

Doing Ethnography Multilingually in Superdiversity

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Doing ethnography in *superdiversity* (Vertovec, 2007) leads the researcher into settings where the use of several languages is necessary for the successful research design and practice. My paper will describe and analyze different “degrees” of “bilingualness” and “biculturalness” I as a researcher have experienced while doing ethnography among multilingual Sweden Finnish adolescents attending a bilingual Sweden Finnish school in Sweden.

While doing ethnography in “my own” Sweden Finnish context, I share and understand both the languages (Finnish and Swedish) and the cultures of my informant group. This has many advantages: I gain good linguistic relationship with the group and share the same cultural capital(s) and heritage(s), which brings me closer to the informants and allows a successful research dialogue. It also has advantages in understanding and analyzing the material. Mutual to me and my informants is also -to some extent- the shared understanding(s) of both being an “immigrant” as well as being a member of a national minority group in Sweden. Yet, adolescents are often not just bilingual but multilingual. Doing ethnography in superdiversity has also led me into research contexts where my (basic) command of additional foreign languages has been useful. This occurs in situations where I shadow my Spanish-Finnish-Swedish speaking informants to their homes and leisure time settings where also Spanish is being used and where I can (to a limited) degree understand what is being said but I no longer have access to the full cultural reading of the setting and material. Doing ethnography in superdiversity has also led me into settings where I like to call myself as an “illiterate” ethnographer who neither has access to some of the languages nor to the cultures. This situation occurs when I shadow my Bengali/Arabic-Finnish-Swedish speaking informants to their homes and leisure time settings where also Arabic or Bengali is being used. In these situations successful research is to a great extent dependent on help from translators and/or interpreters which naturally has an effect in me role as an ethnographer.

By using a varied sociolinguistic ethnographic material I will demonstrate and analyze the different “degrees” of bilingualism and biculturalness I have experienced while doing ethnography multilingually and –culturally and their impact on the research design, practice and outcome. I also aim to contribute to the methodological and analytical development of the research field of doing research multilingually. My study is part of the transnational research project “Investigating Discourses of Inheritance and Identity in four Multilingual European Settings” (IDI4MES) funded by the European Science Foundation via HERA - Humanities in the European Research Area.

Vertovec, S. (2007): Superdiversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, p. 1024-1054.