 위한 스웨덴어,
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논문 접수일: 2016.11.25. 심사 완료일: 2016.12.13. 게재 확정일: 2016.12.20.