

# Ethnicity and Gender in Textbook and Practice: Language Courses for Immigrants in Sweden.

Marie Carlson  
Center for Cultural Studies,  
Goteborg University, Sweden.  
[marie.carlson@kultur.gu.se](mailto:marie.carlson@kultur.gu.se)

EMIGRA Working Papers núm. 61  
ISSN 2013-3804



## Resumen/ Abstract

The contribution at hand here deals with conceptions of gender, ethnicity and views of knowledge in textbooks and practice/ interaction within Swedish Language Courses for Immigrants (SFI) – adult education. Twelve Turkish course participants and some educators have been interviewed. The empirical data also consist of field notes and analysis of some widespread textbooks and diverse documents about and for the school. 'Turkish' and 'Swedish' perspectives are confronted in conversations in different contexts. A discourse analysis approach is applied within the ethnographical framework. The analysis shows how textbooks, other materials and the teaching are positioned in a grid of discursive practices (cf. Gergen 2001, Norton & Kelleen 2004, Popkewitz 1998). They altogether express and interact with dominating values, norms and ways of thinking during different periods in Swedish society. For example the values and images conveyed to the SFI-participants during some periods, almost in a spirit of upbringing, deal with becoming good workers, clients and students – and not least, good “democratic” citizens in a “Swedish” sense (cf. Carlson 2001). Anorm of “Swedish” gender equality is also evoked in the SFI-education, which both teachers and course participants reflect and act upon (cf. Wheterell & Gallois 2003). In narrating the SFI-studies, the Turkish women, relate their experiences to both “Turkish” and “Swedish” discourses about family and identity (cf. Davies & Harré 1990, Kemuma 2000, Norton 2000, Shotter 1993, Talja 1999).

However within the educational institution being a SFI-student is more discussed with the concept of immigrant in Swedish culture, where the “Swedish” is a norm. Ideas are constructed of both “the Swedish” and “the others” in mutual encounters – among both course participants and educators (cf. Hall 1992, Fournier 2002, Mohanty 1991, Parati 1997, Xavier de Brito & Vasques 1998). The SFI educators embrace their visions related to the 'Swedish model' characterized by a rational Enlightenment concept with strong beliefs in modernity and secularization. By talking about the SFI-education as a 'modern' practice of knowledge, the educators themselves become representatives of 'modernity' in relation to 'the others'. But the course participants are also a part of a powerful discourse of modernity – both in the present and in the past.

---

## Palabras clave / Keywords: gender, ethnicity, textbooks

Cómo citar este artículo: **CARLSON, M.** (2007) “Ethnicity and Gender in Textbook and Practice: Language Courses for Immigrants in Sweden.” *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 61. Accesible en línea: [www.emigra.org.es](http://www.emigra.org.es). Descarga realizada el (dd-mm-aaaa)

How to quote this paper: **CARLSON, M.** (2007) “Ethnicity and Gender in Textbook and Practice: Language Courses for Immigrants in Sweden.” *EMIGRA Working Papers*, 61. Available on line: [www.emigra.org.es](http://www.emigra.org.es). Last retrieved on (dd-mm-yyyy)

Este texto se presentó como comunicación al II Congreso Internacional de Etnografía y Educación: Migraciones y Ciudadanías. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, 5-8 Septiembre 2008



## ***Ethnicity and Gender in Textbook and Practice: Language Courses for Immigrants in Sweden***<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Both the general media interest, and that of educational research, for issues of cultural meaning, discursive practises and subject/object positions have increased in the past few years, particularly with respect to issues of social class, gender, ethnicity and cultural diversity (cf. Antaki & Widdicombe 1998, Davidson 1996, Holmes & Meyerhoff 2003, Mac an Ghail 1998, Norton 2000, Skeggs 1997). This is not the case though when it comes to the content and use of textbooks in everyday life at school – especially not in a Swedish context where this research takes place. Yet textbooks, among other educational texts being used and produced in the school context, contribute to the construction of gender, class, ethnicity and other kinds of social categorizations, within as well as outside school (cf. Apple 1999, Narrowe 1998, Popkewitz 1998, Schiffauer & Sunier 2004). This paper is related to a project, which through three case studies aims at studying the construction of social categories in and through the use of textbooks and other educational texts by means of ethnographic research methods including a discourse analysis approach (cf. Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999). In this paper I more specifically want to discuss some images and values related to gender, ethnicity and views of knowledge in textbooks and practice within Swedish Language Courses for Immigrants, SFI, also called ‘Swedish For Immigrants’. It is a voluntary course, which aims to provide adult immigrants with a basic knowledge of Swedish language and Swedish society. SFI should be ‘a bridge to life in Sweden’, the official documents tell us (SKOLFS 1994: 28).<sup>2</sup> But what kind of images about Sweden and ‘the Swedish’ are presented in current textbooks and other teaching texts? And in what way is this articulated and who is allowed to speak? What norms, values, and views are prominent? I shall reflect upon these topics through some widely used textbooks and diverse documents about and for the school and through data from interviews and conversations with 12 Turkish course participants and their SFI teachers.<sup>3</sup> The 12 course participants are all women, between 22 and 30 years old. Most of them migrated to Sweden in order to marry Turkish men living there.

### **Teaching material as discursive documents of their times**

Various teaching material can be seen as an integral part of a network or ‘alloy’ of discursive practices, in which educational thinking and interaction with the surrounding society are expressed (Popkewitz 1998: 104). When analysing a number of frequently utilised textbooks from the very start of the SFI course in the 1960s up to the present, one can, for example, follow the history of immigration as well as conditions on the

<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this article, with another title, is published in *Education in ‘Multicultural’ Societies. Turkish and Swedish Perspectives*. Eds. Marie, Carlson, Fatma Gök & Annika Rabo. (2007). Stockholm: Transactions Vol 18, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul.

<sup>2</sup> From January 1st, 2007 a new educational law was promulgated, which this essay does not analyse.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the results and empirical data are taken from a doctoral thesis (Carlson 2002).



labour market. This is also true of the guideline documents.

Something about the authority of the text should also be noted – the writing conventions, the ways of giving an account in official documents as a genre, to which teaching aids also adhere, show an almost expected ‘objectivity’ and logically consistent reasoning. Such a tradition of writing invites a kind of ‘apolitical common sense’, a kind of reading without questioning (cf. Thavenius 1995). The textbooks, like the official documents, imply that there is a prevailing consensus about the statements being made, and that these are written about in a comparatively impersonal style, which strengthens the impression of neutrality. In addition, no real author is discernible in the printed text, which provides an anonymity, which enhances the normative impact. The textbooks consequently appear as bearers of the prevailing view on knowledge and set the agenda: “The textbook is ‘made’ into a real thing that sets the pace, provides the criteria of learning, and defines the formulas by which one arrives at the truth” (Popkewitz 1998: 104).

#### *An active working life – the 1960s*

When SFI education started in the 1960s it was mostly located in various study circles<sup>4</sup> (*studieförbund*), which often had good contacts with workplaces. This era was characterised by extensive labour immigration both to Sweden and to other countries in Western Europe. In the first textbook, which was published in a large edition in 1967, *Swedish for You – Textbook in Swedish as Second Language* (*Svenska för er – lärobok i svenska som främmande språk*, Higelin et al. 1967), the focus is clearly on an active working life. The engineer Pettersson who works at an architectural firm gets a monthly salary, whereas the welder Mr Wellander does piecework and gets his wages every Thursday. In drawings we can see the welder and the engineer working from Monday to Friday. On Saturday and Sunday we find the engineer Pettersson relaxing in a comfortable easy chair reading the newspaper, while Mr Wellander plays football on both days (ibid.: 24-25, 53-54). Ample space is provided for a discussion about protective regulations in the workplace and about trade union activities. The texts are very concrete, and we can follow people closely in their occupational roles. Also a comprehensive body of social information is included, among other things about health insurance benefits, ATP (the general pension supplement) and the employment agencies. At that time there were many jobs available, which often meant that most of the immigrants could start work straightaway without any specific education being required. Even if a company had to lay off employees temporarily, it was in general quite easy to get another job promptly, and that state of affairs is reflected in the textbooks. The dialogue ‘A visit to the employment agency’ in *Swedish for You* (*Svenska för er*) illustrates what happens when the immigrant Mile Popovic is laid off at Janssons’ Metal Factory:

---

<sup>4</sup> Study circles arranged by adult educational associations are an important part of Sweden’s adult education. Anyone can start their own study circle, but the government largely contributes financially.

MP: Good morning/afternoon! My name is Mile Popovic.

The official: Hello. My name is Peter Green. Have you visited this employment agency before?

MP: No. I have never had to come here. I got a job through a fellow countryman already in Sweden before I arrived here.

Mr. Green asks about Mile's name (most likely about its spelling) and address and writes a visiting card.

The official: You are consequently one of those people whom Janssons' Metal Factory is going to lay off?

MP: Yes, that's right. Now I am looking for another job.

The official: Here is the visiting card. Bring it along when you come to the employment agency.

MP: Yes, I will do that.

The official: Are you covered by unemployment insurance?

MP: Yes, in one of the trade unions. But I worked for three months before I joined the union. I did not know how important that was.

The official: For how long have you been a member of the trade union?

MP: Only for ten months.

The official: That is a pity. You must wait another two months before you can get anything from the unemployment insurance.

MP: Yes, I know. But I must get a job; I cannot afford to be out of work.

The official: We will probably get a job for you before you are laid off. There is no job just now, but come back on Friday this week. Do you have a work permit?

MP: Sure, it is written in my passport. Here it is!

On Thursday, Mr Green calls Mile at home and tells him that there might be a job in Göteborg. On Friday morning Mile returns to the employment agency and speaks with Mr Green.

The official: I am going to write down the name of the company and its address on a reference card for you.

MP: Thanks, that's fine. Can I get any allowance for removal expenses, if I take this job? I have a family and it might be very expensive.

The official: We might be able to help you with a relocation allowance, so it will probably be all right. You can perhaps get a settling allowance as well.

MP: What is that?

The official: It is an allowance for food and other things during the first month, before you get your salary. If necessary, you and your family can also get an equipment allowance for the new home in Göteborg. Here is your reference card. Show it to the employer. Also bring a reference from Janssons' Metal Factory.

MP: Thanks for all your help.

The official: You are welcome. Good luck with the new job!  
(Higelin et al. 1967: 88-89.)

In this text no obstacles whatsoever appear to getting a new job – it can even be procured before the employee is laid off. The control of the work permit is checked very casually, almost in passing, but in a paternalistic tone of voice. The allowances in the 1960s are paid out by the employment agency and not, as today, by the social welfare office. Furthermore, nothing is mentioned about retraining or any other education before the proposed new work. SFI education does not seem to be embraced by the later increasingly articulated educational discourse, which will be discussed below. The text gives the impression of concrete practical information conveyed to an immigrant worker, not to a course participant engaged in 'lifelong learning', even if all course activities offered in the new country (of residence) are described in a positive vein.

### ***The welfare consumer – the 1970s and 1980s***

When a number of textbooks like *The Svensson family* ('Svenssons', Manne & Lundh 1972), *Swedish Swedish* (*Svensk svenska*, Holm & Mathlein 1974) and *Say it in Swedish* (*Säg det på svenska*, Kristiansen Lundh & Wijk-Andersson 1978) were published in the 1970s, they no longer contained such a comprehensive amount of material about work and occupational life. In particular, the texts had changed to a more impersonal and general style. In contrast to earlier detailed descriptions of conditions of employment and work tasks, the emphasis was now on phenomena surrounding the work itself. The texts might be said to have moved work to the periphery.

A striking feature of these texts beyond the occupational sphere is the participation in various courses, which primarily take place during leisure time. In *Swedish Swedish* (*Svensk svenska*, Holm & Mathlein 1974, 1985) one can, for instance, read about the course programme for the Stolt family. Gösta (husband) learns how to cook on Mondays, about politics on Tuesdays and French on Fridays. Irma (wife) attends courses in typing on Mondays, singing on Wednesdays and English on Thursdays. Olle (son) is swimming on Mondays, plays the guitar on Wednesdays and



participates in a drama course on Thursdays. Finally, Gunilla (daughter) attends ballet lessons on Tuesdays and is engaged in an acting course on Thursdays. Life is to a great extent structured by these activities, and questions about different activities are frequently put to the reader. A prevalent feature in almost all the textbooks is the great care that is taken to structure the texts in relation to various temporal aspects; it may be telling clock time, various points in time during the twenty-four-hour period, during the week, the month and so forth. Even if the intention primarily is to convey, via 'time', linguistic phenomena like the different tenses of verbs and the word order, this structuring nevertheless leaves the reader with an impression that life in Sweden is strictly regulated by time.

Texts from the 1970s are also increasingly about situations in which human beings appear as the 'objects' of measures taken by society, rather than as active subjects. One can read about patients, pupils, and people on the dole, but also about the life of retired people (cf. Kamali 2000). Without unduly exaggerating, the textbooks of the 1970s focus on national insurance and various kinds of allowances which are offered by the welfare state – sometimes called the 'People's Home' (*Folkhemmet*) – from the cradle to the grave, and the authors have a pronounced confidence in informational texts. In particular, the texts are reoriented towards various roles and strategies, which the newly arrived immigrants can embark upon; one takes one's residence permit and walks to the social welfare office or the immigration bureau. More and more, an image of the 'immigrant' as a person who needs considerable help in order to make the best use of his/her interests is evoked – a shift from the *Gastarbeiter* to a consumer of support in the welfare state. This image is also consonant with the official report of the SFI committee of 1981, which writes about 'immigrants', 'women', 'disabled persons' and 'the poorly educated' as 'weak groups' (cf. SOU 1984: 55: 33). A discourse focusing on 'deficiency' is obvious. This discourse functions as a structural principle in the discussion and the impression of a kind of objectification and clientisation nevertheless lingers on when reading various teaching materials from this period – the 1970s and 1980s.

### ***Learn how to learn! – The model of the 1990s***

The next jump to the 1990s leads us to the course participants and the teachers I met and interviewed at the end of that decade. Besides photocopied material, these groups use, for instance, the textbooks *+46 Parts 1 and 2, Swedish as a Second Language* (+46 – *Svenska som andraspråk*, Gull & Klintenberg 1996, Gull & Sandwall et al. 1997)<sup>5</sup> and *The Road to Sweden, Textbook A and B* (*Vägen till Sverige*, Manne & Lundh 1995a, 1995b). *+46 Part 1 and 2, Swedish as a Second Language*, had a special impact on certain teachers, to which it must be added that this teaching material comprises a comprehensive body of texts. The main message of the 1990s – 'first education, then work' – is obvious. If during the 1970s one could discern that the texts moved away from centring on work, one could in the textbooks of the 1990s read about work in an even more indirect manner with headings like 'Talking of work' (+46 *Part 2, Swedish as a Second Language*, Gull & Sandwall et al. 1997: 128-155). The

<sup>5</sup> +46 refers to the country code for international phone calls to Sweden.





question: ‘How is the labour market these days?’ is answered by the employment officer as follows:

It is difficult to get a job now. The employer demands education or experience even for unskilled work. In the future one will therefore need more and more education in order to get a job (ibid.).

Regarding the question about what one must do in order to get a job, it is emphasised that the job-seeker must be active and continuously search for work. What appears to be of special importance in job-seeking, according to the employment officer, is ‘to think about being “moderate” (*lagom*)<sup>6</sup> when applying for a job’, whereupon the following comments appear:

One should wear moderately nice clothes, not too fancy or too casual. One should be moderately polite, moderately self-confident, etc. This is especially difficult for immigrants who might not know exactly what ‘moderate’ means in Sweden. Something, which is just right in one country might be too much or too little in another country (ibid.).

Thereafter the textbook authors ask: ‘How can one learn what is moderate?’ and the following answer is provided:

... one can attend some of the job-seeking courses at the employment office. There one can train in how to behave and appear in an employment interview. And it is also good to do practical training. During this one learns how a workplace functions and how the workmates behave while at work (ibid.).

It is quite striking in this context, as in other textbooks, that the ‘change’, and the ‘learning’ which is implicit, are unilateral, and it is the individual immigrant who must change and learn. The participants are often described in terms of deficiencies, which ought to be rectified. In an almost self-evident manner, the course participant is expected to adapt to the ‘Swedish way’ – the individual ought to adapt to the demands of the Swedish labour market and the Swedish educational system.

Extensive influence from a societal discourse about education and work is discernible when the textbook authors talk about ‘more and more education’, being ‘active’, ‘learning’, ‘considering being just right’ and attending ‘job-seeking courses’. In spite of a prevalent ‘work orientation’ (*arbetslinje*) in subsequent texts with topics like ‘Looking for a job’ and ‘the employment interview’ (Gull & Sandwall et al. 1997: 132-135), the message is nevertheless clear: it is a long, long way before one gets there. Moreover, since the message ‘*Learn how to learn*’ reappears in separate sections after

---

<sup>6</sup> The concept ‘moderate’ has for a long time been mentioned as a ‘very Swedish expression’ and it is discussed in, for instance, an anthology published by the Board of Immigration (‘Is moderate best? – About cultural meetings in Sweden’, SIV, Statens Invandrarverk, 1984).



each chapter, the reader or ‘learner’ is robustly brought back to the institutional imperative to learn. Consequently, one could or should learn how to be ‘employable’ – this kind of message is simultaneously articulated to a considerable degree within the EU in various contexts (cf. Garsten & Jacobsson 2004). In the context of SFI education, there is also an increasing number of new textbooks focusing on the working life – for example *‘Working life – Working in Sweden’* (Arbetsliv – Arbete i Sverige, Håkansson & Söderberg 2005). The way one talks about learning and trying to work in actual educational practice interacts both with a more encompassing societal discourse on education and with the presentation in the textbooks (cf. Popkewitz 1998).

There appears in the educational books of the 1990s, and later on at the beginning of 2000, a general standard from various quarters in terms of a desirable way of conducting one’s life and learning: change is desirable, resources are provided in the form of various courses, and the individual is expected to fit in (to the system) and furthermore to do it enthusiastically. Several problematic aspects can be seen in this context. On the one hand, the system implies a continuous selection and stratification of human beings, which can end up in the stigmatisation and marginalisation of those who do not succeed in getting a job or passing their exam. On the other hand, there is a tension between ‘freedom of choice’ – one of the fundamentals in the guiding principles of the immigrant and minority policies since 1975 (SOU 1974: 69: 94) – and what appears to be decidedly compulsory: to participate continuously in various courses in addition to having passed the SFI satisfactorily. The principle ‘freedom of choice’ is subordinated to the ‘desirable way’ of conducting one’s life and learning. The power of definitions belongs to the majority society, especially when norms, more symbolically non-contestable values expressed as ‘Swedish’, are at stake.

### **‘Social orientation’ – norms and ideals for living in Swedish society**

Ideals attached to being a participant in Swedish society are in various ways articulated in SFI education, partly by means of a more or less implicitly collective way of thinking, which is conveyed and experienced in everyday life/activities. These ideals, to a great extent, are also embedded in structuring ‘Social Orientation’, SO, into certain topical areas. ‘Objective’ information is presented as ‘proper’ strategies of action for different roles in Swedish society. In the curriculum pertaining to SFI one reads:

SFI for immigrants is, in addition to being a source of linguistic knowledge and language development, also a bridge to Swedish life. Various aspects of social life and culture in Sweden and also the organisation of society should therefore be integrated into language education, so that the pupils will be able to adopt those attitudes and traditions which characterise the country where they now reside (SKOLFS 1994: 28).

By the time the SFI course is finished, ‘the student should have achieved’ the following, regarding knowledge of civics:

The student shall have gained:



- deeper knowledge about Swedish society, law and justice, including, among other things, the rights of children, equality between men and women, and the norms and values which are essential in Swedish society.
  - knowledge about the conditions on the labour market
- (Curriculum for SFI, *Kursplan för svenskundervisning för invandrare [SFI]*, *Regeringsbeslut*, 30 June 1994, No. 23).

But each school has comparatively great discretion to choose *how* the goals should be achieved. A principal tells about how the content and planning of the SO field are determined at her school:

SL 2: We have had such SO materials – yes, it is civics in the sense that it includes the local area as well. It is about how the medical service, social insurance office, and consumer laws function; how does it work when one buys something? Quite basic things... And how Sweden is governed... Very, very simple. What does the housing market look like with condominiums and rental apartments? And what does the legislation look like? But it can be taught in very different manners. I think that in some groups these things are given much more time/emphasis than in other groups.

MC: As you say, very much depends upon the teacher. There is great latitude in that certain teachers can choose only certain topics.

SL2: Yes. One might say that a course / syllabus should actually – one should treat these topics during a course.

MC: Who has decided those topics?

SL2: Well, but it's a – it is a common... theme, what should one say... these topics become so natural. For instance, they occur in textbooks and teaching aids. They (also) occur in the local curriculum – so that from various schools here in Göteborg... so that is like a common... I might say a collective understanding.

The rationale of the principal might be related to various types of discursive speech in teaching aids, the local curriculum and, implicitly, conversation between teachers, other staff and schools. These different 'speeches' end up in what the principal calls a 'collective understanding' about what should be an integral part of the SO field. The common, self-evident general understanding does not appear to give rise to any specific reflective discussion in a critical vein, because, as the principal says: 'the topics become so natural'.

From the point of view of content, according to the school principal, SO is about various roles in Swedish society – being a patient, client, consumer, tenant – but also about being acquainted with the Swedish political system and history. The two textbooks, *The Road to Sweden*, *Textbook A and B*, and *+46 Part and 2, Swedish as a*

*Second Language*, partly include themes similar to those, which the principal refers to above. In particular, the latter textbook presents a societal subject painstakingly constructed around a number of topics like bringing up children, information on sexual matters, types of families in relation to the law and the municipal economy. It is striking that what is highlighted in the description of society is an ethnically 'Swedish' history, and not 'the actual lived plurality', which is described in policy documents:

That Sweden is different today compared with twenty years ago is an important point of departure. Through immigration during the last decades and internationalisation, Sweden has become a multicultural society. This is a fact that must be reflected in the new policy (*The Final Report of the Political Committee on Immigration*, SOU 1996: 55: 309).

The immigration and the process of change, which is called by the political committee 'a matter of fact' or 'the new normality of society' (ibid.), are not reflected or commented on in the textbooks. Instead, elements of migration history are, for instance, about the one million Swedes who migrated to North America from 1840 to 1930 (Gull & Klintenberg 1996: 112). A recurrent and obvious dichotomisation is made between 'us' and 'them'; 'the Swede' is always exemplified by what might be called 'ethnic Swedes' who are contrasted with 'the others'. In +46 *Part I and 2, Swedish as a Second Language* (Gull & Klintenberg 1996, Gull & Sandwall et al. 1997), the (immigrant) reader is called upon to keep comparing Sweden with 'the native country', and 'the Swedes' are always 'ethnic Swedes' and nobody else. This kind of reasoning can also be perceived as an ongoing construction and cultivation of the majority's own ethnicity in relation to 'the other'.

In *The Road to Sweden*, the main characters Hassan, Indira, Maria, Betty, Carlo and Kofi on their way they meet only 'Swedes' and ever more 'Swedes'. The first one they encounter is the teacher Åke Jansson and his family (Manne & Lundh 1995a: 13, 19). The second family to appear is dressed in Swedish national costume (ibid.: 76). The text 'The Swede and his money' is about Jan Svensson (ibid.: 112), and it is narrated in terms of what 'the Swedes' get up to during their leisure time:

Swedes like to read during their spare time. Out of 100 persons 75 declare that they read a newspaper daily... 48 persons state that they like to walk and that they do it frequently. During the winter many ski and skate... Many do sewing and knitting. Others work in their gardens or repair their houses or cars (ibid.: 103).

To judge from the names and pictures being presented in 'Facts' these sections in the textbook are written in the same vein. They are almost exclusively about 'ethnic Swedes'. In the illustrated section 'What does a Swede eat?' we can read:

This is a typical Swede. He eats a lot of potatoes and bread and quite a few sausages and meatballs. He likes pancakes, and pasta and pizza as well. He eats quite a lot of vegetables, but not much fish. He drinks milk

or beer with his food. And he drinks *a lot of* coffee! (Manne & Lundh 1995b: 39).

The presentation of Sweden and ‘Swedish’ shows a strikingly dichotomised way of thinking as ‘us’ and ‘them’ and a pronouncedly biased style of historical writing. Complex historical and cultural perspectives are not discussed at all. Nor does a gender perspective explicitly enter these texts, which might seem remarkable bearing in mind that, for instance, family, sex and social life are listed first as topics to be included in SO. It is also notable since gender equality is heavily emphasised in the policy documents pertaining to various levels.

However, the meanings, which a text presents do not necessarily become the meanings that a reader automatically and uncritically receives. The reception of a text is always active. The text is indeed interpreted on the basis of certain frames of interpretation, but it can also contribute to the creation of new ones. The reader can also reject the offers of meaning a text contains. This active interpretative process became very obvious during observations and conversations with the participants.

### **Gender equality – ‘Swedish’ and ‘Turkish’ perspectives**

For quite a long time there have been frequent statements in the media, in public debate and in certain research about particular immigrant groups and ‘their premodern’ and ‘traditional’ societies in relation to ‘our late modern’, ‘Swedish’ ‘post-modern’ society. A crucial topic here is the norm of gender equality. As already mentioned, there actually are no explicit texts in the textbooks pertaining to this sensitive issue. Instead, a norm of ‘Swedish’ gender equality appears more indirectly, for example in descriptions of the division of labour within a family or in descriptions of who works with what in a workplace. The most obvious hints about ‘equal distribution’ in everyday life are perhaps to be found in illustrations of various domestic tasks. A quite common picture of ‘the modern man’ is of a man wearing an apron while standing at the stove stirring pots or doing house-cleaning. There have been some reactions towards ‘ideologically arranged pictures in SFI books’ (cf. Wellros 1995). Statistics concerning the division of labour in Swedish homes point to a completely different picture from that presented in the textbooks (ibid.).

The SFI participants I met in different situations appear to be quite aware of the dominant Swedish discourse on gender equality, and they recurrently react and refer to it when narrating their experiences as course participants.<sup>7</sup> In the interviews the women frequently relate to what they regard as ‘Swedish’ notions, but also to ideas in their own group. It is obvious that they relate their experiences to gendered discourses connected with social relations. Gülay, who together with Ayten maintains that it is difficult to find a ready listener among the teachers regarding their difficulties in studying at home, gives

---

<sup>7</sup> The 12 Turkish women in my study have attended school 4 to 8 years in Turkey. Most of them migrated to Sweden in order to marry Turkish men residing there. The group includes both townspeople and people from rural areas. The time of residence in Sweden varies between three and ten years.

a kind of 'anti-image'. Both she and Ayten have gotten into a somewhat precarious situation *vis-à-vis* 'the Swedes', that is, their teachers who expect them to study even at home. Gülay relates explicitly to a contrasting 'Swedish' image – the 'Swedish' norm of gender equality:

The Swedes do not really understand; they think we are just like them. They think about their own conditions, that we have every possibility to pursue this on our own, to allocate time just to ourselves. That we cannot do. The teachers have a hard time understanding our situation.

This dialogue in a way illustrates how identity is constructed relationally in terms of 'the other' – in this case the Swedes (cf. Narro 1998). Ayten appears to be saying that 'Swedish' women can manage to look after children, and manage their homes and jobs, because there is a difference between 'Turkish' and 'Swedish' men:

Among Swedish couples the men lend a hand, they wash up the dishes, they share the work at home. If Turkish men occasionally wash up, then it should be regarded as something close to deviant behaviour. And if the men also work outside the home it is taken for granted that the wife alone should do practically all the housework. At the moment my husband is unemployed, but it does not really matter if he is working or not – rather, it is a matter of attitude.

In Ayten's and Gülay's cases, one might say that their schoolwork lacks legitimacy among the other family members – and maybe even to some degree among themselves. The attitudes and social roles here are quite similar to other identity studies of Turkish women in the midst of so-called modernisation processes. There seems to be a co-existence of 'traditional' and 'modern' lifestyles, but home and children are still given priority (see e.g. Kagitçibasi 2002, Kandyoti 2002, Sümer 1998). To a considerable extent, some of the women I have interviewed seem to reproduce established sex role patterns. Traces of this tradition, a kind of very much family-oriented discourse, as it is described in academic as well as in popular discourses, can be discerned in the narratives of the SFI participants (e.g. Abu-Lughod & Parla 1998, Akpınar 1998). But, as already mentioned, there is a simultaneous process of reflexivity going on. The women negotiate and interact in different contexts and sometimes new ground is broken.

Obviously this indicates an active construction of meaning at hand within the framework of existing conditions. Attention would then be better be paid to how categories like gender, class and ethnicity simultaneously imbue social positions in a complex way (cf. Bradley 1996, Skeggs 1997). To study women as an *a priori* category is questionable. Mohanty (1991), for example, maintains that an inclusive concept of women is problematic as an analytical category: 'That which unites women is the sociological notion about the 'similarity' in their oppression. It is on this point that an elision takes place of that which goes between 'women' as subjects in their own history' (Mohanty 1991: 199).



Within SFI education the power of definitions belongs to the majority society and it is also a question of social position (cf. Carlson 2001, Norton 2000, Ålund 1988). For the Turkish participants all this is very obvious (see also Carlson 2006). Not least categorised as Muslim migrants from the Middle East, sometimes perceived as coming from the Third World, they come across certain stereotypical images (cf. Hall 1992, Parati 1997, Xavier de Brito & Vasques 1998).

SFI educators often discuss ‘traditional knowledge’ belonging to ‘the other’. This determines their understanding in a comparatively unreflecting way. The traditional epithet is ascribed to the course participants and is conceived of as something decidedly negative, something to dissociate oneself from, in contrast to the ideal of ‘a modern, critically reflective individual’. Likewise, the SFI participants are often associated with a lack of independence, with passivity and subordination, and this directly contrasts with the independent, active and outspoken learners ‘here in Sweden’. By talking about SFI education as a ‘modern’ knowledge practice, the teachers themselves become representatives of ‘modernity’ in relationship to ‘the others’. But the course participants also form an integral part of a forceful discourse of modernity – both for the time being and in the past (cf. Bozdogan & Kasaba 1997). Not least, a powerful modernity/modernisation project was implemented in Turkey when the republic was established in 1923.

Even if the migration journey from the educators’ point of view seems only to go in one direction, from darkness towards the light (cf. Kandiyoti 2002), that is not the case in the narrations of the Turkish women. In my data the dichotomy ‘modern’ / ‘traditional’ is not as straightforward; instead, there is a great deal of variation in the attitudes expressed. The Turkish women’s narratives rather tell us about a contradictory and ambivalent relationship, with continuous changes and displacements. Their stories can be seen as counter-narratives, in which they can shift from a position of losers to one of opponents (cf. Fournier 2002, Villenas 2002). The women actually see themselves as both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ bearers of values within ‘their tradition’. The fact that the migration journey seems not to be a matter of a ‘homogeneous’ modernisation process is borne out by Emine’s statement that in Turkey she left a ‘modern’ and ‘outgoing’ family to end up in something very different in Sweden:

When I came to Sweden I did not have too much knowledge about Sweden, I only knew a little. And I was rather young when they sent me – here [in Sweden] they did not allow me to attend school, to tell you the truth. Actually I cannot tell you who did not allow me, but I think that it should have been my husband’s duty to inform me. He had grown up in this country and he knows everything, what kinds of options there are, what you can make the most of, what you can profit by. He should have told me that ‘it is important for you to learn the language and that you can attend school and so on.’ The rest of the family didn’t either. In a way this family was not as modern; one can say that they held the opinion that one should be at home and do housework and have children and one should



take care of the children, etc. On the other hand, my own family, even though I come from a village, my family was much more modern – they were more outgoing, more liberated in their manners, so there was a difference between these two families.

It is primarily the SFI participants who discuss ‘tradition’ in a dual way – they tell about ‘Swedish’ and ‘Turkish’ traditions. And in their narratives the women refer to continuous changes and displacements. Compulsory discourses seem to arouse reflexive resistance, primarily because the participants believe that stereotypical traits are ascribed to them too unreflectively. Emine depicts it as follows:

When we arrive here we become almost like children nevertheless – it doesn’t matter if you have earlier knowledge of different things or so. But when you come here and sit down and can’t speak the language, then it is like having no mouth or ears – you can’t listen, so you become a nobody. You sink to becoming nobody. You feel that you are worth nothing, that you do not really exist. Actually one can have different kinds of knowledge, but when you can’t tell this in words or retrieve this by language – then I really have no use of my own knowledge. Then you believe that from their point of view they consider you as, yes, as being in the dark, uneducated and reactionary or, yes, unmodern, etc. Maybe they don’t think such things about us, but it’s exactly what I feel – that they think that I am good for nothing.

### **Uncritical mediation of knowledge – some remarks**

As I have discussed, textbooks, among other educational texts being used and produced in the school context, contribute clearly in an unproblematic way to the construction of gender, class, ethnicity and other kinds of social categorisations, within as well as outside of school. A (kind of) ‘us’/‘them’ line of thought is reproduced and maintained. Sweden is presented as purely ‘Swedish’ within SFI education, whose participants are perceived as ‘the others’; information is given to the participants about roles and strategies to develop. Textbooks and other materials, like the teaching practices, express and interact with prevailing values, norms and ways of thinking (cf. Popkewitz 1998). As far as textbooks and teaching aids are concerned, Sweden is likewise presented as totally ‘Swedish’, without any real, more complex historical and cultural perspectives. Social class, gender and ethnic variation are conspicuous by their absence in these texts. They exist neither as historical categories nor as contemporary constructions. Instead, the values and images conveyed to SFI participants in the textbooks during different periods, sometimes almost in a spirit of obvious socialisation, deal in an unproblematic way largely with becoming good workers, clients and students – and not least, ‘good democratic citizens’ in a ‘Swedish’ sense. The SFI textbooks largely constitute an uncritical mediation of knowledge rather than a way of encouraging the active pursuit of knowledge and a critical reflective attitude, which are otherwise emphasised in various educational documents.<sup>8</sup> The content is portrayed as

---

<sup>8</sup> It must, however, be stressed that many teachers work with comprehensive material from newspapers and other media. In such contexts, a more critical scrutiny can



neutral and depoliticized, and allusions to scientific results reinforce the legitimacy claims. Recently however, various actors within the research community, in the media as well as at the Board of Education have asked for a more critical scrutiny of textbooks. These demands are raised not least in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity in a 'multicultural' society.

## References

- Ålund, Aleksandra. 1988. 'The Power of Definitions: Immigrant Women and Problem-Centered Ideologies', *Migration* 4/88, pp. 37-55.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila & Aysha Parla. 1998. 'Feminism, Nationalism, Modernity', *Turkish Journal*, Vol. 16, Fall.
- Akpınar, Aylin. 1998. *Male's Honour and Female's Shame. Gender and Ethnicity Identity Constructions among Turkish Divorced Women in the Migration Context*. Uppsala: Department of Sociology, Uppsala University.
- Antaki, Charles & Widdicombe, Sue (1998) Identity as an achievement and as a tool. In: C. Antaki & S. Widdicombe (Ed.) *Identities in talk*. London: Sage.
- Apple, Michael W. (1999) *Power, Meaning and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing
- Ballardini, Kerstin & Sune Stjärnlöf et al. 1983/1989. *Mål 1*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur.
- Ballardini, Kerstin & Sune Stjärnlöf et al. 1983/1989. *Mål 2*. Stockholm: Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur.
- Bradley, Harriet. 1996. *Fractured Identities. Changing Patterns of Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press,
- Bozdoğan, Sibel & Reşat Kasaba (eds). 1997. *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press.
- Carlson, Marie. 2001. 'Swedish Language Courses for Immigrants – Integration or Discrimination?' In Geoffrey Walford (ed.), *Education and Policy*. Oxford: Elsevier Science Inc.
- Carlson, Marie. 2002. *Svenska för invandrare – brygga eller gräns? Syn på kunskap och lärande inom sfi-undervisningen*. Göteborg: Department of Sociology, Göteborg University.
- Carlson, Marie. 2006. 'Immigrant Women within Swedish Language Instruction: Contradictions and Transgressions', in Justyna Sempruch, Katharina Willems & Laura Shook (eds), *Multiple Marginalities: An Intercultural Dialogue on Gender in Education*. Königstein: Helmer Verlag.
- Chouliaraki, Lilie & Norman Fairclough (1999) *Discourse in Late Modernity – Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Davidson, Ann Locke (1996) *Making and molding identity in schools. Student narratives on race, gender, and academic engagement*. New York: State University of New York Press.

---

certainly be found, but such a discussion is largely absent from the textbooks I have examined.



- Fournier, Valérie. 2002. 'Keeping the veil of otherness: practising disconnection', in Barbara Czarniawska & Heather Höpfl (eds), *Casting the Other: The Production and Maintenance of Inequalities in Work Organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Garsten, Christina & Kerstin Jacobsson (eds). 2004. *Learning to be employable: New agendas on work, responsibility and learning in a globalizing world*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gull, Maria & Britt Klintenberg. 1996. +46 *Del 1 Svenska som andraspråk för vuxna*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Förlag.
- Gull, Maria & Karin Sandwall et al. 1997. +46 *Del 2 Svenska som andraspråk för vuxna*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell Förlag.
- Higelin, Siv, Britt Svensson et al. 1967. *Svenska för er – lärobok i svenska som främmande språk 1* Stockholm: Sveriges Radios Förlag.
- Higelin, Siv, Britt Svensson et al. 1967. *Svenska för er – övningsbok i svenska som främmande språk 1*. Stockholm: Sveriges Radios Förlag.
- Hall, Stuart. 1992. 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power', in Stuart Hall & Brem Gieben (eds), *Formations of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Holm, Monika & Marianne Mathlein. 1974/1985. *Svensk Svenska – Nybörjarbok*. Stockholm: Scriptor Förlag.
- Holmes, Janet & Meyerhoff, Miriam (Ed.) (2003) Different voices, different views: an introduction to current research in language and gender. In: J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Ed.) *The handbook of language and gender*, s. 1-17. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Håkansson, Marie & Lena Söderberg. 2005. *Arbetsliv – Arbeta i Sverige*. Stockholm: Liber AB.
- Kagitçibaşı, Cigdem. 2002. Cross-cultural Perspectives on Family Change. In Rita Liljeström & Elisabeth Özdalga (eds), *Autonomy and Dependence in the Family – Turkey and Sweden in Critical Perspective*. Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul Transactions. Vol. 11. London: Routledge
- Kandiyoti, Deniz. 2002. 'Introduction: Reading the Fragments', in Deniz Kandiyoti & Ayşe Saktanber (eds), *Fragments of Culture – The Everyday of Modern Turkey*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Kamali, Masoud. 2000. 'The role of educational institutions in the clientization of immigrants: the Swedish case', *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 179-193.
- Kemuma, Joyce. 2000. *The Past and the Future in the Present. Kenyan Adult Immigrants' Stories on Orientation and Adult Education in Sweden*. Uppsala Studies in Education 89. Uppsala: Uppsala University Library.
- Kristiansen Lundh, Solveig & Elsie Wijk-Andersson. 1978. *Säg det på svenska – Textbok*. Uppsala: Studieförlaget.
- Lpf 94 *Läroplan för de frivilliga skolformerna*. Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Mac an Ghaill, Máirtín (1998) *The Making of men. Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling*. Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Narrowe, Judith (1998) *Under One Roof. On becoming a Turk in Sweden*, Stockholm: SSSA & Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Norton, Bonny & Kelleen Toohey (eds) (2004) *Critical pedagogies and language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.



- Norton, Bonny (2000) *Identity and language learning: gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. Harlow: Longman, 2000.
- Manne, Gerd & Doris Lundh. 1972/1984. *Svenssons*. Malmö: Gleerups Förlag.
- Manne, Gerd & Doris Lundh. 1995a. *Vägen till Sverige, Textbok A*. Malmö: Gleerups Förlag.
- Manne, Gerd & Doris Lundh. 1995b) *Vägen till Sverige, Textbok B*. Malmö: Gleerups Förlag.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo & Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Narrowe, Judith. 1998. *Under One Roof – On Becoming a Turk in Sweden*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Norton, Bonny. 2000. *Identity and Language Learning. Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Essex: Longman.
- Parati, Graziella. 1997. 'Looking through Non-Western Eyes: Immigrant Women's Autobiographical Narratives in Italian', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith (eds), *Writing New Identities. Gender, Nation and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Popkewitz, Thomas S. 1998. *Struggling for the Soul. The Politics of Schooling and the Construction of the Teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Schiffauer, Werner & Thijl Sunier (2004) "Representing the Nation in History Textbooks". In: Schiffauer, Werner, Gerd Baumann, Riva Kastoryano & Steven vertovec (eds.) *Civil Enculturation – Nation-State, School and Ethnic Difference in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany and France*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 1997. *Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage Publications.
- SKOLFS 1994: 28 Förordning om kursplan för svenskundervisning för invandrare. Skolverket, Fritzes: Stockholm.
- SKOLFS 1994: 44 Skolverketes föreskrifter om betygskriterier för kurs i svenska för invandrare (sfi), Skolverket, Fritzes: Stockholm.
- SOU 1974: 69 *Invandrarutredningen – Invandrarna och minoriteterna*. Huvudbetänkande. Stockholm: Liber.
- SOU 1984: 55 *I rätt riktning: etniska relationer i Sverige*. Slutbetänkande av Diskrimineringsutredningen. Stockholm: Liber.
- SOU 1996: 55 *Sverige framtiden och mångfalden*. Slutbetänkande från Invandrapolitiska kommittén. *The Final Report of the Political Committee on Immigration*. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Sümer, Sevil. 1998. 'Incongruent Modernities: A Comparative Study of Higher Educated Women from Urban Turkey and Norway', *Acta Sociologica* 1998, Vol. 41, pp. 115-129.
- Thavenius, Jan. 1995. 'Det avpolitiserade språket', *Utbildning och Demokrati*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 5-17.

- Villenas, Sofia. 2001. 'Latina Mothers and small-town racisms: creating narratives of dignity and moral education in North Carolina', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 3-28.
- Wellros, Seija. 1995. 'Sagor eller sanningar', *På lätt svenska – Invandrartidningen*, 14/95.
- Xavier de Brito, Angela & Ana Vasquez. 1998. 'Circe or Penelope? An Analysis of the *Problematic* of Latin-American Women in Exile', in Danièle Joly (ed.), *Scapegoats and Social Actors. The Exclusion and Integration of Minorities in Western and Eastern Europe*. London: MacMillan.

### **Local documents**

- Sfi – Kommentarmaterial till betygskriterier. Göteborgs Stad Utbildning. Gerd Asplund et al. 1994.
- Utbildningsnämndens Skolplan 1997-8. Göteborgs Stad Utbildning.

