Migration of Danish Deaf families to Sweden
« What are the sociocultural reasons behind the recent emigration of Danish deaf families from Copenhagen to Malmo? »
Structure of the presentation

- The press release
- The socio-cultural description of my fieldwork
- The methodology
- Findings and analysis
- Conclusion
Press release

Sign Languages’ status under threat in Denmark and the Netherlands?

President of the Danish Deaf Association (DDL) Ms. Janne Boye Niemelä presented the alarming situation in Denmark where 99% of all newly born children are offered cochlear implants; yet at the same time the provided support services do not include sign language but instead concentrate on auditory verbal therapy. With the number of deaf schools decreasing the recent developments in the Danish society would seem to aim at promoting speech to the detriment of Danish sign language. Furthermore, according to Ms. Corrie Tijsseling the deaf community in the Netherlands is currently dealing with a similar debate on sign language’s place in deaf children’s education.
Socio-cultural description of the fieldwork

- 99% of Deaf children are implanted. The government has a strong power on the process of growing up the Deaf child. After positive detection of deafness thought the prenatal diagnosis, the children is following by the government and he receives support as a cochlear implant, a speech therapist and encouraged to be mainstreamed in a hearing school.

- I spent a big part of my time for the fieldwork in Sweden where the 3 Deaf families are currently living and 1 family living in Denmark. The four families with who I did my fieldwork were composed of Deaf parents and Deaf children. I was living in the city of Copenhagen for 6 months and I was participating in many activities of the Deaf community based there.
Methodology

- **Participant observation**: native anthropology - insider and outsider

- « The most productive relationship occurs between a thoroughly enculturated informant and a thoroughly unenculturated ethnographer. » (Spradley 1979: 49-50)

- **Ethnographic interviews**: non-directive interviewing

- The material used was a camera: visual anthropology
Danish Government enforced the mainstreaming in hearing schools

Attitude of the Deaf school professionals

The Danish institutional system differ from the Swedish one

« If my child will be implanted, there will be a program for him and the government will control the future of my child. » (My fieldwork notes: 2013)

Bad experience in mainstreaming school

Implant their child because CI could offer a more large opportunities for the future

Deaf children could socialize with their Deaf peers

The doctors are not neutral when they explains how to recover the deafness

Danish Government enforced the mainstreaming in hearing schools
Theory of Audism
(Humphries: 1975 and Bauman: 2004)

- **Definition of Audism**: «The notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.» (Humphries, 1975)

- Three distinct dimensions of oppression:

  - **Individual**: Deaf people come into contact with audist attitudes, judgements and actions with great frequency throughout their lives. (Bauman 2004: 240)

  - **Institutional**: Educational and medical institutions have assumed authority over Deaf persons, claiming to act in their best interest while not allowing them to have a say in the matters that concern them the most. (Lane: 1992)

  - **Metaphysical**: We see ourselves as becoming human through speech (Bauman 2004: 242)
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The Danish institutional system differ from the Swedish one.

The government sphere

The medical sphere

The educational sphere
Conclusion

- The sociocultural reasons of moving to Malmö that are lying behind these families are various and differ from each other but when we look further at these reasons, we could identify some general characteristics that are similar. The most similar apparent characteristic is certainly the feeling of oppression. Indeed all the families were frustrated from the actual situation in Denmark but the form of oppression itself differs for each of these families.

Oppression (Audism) \(\rightarrow\) Deaf Space
Deaf space : Heterotopia (Foucault, 2004 and O’Brien, 2005)

• “There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.” (Foucault, 2004)

• The six principles that describe and define heterotopias:
  
  1) Separation from mainstream society
  
  2) Different patterns in time
  
  3) Several real spaces in a single space
  
  4) Linked to slices of time
  
  5) Systems of opening and closing
  
  6) Relationship with all other spaces
Conclusion - What is the sociocultural reasons behind the recent emigration of Deaf families?

• Deaf space as the response from the audism concept?

• Deaf space defined by the concept of heterotopia?

• Deaf space in long term and not short term?

• Schools as the starting point of the Deaf space?