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Metaphorical competence, literature and second language education from an international and Swedish perspective - a research review

Abstract:

The aim of this presentation is to raise the importance of knowledge concerning metaphorical competence and literature education in Swedish as a second language for students in upper secondary school. This subject area is also the focus of my ongoing dissertation project in didactics and the presentation summarises the results from the first area of research of my compilation thesis.

In the Swedish school system of today, many students have a different mother tongue than Swedish. For almost a fifth of the students in upper secondary school, Swedish is a second or third language (Economou, 2015) and many have difficulty in acquiring a language level in the second language that is equivalent to a native speaker (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2004; Saleé, 2017). This has resulted in an increased demand of various efforts in language development, especially concerning the teaching of Swedish as a second language.

In Sweden, as well as in many other countries, second-language students often face the challenge of simultaneously learning a new language and acquiring new knowledge via this language that they do not yet really master. Most researchers agree that second language learning takes time. Understanding the communicative language can take a couple of years under favourable conditions, while the more advanced school language can take up to eight years or more to conquer (Cummins 2008; Löthagen, Lundenmark & Modigh, 2012). A great challenge for second language learners is the use of figurative language, which affects learner’s ability to understand, interpret, process, and/or produce metaphors. International empirical research has shown that integration of conceptual metaphors in language teaching has the potential to improve students’ conceptual fluency as well as their productive and receptive language skills (Danesi, 1992, 1995, 2015; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Littlemore 2001, 2009). Some researchers have also shown that metaphorical skills constitute a very important part of literature teaching for second language speakers (Gibbs, 1994; Picken, 2005; Komorowska, 2013).

Even though metaphorical competence has long been explored internationally, studies in the field are unusual in Sweden and other Nordic countries. Until recently, very few Swedish researchers have introduced cognitive semantic perspectives in their investigations. This presentation aims to give an overview of the current research within the field as well as emphasising the importance of conceptual metaphors in the teaching of literature in Swedish as a second language in upper secondary school.
References:


