SFI - as an Agenda for

Internalizing Swedish Norms and Values

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Abstract

This study examines the adult Swedish language education for immigrants, SFI, as a system with functions in the Swedish society. The practical teaching of the Swedish language is lifted out and the remaining knowledge is studied. The aim is to apply a system theoretical approach in order to describe how SFI has different functions in society and furthermore, how the knowledge SFI mediates also have functions. Parsons’ system theory serves as the theoretical foundation for this study, but a perspective of stereotypes as well as infantilization broadens the study. The empirical material which this study is based on is gathered through 13 classroom observations and six interviews. The material shows that SFI has the functions to inform, affect, prepare and prevent immigrants in different ways. It concerns matters such as democratic and equal values, medical care, dental care and the tax system. All these functions aim to change the behaviors and thoughts of immigrants so that their behaviors and thoughts better correspond with those of other members of the Swedish society. Noticed and addressed is that these functions appear to have somewhat stereotyping and infantilizing consequences. Thus, SFI as an institution plays a significant part in the integration process of immigrants.
1 Introduction: Understanding SFI as a System

When a person moves to a new country there are many things that are useful to learn about regarding the new society. One such thing is the language, which is also said to play a key role in the integration process. When adult immigrants arrive to Sweden they have the possibility to study Swedish. The Swedish language course for immigrants goes under the name SFI, Swedish for immigrants. At SFI, participants study Swedish, but they also gain knowledge about the Swedish society which they are new members of. It is difficult to say clearly what kind of information an immigrant is in need of when starting a new life in Sweden. It depends on where the person is immigrating from, and it also depends on the individual, as all of us possess different knowledge regardless of where we come from. SFI is important regarding these questions as the school often is the first regular contact immigrants have with the Swedish society. During five weeks I conducted an internship at Komvux Södervärn in Malmö, Sweden, where SFI is taught. During this internship I studied to what extent information about the Swedish society is taught and incorporated in the education. Quite soon it became clear that information about the Swedish society is included within the teaching to a large extent, and therefore my interest took another direction. It became an interest to study what the information about the Swedish society consists of. In other words, of what kind is the information or knowledge which is taught and incorporated within the education of SFI? During the internship I gained invaluable information about how Swedish norms and values are taught within SFI and that is what will be presented in this study.

The Education Act, a constitution within SFS (Swedish Code of Statutes), regulates all education in Sweden. The Education Act as well as the specific syllabus for SFI, both state that students who study SFI shall not only achieve skills in the Swedish language but also knowledge about the Swedish society. What this knowledge is supposed to be is, however, not explicitly stated in neither the Education Act nor the syllabus. Some explanation of what the knowledge consists of is mentioned in an investigation conducted between 2002 and 2003. The investigation aimed to suggest how SFI could be changed and renewed. One area of the investigation pays attention to knowledge of society. The report, *Vidare vägar och vägen vidare – svenska som andraspråk för samhälls- och arbetsliv*, divides this type of knowledge into four parts:

- facts/information about for example the construction of society,
more abstract and loaded aspects such as norms, values and cultural expressions,

strategies on how to learn a language and facts, and be able to orientate oneself in diverse societal contexts,

word/concept/linguistic functions which are connected to above. (my translation)

The aim of the thesis is to lift out the Swedish language education from the context of SFI in order to see what is left. This means, to study what knowledge and information SFI conveys other than the practical learning of the Swedish language. The empirical data collected is studied from a sociological perspective of structural functionalism. I discuss questions that arise, such as why this knowledge is taught and what it can imply both for the teachers who teach it, the participants who receive the information as well as the function for the society as a whole. Therefore a system wide approach will be suitable for this study. System theory is used in order to understand SFI and its functions. From this approach it is also possible to discuss the function of this knowledge within a system such as the Swedish society. Together with system theory, it is also necessary to bring in the aspects of stereotyping as well as infantilizing as they are some consequences to this other kind of knowledge. When the study brings up these aspects it is possible for me to bring in the knowledge I have gained during my education. It also takes this study from a sociological perspective and gives it a multidisciplinary approach. Throughout the study the terms ‘immigrants’ and ‘Swedish people’ are used in a generalizing way. This is done as a simplification in order to be able to write this study.

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- “fakta/information om t.ex. samhällets uppbyggnad,
- mer abstrakta och laddade aspekter som normer, värderingar, kulturella uttryck,
- strategier för att kunna lära språk och fakta och för att kunna orientera sig i olika samhälleliga kontexter,
- ord/begrepp/språkliga funktioner som hör ihop med ovanstående.”
In the following, the theory concerning systems and their functions will be presented. After that there is a chapter with background information which is necessary in order to understand the context of this study. Here, some previous research within the field of SFI is also given attention. Next is a presentation of the method used for this study, both a general description about the method as well as details on how observations and interviews have been performed. Consequentially comes the rather extensive part where the empirical findings are presented and in this chapter they are also analyzed. Hereafter, a summarizing chapter to bring the reasoning together and shortly conclude what has been found. Finally, some conclusive words are given at the end. But now, the theoretical departure for this study continues.

2 Theory: Towards an Understanding of System Theory

This subject can be studied from different perspectives such as an economic perspective, how the knowledge SFI mediates may affect participants’ economic situation. One could also study it from a philosophical perspective, for example what it means for both participants and teachers that this knowledge is taught. I, however, will take sociology as my theoretical starting-point for this thesis. Sociology is a very broad subject and generally one can say that sociology studies societies and the social actions which take place in societies. Furthermore, I will base my study on one branch of sociology, structural functionalism. It stems from the work of the great sociologist Emile Durkheim. More specifically, his early work has had major importance for the rise of structural functionalism. Structural functionalism has held a dominant position within sociological theory for many years, yet in the last four decades it has gradually taken a step back and today some argue that it belongs to the history of sociological theory. Other theoretical concepts used in this study is stereotyping and infantilizing. This broadens the study and changes it from a purely sociological study to a multidisciplinary study where IMER related aspects are included. A more detailed explanation of how to


3 Ritzer 233.

4 IMER stands for International Migration and Ethnic Relations.
understand structural functionalism is provided further on in this chapter but an introducing sentence can be useful at this point.

According to Per Månson, the area of structural functionalism deals with the structures that exist in a society and the relations between these structures and the actors within it. These structures can be societies in different forms and sizes. It can refer to a family, an organization or a society in a city or a country. The term functionalism refers to functions within a society which are performed by institutions or other actors. These functions exist for a reason and one way of studying structures can be to study what functions are necessary and who or what it is that fills these functions. Ritzer acknowledges three main ideas within structural functionalism, which belongs to consensus theories. All three ideas are vital for the survival of the society, i.e. the structure. The first idea, and perhaps also the most significant, is that members of a society must have generally accepted ideas of right and wrong in common. The second idea is that the social structures that exist in a society rest on known yet unspoken agreements between the members. The third and final idea is that when social change takes place it happens, or rather is done, under calm circumstances and with some sense of organization.

2.1 Talcott Parsons

A central name within structural functionalism is Talcott Parsons. Parsons spent most of his time as active sociologist in America, apart from a couple of years in Great Britain and Germany. He is seen as the sociologist who introduced great European thinkers, such as Durkheim and Weber, into the arena of American sociology. He dedicated his time to sociological theory and one of his main concerns was to develop a general theory of society. Some of his early works relate to the actor and the actions of the actor. Later on Parsons made a shift of attention and his later works are more related to social theory. In 1951 Parsons

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6 Månson, 40-1.

7 Ritzer, 233-4.

8 Månsson, 41-2.
published *The Social System* and Peter Hamilton writes that it “was intended to be a general sociological theory, a theory which would be capable of analysing and ultimately explaining the sociological component of human social action”.\(^9\) This means that Parsons wanted a sociological theory which was applicable to all social systems, regardless if the system is a family, organization or a large society. George Ritzer points out that “Parsons’ theoretical strength, and that of structural functionalism, lay in delineating the relationships among large-scale social structures and institutions . . .”.\(^10\) Parsons provides analytical tools to be implemented in order to understand how social structures such as societies and the institutions within them relate to each other and how they affect actors within societies.

According to Parsons, there are certain needs within a society. These needs are to be fulfilled by institutions if the survival of the society is to be ensured. When institutions meet the existing needs it can be said that they have a function. If there is no need that corresponds with the institution, it is not likely that the institution will continue to exist, because it has no function in the society. Ritzer presents Guy Rocher’s definition of a function as it is defined as “a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system”.\(^11\) So, if there is a need for producing paper in a society there will also be an institution which has the function of producing paper, in that way the institution meets the need in the society, and thereby the institution has a function. Parsons argues that there are some needs which are necessary for all systems to accomplish. He structured a schema which consists of four imperatives that represents these needs. This is the AGIL schema which was presented in 1951 in *The Social System* (see fig.1). Adaption, goal-attainment, integration and latency are the four functions that Parsons argue are necessary for a social system to manage and fulfill, in order for the system to remain stable and thereby survive. There is no hierarchal order between these four functions even if the name of the schema or the figure might suggest so. To bring some clarification around what they mean and what their role is within a system they are discussed individually.

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\(^10\) George Ritzer, 202.

\(^11\) Rocher 1975:40 in Ritzer, 237.
Adaption – a system must be able to adapt to the external environment it exists in. If features of the environment changes then the system must change too. As systems influence their environment it is also important that the system to some extent adjusts the environment to the system’s needs.

Goal-attainment – this refers to the system’s ability to set and define its goals, and furthermore to reach the goal. In order to ensure that the goal is reached the system must activate and encourage its forces, which are actors, to move in the right direction.

Integration – for the goal to be reached a certain amount of coherence in the system is necessary. The function of integration is to make sure that this coherence exists. Integration concerns the relationship between members and institutions of the system, relationships between members and members, members and institutions, and institutions and institutions.

Latency (also referred to as pattern maintenance) – the existing coherence in a system must be maintained, and this is the function of latency. When new members arrive it is also important that they internalize the norms and values of the system.\(^{12}\)

Parsons wanted the AGIL schema to be applicable to all social systems, consequently all kinds of collectivities. But there was one social system that Parsons paid extra attention to, and that was society. According to Rocher in Ritzer, a society is “a relatively self-sufficient collectivity [where] the members of which are able to satisfy all their individual and collective

needs and to live entirely within its framework”.  

If we were to take Sweden and the Swedish society as an example of a social system, the four imperatives would contain different institutions (see fig.2). They can all be seen as subsystems as they, within themselves, will have the same kind of system if one were to study another level.

The economy would be the subsystem responsible for adaptation to the environment as well as adapting the environment so that it fits the needs of the society. As Ritzer writes, this function is carried out by “labor, production, and allocation”. The subsystem that performs the function of goal attainment is polity (the political system). The political system decides where resources are needed in order to achieve the goal, and hence the political system motivates and mobilizes resources. Resources in this sense refer to both actors and means. The function of integration is performed by the societal community. The function is to keep the members, as well as the institutions of the system in order and coherent. The law is an example of an institution which fulfills this function. The law gives both members and institutions rights as well as responsibilities. Finally, the fiduciary system is the subsystem that performs the function of latency. The function is to internalize and socialize the norms and values of the system. To transmit the culture of the society to new members is primarily done by families and schools.

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13 Rocher 1975:60 in Ritzer, 243.
14 Ritzer, 243.
According to Parsons System theory, coherence is a need for the survival of a society, yet total coherence is hardly the best solution. There are social control mechanisms which can be put in to use in order to create coherence; however, he argues that these mechanisms should be used sparsely. This means that the basic conformity in a system should not be based on constraints or founded in the fear of what society might do if a person disagrees with the norm. Instead a degree of individuality is necessary. The system should also provide its members with opportunities to communicate their own ideas and opinions. Ritzer says that even if coherence among the members is important, there should also be room for “a wide range of individual variation in the system”.15 Another important aspect of coherence in relation to the system is that deviance from the norm must be accepted. Of course, any kind or any amount of deviance cannot be accepted, but total conformity is not a desired goal.16 One institution which punishes deviance is the legal system. In a society it is often, yet not always, a legal system which sets the rules for what kind of deviance which is accepted. Another institution is the school which affects its students’ behavior in accordance with right and wrong actions. The same function is performed by the family, and most likely this is the institution with the major impact on members of society, at least in the beginning of a person’s life. So, one can say that deviance to some extent is not harmful to the system and therefore it should not be fought or controlled. But when the deviating behavior crosses a line, an institution often interferes and punishes the actor for the behavior.

Parsons has often received critique regarding his theories, as they are said to be difficult to understand. This is also brought up by Hamilton, however, he does not agree fully. He admits that Parsons’ theories are complex and tricky to understand but he also points out that a lack of suitable language within the sociological field can contribute to this difficulty.17 Another criticism towards Parsons is that his theories tend to be developed for and deal with fixed systems. There is very little place for change within the systems which is often seen as a deficiency. Along with this, as the structural functionalist he is categorized as, Parsons’ interest for the society was greater than his interest for the actor, and therefore actors are often

15 Ritzer, 243.
16 Ritzer, 243.
17 Hamilton, 14-5.
left out of his theories. It should be kept in mind that the AGIL schema, used in this study, is meant as a theoretical model used when interpreting systems and their functions. After this theoretical chapter an explanation of the history of SFI is suitable.

3 Background: What SFI is and Represents in the Swedish Education System

This chapter gives a brief insight to how SFI has evolved during its existence. It also provides some information on the international health communicators which is needed for further reading. Towards the end, some previous research on SFI is addressed.

3.1 The background of SFI

A report from the Swedish National Agency for Education, Skolverket Vem älskar sfi? utvärdering av svenskundervisningen för invandrare – en utbildning mellan två stolar, explains that Swedish education for immigrants started in 1965 after the government made a decision that some education in the Swedish language was necessary for immigrants arriving to Sweden at the time. Andrew Geddes explains that the act of providing language training was part of “a shift towards ‘mutual adaption’” for Swedish immigration policy. To begin with the responsibility for SFI was given to studieförbunden, organizations that provide adult education classes and study circles. The attendance was voluntary and there was no demand that the teachers had a proper education. Some weekend-educations were offered to the study circle leaders, but it was not until 1973 that an education directed towards SFI was established at universities. In the beginning no specific goals were established, one can say that the overarching goal was for immigrants to learn Swedish as fast as possible so that they could

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18 Ritzer, 240-3.


21 Skolverkets rapport nr 131, 16-36.
enter the labor market and assimilate to the Swedish society. During the 1960s and 1970s decisions concerning SFI were often hasty decisions which responded to changes in immigration patterns. Changes in the approach towards immigrants were also seen in a parliamentary report published in 1984. According to Geddes, the report stated that it was necessary for immigrants to adjust, to some extent, to the Swedish society. The report shows clearly that this was an expectation from society.

With a reformation in 1986 the responsibility for SFI became a matter for the municipalities who could choose to organize the education themselves or hire someone else to do it. This reformation led to an improvement for SFI as “goals, content and work form were defined in a special curriculum for the education . . .” (my translation). With the reformation it also got stated that SFI should include some social- and working life orientation. In 1986 and 1991 two more reformations took place, both of them obviously with the aim of improving SFI in various ways. However, despite reformations and efforts to change SFI, one problem seems to remain. According to Skolverket’s report the education constantly fails to provide the participants with the knowledge they need in order to continue their studies or enter the labor market, and the same critique is still present today. In 1994 the SFI education no longer rested on its own curriculum, instead the curriculum for SFI was the curriculum for private schools. When looking back at the history of SFI, one can see that SFI has had a strong link with integration on a linguistic level. As societal knowledge was included, this link increased.

Today it is the municipalities in Sweden which are responsible for providing SFI to immigrants. Several institutions in Sweden have also agreed upon providing an introduction for new arrivals in Sweden, and SFI is included in this introduction. Since Integrationsverket, The Swedish Integration Board, was shut down in 2007 it is Länsstyrelsen, The Counties


\[23\] Geddes, 121-2.

\[24\] Skolverkets rapport nr 131, 20. Original: “mål, innehåll och arbetsformer preciseras i en särskild läroplan för undervisningen”.

\[25\] Skolverkets rapport nr 131, 16-36.

Agency in Sweden, which is responsible for this introduction. In short, it means that new arrivals can receive help from society during their first time in Sweden. The time frame for this introduction can vary, but in general it is two years.\textsuperscript{27} It is agreed upon that some knowledge about Swedish society is necessary for immigrants when arriving to Sweden. However, the problem is that what this knowledge should consist of, is not stated anywhere. That language is a vital factor in the integration process is generally accepted and due to this SFI has an important role as a system with the function of integrating immigrants to the Swedish society. Apart from the language, which is the obvious task of SFI, the knowledge which is of another kind is also of integrative type, and therefore, SFI gets an integrative function on further levels than only the linguistic level.

At the time of the internship, SFI was provided by four actors. With which actor a person studies SFI depends on the person’s educational background. At Komvux, where my internship was performed, persons with very differing background study. There are classes for participants who have not gone to school and perhaps are analphabets. There are also classes for participants with more than 12 years in school, yet not an academic education. Of course there are also classes for participants within this range. Participants are divided into three tracks depending on previous education. Furthermore, they are divided into different levels depending on their existing knowledge in Swedish. Finally, a division is made between those who have been in Sweden less than three years and more than three years. During the internship, most observations were in classes with participants who had been in Sweden less than three years, but in classes from all tracks and levels. The day-time classes add up to approximately 16 hours a week and the classes in the evenings approximately six hours a week. The aim with the evening classes is that they are supposed to be compatible with a job or an internship.

In the Education Act for SFI it is stated that “Swedish for Immigrants is aimed at giving adult newly arrived immigrants basic knowledge of the Swedish language and Swedish

society”\(^{28}\). A definition of what basic knowledge of the Swedish society refers to is not explained in the education act. This basic knowledge is also mentioned in the syllabus for SFI. Where the aim of the education is specified, the syllabus says that “the education shall give linguistic tools for communication and active participation in everyday-, society- and work life” (my translation).\(^{29}\) Nor this is an explanation which says what this knowledge about society should contain. In the section where the goal and character of the education is described, the syllabus contains another similar statement. It says that “the student shall also develop his/her intercultural competence by reflecting over his/her own cultural experiences and compare them to phenomenon in everyday-, society- and work life in Sweden” (my translation).\(^{30}\) Evidently, it is mentioned several times that some knowledge of the Swedish society should be included in SFI, yet what this knowledge should be is not mentioned. This thesis is going to give some examples of this knowledge. Empirical material gathered through observations show that international health communicators provide some of this other kind of knowledge that SFI mediates. Therefore, some information in that area is helpful.

### 3.2 International health communicators

The international health communicators are a group with the aim to provide and increase knowledge about health in general and about Swedish health care in particular. More specifically they work towards increasing awareness concerning health and also towards improving public health among certain groups of people. This group visits SFI on a regular basis in order to have information meetings with participants. The information they give concerns, for example, the organization of the Swedish medical system, dental care, food and exercise, and alcohol. The communicators have some kind of medical education in their home


\(^{30}\) Sweden Department of Education, SKOLFS 2009:2, Section: Utbildningens mål och karaktär, original: “Eleven ska också utveckla sin interkulturella kompetens genom att reflektera över egna kulturella erfarenheter och jämföra dem med företeelser i vardags-, samhälls- och arbetsliv i Sverige”.

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countries and the information is given in Swedish as well as in many other languages, thereby immigrants can receive the information in their mother tongue if that is most suitable for them.\textsuperscript{31}

The group has a close collaboration with schools where SFI is taught, as this is a good way of reaching out to the target group. The health communicators have a linguistic advantage as well as a cultural advantage. On top of this they have professional medical experience from their home country. This means that they can have an understanding of immigrants’ situation when living in a new and different society as they have gone through the same process themselves. Something which probably is difficult, or even impossible, if the person has never been in a similar situation her- or himself. Furthermore, it means that as they speak Swedish as well as their mother tongue, and perhaps even more languages, they can provide information which is easier for the target group to understand. I also believe that the fact that they are immigrants themselves gives them credibility towards the target group, and it may also help to create trust. Due to organizational changes the international health communicators are no longer a separate group from December 31, 2009. Instead they are incorporated with another group and together they become Societal- and Health Communicators.\textsuperscript{32}

3.3 Previous research

The previous research in the area of SFI takes on different aspects of the subject. Some research has been done from a linguistic perspective while some other researchers have studied SFI from a sociological perspective of knowledge. Linguistic studies are left out in this part since that is not my focus of attention. In order to get an insight in what this previous research consists of in the sociological understanding of SFI, a few of them are presented in the following. A conclusion from Skolverkets’ report is that participants of SFI feel that too much focus is put on Swedish traditions and they would rather learn more about Swedish


everyday life. According to the evaluation, the type of social orientation which is communicated concerns “housing and the surrounding environment, health- and medical care, Swedish everyday culture, Swedish holidays and traditions, and democracy” (my translation).33

In 1996 Karsten Douglas studied a group of refugees from Bosnia-Hercegovina in the context of adult education in Sweden. He found that the participants sometimes found it difficult to understand the grounds for judgment when their tests were graded. Arguments that they did “not write like a Swede” existed even though the way of writing was correct from a grammatical point of view (my translation).34 Another problem Douglas found was that a problem existed with teachers treating participants as children. Marie Carlson also writes about teachers who, perhaps unconsciously, feel that participants need to be raised and how this is reflected in teachers’ behavior even if it is dissociated of. Carlson has done a lot of research in the area of SFI and in 2003 Svenska för invandrare – brygga eller gräns? was published.35 She concludes that SFI in some contexts acts as a bridge to the Swedish society while in other contexts it acts as a boundary. It is also interesting that she discovers “the Swedish” to play an important role in the education. Carlson also reflects over the fact that participants are not so involved in their education; it is the Swedish perspective which seems to decide how things are conducted with the best result.

This can obviously lead to problems; something Hans-Olof Gustavsson addresses in his doctoral dissertation Utan bok är det ingen riktig undervisning, which is a study of school cultural frame of references within SFI.36 He describes how the experience of education a person has from the home country does not always correspond with the way of educating in the new country. This happens for participants in SFI and as school cultural frame of

33 Skolverkets rapport nr 131, 241-3. Original: “boende och närmiljö, hälso- och sjukvård, svensk vardagskultur, svenska helger och traditioner samt demokrati”.


references do not correspond with each other participants may start to question the education as well as the teachers. Malin McGlinn’s thesis Är detta en apa? en Studie av Svenska som andraspråk deals with the concept of knowledge in the area of adult Swedish language education for immigrants. Her study is conducted in Malmö and it describes how power relations between participants and teachers can develop. Furthermore, she points out the usage of generalizing vocabulary and discusses the problems that arise with such a vocabulary.37

4 Method

This is a study of the institution of SFI at Komvux Södervärn in Malmö and for this study empirical material has been gathered during a five week internship. When conducting social research several methods of gathering material can be used. In this study participant observations in classrooms have been carried out and during these observations conversations with teachers and participants have taken place. Interviews with principals, a study and careers adviser, and a welfare officer have also been conducted. At the beginning of this internship I had no clear view of what this study would concern as the main purpose was to get an insight into this particular workplace. Gradually during the internship I gained knowledge about SFI, and soon it became clear that the gathered information, how SFI mediates a lot of information about the Swedish society, could be useful for this study. To discover research questions while conducting the research is the fundamental idea of research based on observations, according to Benny Henriksson and Sven-Axel Månsson.38 This chapter presents some specific information about the procedure of both the observations and the interviews. There are limitations concerning this study and they will also be addressed. To begin with, some important aspects of research in general and of the chosen method are useful.


One aspect of research is that it can be done for different reasons. It can be done in order to support a phenomenon the researcher already is aware of, it can be done in order to confirm a theory, or perhaps to find out the existence of something the researcher is not aware of. In this study, it was my interest for integration which guided me towards sfi, however, the decisive factor was not my interest, but the fact that Komvux Södervärn accepted my request for an internship. It was the internship at SFI and the empirical data found there which led to a study within this particular field. Another important aspect of research is subjectivity. This means that every researcher has their own way of approaching a situation because we are all individuals. How we approach situations depends on various things such as personal background, in terms of place of growth and family, personal experience and education. Henriksson and Månsson also point out that “[w]hat we as ethnographers describe is not objective first-hand experiences or “facts”, but second-, third- or perhaps fourth-hand interpretations”. This means that the gathered material as well as interpretations of the material is colored by the researcher’s personality. Even if there is no way to eliminate a researcher’s personality in observations or interviews it is helpful to be aware of the fact that what is presented in this study is my experiences and interpretations.

One advantage with observation as a research method is that “participant observation is said to make no firm assumptions about what is important”, something that questionnaires or interviews might do. So, maybe this is a method where personal background and experience do not have such a strong impact, compared with other methods. As a researcher one can also feel a slight insecurity when not knowing what is important and what to make notes about. Thus, the notes from the observations of this study contain a lot of unnecessary information, but during the observation it is important to make notes of many things and later see which notes that are useful. Tim May points out flexibility as one of observations’ strengths, in the sense that it is not an action only happening once. So, the experiences drawn from one observation can be useful in the next. Another positive aspect of observations is that the

39 Henriksson and Månsson, 36.
41 May, 159.
information gathered displays behavior, that is, what people do. Contrary to interviews or surveys where the information gathered often shows what people think they do. And the difference between what people actually do and what they think they do can be vast. The combination of observations and interviews turned out to be useful as it was possible to discuss observation experiences during the interviews.

The interviews conducted can be described as unstructured as there was no prepared question sheet which was used during the interviews. The aim of the interviews was to achieve knowledge about a new subject. This is also characteristic for the qualitative interviews, according to Bengt Starrin and Barbro Renck. Contrary to quantitative interviews where the aim is to determine the extent of something already known to the researcher.42 An experience from the interviews is that pauses seemed to encourage the interviewee to keep talking. When a person’s answer was followed by a pause, from my side, the person tended to develop their answer further or take up another subject they felt was related and important. As mentioned in the last paragraph, the observations and interviews, in this study, are complementary. Using two ways of gathering information provides information which would be lost if only one way was chosen. Therefore, it is beneficial for this study that two ways of gathering material are used as it makes the study more comprehensive. Naturally there are disadvantages with both observations and interviews, but instead of addressing general disadvantages here the limitations to this study are presented further on. Consequentially, specifics about the conducted observations and interviews.

### 4.1 Procedure

The observations and interviews took place during my internship which started at the 5th of October and ended at the 4th of November. Apart from this period I also conducted one observation on the 24th of November. In total 13 observations were performed. During the internship all observations took place in the daytime. The late observation, however, took place in the evening. The observation time varied from two hours to four hours. The majority

of the observations lasted four hours, which is also the standard time for the daytime classes. Concerning most observations I had met the teacher beforehand; it was only in a few cases that I met the teacher as the class began. In most observations I introduced myself and explained my reason for joining the class, but in some observations the teacher introduced me. To what extent I could explain the purpose for joining the class depended a lot on how much Swedish the participants understood at the time. It was possible for me to take notes during the observations and then go through them further after the observation. I have chosen to keep the persons involved in this study anonymous as their names are unimportant. Instead it is important to describe what these persons do and say.

I carried out six interviews with different persons who hold different roles at this workplace. All interviews were performed at the interviewee’s office and the time of the interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. They were unstructured interviews as the purpose for them was for me to achieve more knowledge about the workplace. Common for all interviews was that I asked the interviewee to describe what their work tasks are and from there the interview continued. Depending on what position the interviewee holds, the questions have been of various kinds. During the interviews I have been able to ask the interviewees about their opinion in certain matters. It can be matters which I have noticed during my observations, and then am able to ask questions about during the interviews. Two interviews were recorded and then transcribed shortly after the interviews were conducted. During the other five interviews I took notes and afterwards went through my notes and added complementary information. It is necessary to address a few things which have put limitations to this study.

4.2 Limitations

The internship enabled this study as it provided both the opportunity and the time to gather empirical material. This project is limited both regarding time and range, but it is likely that spending more time gathering material would improve the results of this study. However, if this was to be done within the timeframe of the project, the empirical data would be severely different and less. Due to the internship it was possible to gather material and reflect upon the
empirical data without the pressure to write at the same time. A limitation to this study is that everything that was spoken in the classroom was not spoken in Swedish, as participants often spoke among each other in their own language. This means that I was not able to understand everything that was said. On the other hand, it made me pay more attention to the body language and study it more thoroughly, and that is also an important part of observations. Another limitation is that most interviews were not recorded, due to restrictions borrowing a recorder. Obviously not every word the interviewee says can be written down when typing, compared to when recording. On the contrary, a positive aspect of not recording an interview is, perhaps, that the interviewee feels more comfortable, as a recorder tends to make people nervous. The chosen method has been presented and now the empirical data together with the analysis follows.

5 Empirical data and analysis: Systems have Functions – four Identified Functions in SFI

In this rather extensive part my empirical findings, and analyze of them, are presented with the help of Parsons’ theory, presented in the theory chapter. The empirical findings concern knowledge that SFI teaches and conveys and it is only in this introductoily section that the Swedish language will be addressed. To begin with, SFI is part of the fiduciary system which fills the function of latency in fig. 2. This function, latency, refers to the socialization of children as well as new members into a new system. The norms and values of the system are mediated to new members with the hope that they will internalize them. From this SFI will be shown as a system and its functions will be presented by using Parsons’ AGIL schema.

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\begin{array}{|c|c|}
\hline
\text{SFI} & \text{A} & \text{G} \\
\hline
\text{Linguistic Adaption} & \text{Teaching Swedish} \\
\hline
\text{Information} & \text{Introduction} \\
\hline
\end{array}
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In this figure we see SFI as a system with certain functions. In turn these functions meet certain needs that exist in the Swedish society. To begin with the adaptive function, one can say that there appears to be a need for immigrants to learn Swedish when they arrive to Sweden. SFI fills the function of teaching Swedish, thus SFI meets the existing need. This leads to the goal of SFI, which is to teach immigrants Swedish. This is the most obvious goal yet there are other less obvious goals as well and I will return to them later in this chapter.

Regarding the integrative function of the AGIL schema, SFI functions as an institution which provides immigrants with some sort of introduction to the Swedish society. Concerning the function of latency, maintaining the existing norms and values of society, SFI fills this function by informing about the norms and values in the Swedish society and also by incorporating them into the teaching. Thereby, immigrants are provided information about the Swedish society within the framework of SFI. Presented in this way it seems as if SFI has an informative function, but this information is expressed in many ways. During observations and interviews it became clear that SFI as a system has several functions. SFI has the function of informing, affecting, preparing and preventing in various ways, and it is these four subjects that the rest of this chapter will be dedicated to. There are consequences to these four functions, and these consequences, stereotyping and infantilizing, will also be brought up in this chapter. Now, a presentation of the function of providing information about Swedish values and Swedish behavior.

5.1 Inform

Information about several things such as democratic values, medical care, dental care and the tax system is mediated to participants of SFI. It may be obvious why it is good for new members of the Swedish society to gain knowledge about for example democratic values while this might not be as obvious when it comes to knowledge about dental care. The importance of promoting and conveying democratic and equal values is brought up in two
interviews and also during two observations. During both interviews, both with persons holding leading positions, the interviewees said that promoting democratic and equal values is one of the missions SFI has together with teaching Swedish. These values are promoted in two ways: overtly they are promoted by talking about them, as a subject, in class; covertly they are promoted by being incorporated into the teaching. Thus, they become a part of the behavior and a part of how things are done at the school. During one observation a discussion about democracy arose, yet it was not a planned discussion. Members of the class started talking about something and someone thought that one person’s opinion was stupid. The teacher stepped in and explained that everyone is entitled to their own opinion and that it is important to respect other people’s opinions. A more extensive example of promoting democratic values took place during another classroom observation.

Participants in a class wanted to make their own coffee and tea in the break, instead of buying coffee and tea in the school cafeteria. Together with the teacher and the principal they had made an agreement and they wrote a contract where it was stated that they agreed to handle it in a proper way (i.e. keep it clean and remember to switch of the timer etc.) and that the coffee and tea only was for the participants of this class. The class decided together that they would start making coffee and tea on a Friday. However, during the break on the day before, Thursday, one person boiled water in the kettle and the teacher discovered this when returning from the break. The teacher asked who it was and the person stepped forward. Then the teacher explained that this behavior is not acceptable as it goes against the decision they had made together. They had all discussed when to start making coffee and tea and they had come to an agreement that they would start on the Friday. The teacher pointed out that this was a democratic decision and that going against that is not acceptable. In order to explain that this was about situations in a larger perspective and not about the boiled water as such, the teacher gave an example. When working together with other people, and making agreements with these people, it is extremely important that the people involved respect mutual decisions and do not act contrary to them.

The fact that democratic values are promoted indicates that there is a need for promoting these values. According to Parsons, this information would not exist unless the need for the information existed. One can surely say that democratic values is the foundation of the Swedish society, and therefore there appears to be a need for newcomers in the Swedish
society to learn about these values, but also to learn that these values are important in the new society. This is done in order to create coherence among the members of society, regardless of their time period as members. One can understand that for a society to be democratic, it is also important that the members of that society respect and share a set of values. In the AGIL schema this information is a part of integration, as it aims to create coherence among the members of the society. An important question arises here: do immigrants who come to Sweden not have knowledge about democracy, and hence not share the democratic values that members of the Swedish society do? It is important to study what the consequences might be as SFI addresses all participants in an aim to promote democratic values. I will return to this question later in this chapter, but now continue with information regarding medical care.

5.1.1 Medical care

During another observation an international health communicator, mentioned in the theory chapter, came to the school to inform about health and the medical care system in Sweden. The information was provided in different languages and I joined the information provided in “easy Swedish”. As the AH1N1 influenza was a hot topic in Sweden at this particular time, some information concerning this was inevitable, but the main subject for the day was the difference between a bacterial infection and a virus infection. The health communicator began by saying that if one goes to the emergency room on a Friday evening around 80 percent of the people who are waiting there are immigrants. Continuously, the health communicator explained that immigrants have a different approach to illness than Swedish people do and that this difference is reflected in the people who visit the emergency room. He explained that one of these differences between immigrants and Swedish people has to do with bacterial and virus infection, hence the information regarding this.

The health communicator informed about the difference between these two infections, and explained how these differences generate different treatment from the doctor. He said that immigrants, and in the category ‘immigrants’ he included himself, expect to get a pill every time they go to the doctor, because that is how it is done in their home country, but in Sweden it is not done that way. As there are no antibiotics which cure virus infections, there is no need for the patient to take antibiotics. He also explained that in Sweden doctors try to keep the
usage of antibiotics low as a high usage leads to an increase in the number of resistant bacteria. He discussed the symptoms of the two types of infection and encouraged participants not to run to the hospital for every little thing, such as a fever for example. A different approach to fever were also a subject he addressed as he argued that immigrants think that fever is very serious, almost lethal, while in Sweden people know that it is not. Again, the health communicator encouraged participants not to go to the hospital for a mere fever. The information that is given to participants of SFI implies that immigrants’ way of acting to illness is wrong and the Swedish way of acting to illness is right. The example of the people who are at the emergency room on a Friday evening is very clear in its message. The message is not that immigrants are sicker than Swedish people, which would be a natural explanation to the difference. Rather, immigrants go to the hospital far more often than Swedish people. This message implies that immigrants do not act in the right way, and that a change in behavior is a good thing and hopefully an outcome of the information meeting.

This example shows that there also appears to be a need for informing immigrants about how the Swedish medical system works, and even more, how members of the Swedish society are expected to react to different illnesses. Evidently, a problem exists in the medical care system with people going to the hospital for, according to the Swedish norm, “nothing serious”. This is most likely an economic problem as it takes time from patients with serious illnesses. The information can also be of preventive kind, where the aim is to improve the health status of participants and their family, and thereby prevent illness in the future. There is a need from another institution in the society, the medical care institution, to inform newcomers about what the norm in Sweden regarding medical care is. In order to meet the existing need, these health communicators are hired to inform immigrants about “how things are done in Sweden” concerning such matters. As the health communicators are of immigrant background, and have medical education from their home countries they are likely to be seen as more trustworthy in the eyes of participants. Having the experience from two countries also provides these persons with a frame of reference that a person without a similar immigrant background would not have. Health communicators then inform immigrants in order to create a behavior which is in accordance with the rest of the members of society, or at least in accordance with the norm.
A problem with this is that all individuals who migrate to Sweden already have knowledge about medical care and what to do when ill. However, this is not always the same knowledge that most people in the Swedish society have. So, when immigrants come to Sweden they are asked to put their knowledge and their understanding away and replace it with the Swedish way of understanding. Parsons theory says that there must be room for deviance within a system. Coherence, to a certain degree, is good for the system. Complete and utter coherence with no tolerance or acceptance for deviance is not. This, though, appears to be one situation where deviance is not accepted. At least not in this form or perhaps it is the amount of people deviating which is not accepted. Again, coherence is aimed by hiring health communicators to convince immigrants to change their behavior so that it does not deviate from the way a "normal" member of the Swedish society acts. Naturally, not all "old" members of the Swedish society acts according to the norm and at this moment I am not aware of any actions towards trying to change their behavior. This example clearly demonstrates an integrative function indicating that the relationship between immigrants and the medical system does not work. Apart from this medical care information I came across an even more specific example of information, information concerning dental care.

### 5.1.2 Dental care and the tax system

It was during an observation that I sat next to a participant and saw some papers in his folder. These papers gave information about how to take care of your teeth. It was not possible for me to see which institution had distributed this paper, but it is possible that the health communicators have handed them out as they also inform about dental care. Among other things, the papers informed about how often one should brush one's teeth. Two times: once in the morning after breakfast, and once in the evening before going to bed. The papers also said that it is good to use toothpaste which contains flour. Moreover, they informed about what is good to eat and what is not good. Sweets and such things are not good for the teeth and it is good to drink water. When I saw these papers I could not help to feel that this was

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43 Ritzer, 243.
information which normally would be directed to children, or if directed towards an adult it would probably be brought up during a dentist appointment, on an individual basis.

This example suggests that there is a need for members in the Swedish society to brush their teeth in a certain way, or at least two times a day. It also indicates that immigrants who come to Sweden do not know how to brush their teeth, thus ‘we’ must inform ‘them’. I can see that it is good for parents to make sure that their children brush their teeth well, as parents are responsible for their children. However, it is difficult to understand that adults should be informed about this. No one visits already existing members of the Swedish society, who are sloppy with their dental hygiene, to inform them further of the importance of taking good care of your teeth. Such kind of information does, in that case, come up during an appointment at the dentist. One cannot avoid posing the question whether an individual’s dental hygiene is a matter for society at all. It is quite clear that the example of health care as well as dental care both can lead to the upholding, or even the creation of stereotyping. But that perspective of this situation is addressed towards the end. First, a final example concerning information I want to present: information about the Swedish tax system.

While talking to some participants at SFI I was told that they had discussed the Swedish tax system during a class. During this week economy was the subject and therefore the tax system was a part of this. Their teacher had informed them about why people pay tax in Sweden, what the tax money are used for. Furthermore, that the Swedish government controls and regulates taxes and decides the size of them. Apart from this they had also discussed how to get the money to last, that is, basic home economics. The participants all agreed that it was good to receive information about the Swedish tax system. A need for this information has also been expressed during other conversations with participants. Among some participants there seems to be an unsatisfying feeling with paying money when they do not know why they pay this money, or what the money is used for. Information regarding this can provide the participants with an increased understanding for how the money is used, but it can also provide them with a better understanding of how they can affect their own expenses. A problem with this information is that it is rather complex matters to inform about and sometimes the participants’ level of Swedish can be a hinder. In other words it can be difficult for the teacher to explain economic matters without using a particular vocabulary, which
would normally be used when discussing this. Luckily there are interpreters at hand who can help in such a situation.

It is important to mention that some of this information, such as health and dental care, is not part of the regular SFI education, yet it is at SFI that participants are given this information. One main reason, if not the main reason, for this is, naturally, that at this school it is easy for other institutions to reach a large number of people who, according to these institutions, are in need of this information. During interviews I have understood that more and more institutions wish to come to SFI to inform about their institutions, what they do and perhaps also how they would want people to act. A problem with this is that it takes time from the lessons when Swedish language is taught. On one hand, from the perspective of different institutions it is good to come to SFI and inform because this is where institutions can pass on information to many people at once. On the other hand, from the perspective of SFI, teachers, principals, and perhaps even participants, it means that there is less time to engage to the Swedish language, the reason participants are there in the first place. It should be mentioned that information meetings, in Swedish, do to some level serve as practice in the Swedish language for participants. Anyhow, valuable teaching is lost. In common for all these examples of information is that they convey an implicit message of ‘how things are done in Sweden’. They suggest that things are done in one way, and one way only, and this is obviously not true. It would also be completely wrong to argue that all Swedes act in a specific way, and that there is no deviance among the behavior of Swedish people. These examples represent different areas within society where certain behavior is demanded or expected from members.

The information presented above can be said to belong to different areas of the AGIL schema. Even if the goal-attainment for SFI is to teach Swedish to immigrants, there can also be other goals which SFI wishes to reach. One could say that according to the AGIL schema, one goal of SFI, and perhaps this is the underlying goal, is to internalize the norms and values of the Swedish society to immigrants. The reason that this is part of the goal-attainment of SFI is that actions of this character are performed within the frame of SFI. If this institution did not desire to teach participants about the Swedish society, it would not be done. However, the desire to teach Swedish behavior may not come solely from the school; rather there is a desire from society on different levels. From the perspective of other institutions it seems as if SFI is
a useful forum where information can be spread. As other institutions, outside of SFI, come to
the school to inform about what they do, this information also belongs to the integrative
function of the AGIL schema. It is a way of improving the relationship between new members
of the society and already existing institutions. As other institutions use SFI as a forum for
spreading information, the school also serves a function in society. From the perspective of
the society, as a system, SFI has an integrative function as it helps to integrate new members
with existing institutions. When viewing SFI as a system in this way its functions also change
a little bit. The entire goal of SFI shifts from concerning language education to a meeting
place.

Finally, one could also argue that this information belongs to the latency function of the
AGIL schema. As the school informs about ways of behaving and acting in the Swedish
society, and also about how the Swedish society functions, the school has the function of
creating coherence among the members of society. So, as can be seen there are no clear cut
lines between the parts of the AGIL schema, and obviously the situation in society is not
black or white. This is important to remember, as the AGIL schema is not meant to be used as
a model where a system can just be put in according to set limitations, but rather the schema
should be seen as a model for understanding demands and requirements that exist in a system,
a helpful tool to use for interpretations of such systems. The common aim with this
information is that participants will internalize these Swedish norms and values so that
coherence among the members of the society is created. So, as well as teaching the Swedish
language, participants of SFI are also being taught what it means to belong to the Swedish
society and how they are expected to behave as members of the Swedish society. During my
internship I found that SFI to a substantial extent has the function of informing its participants
but another noticed function of SFI is that participants are affected in different ways.

5.2 Affect

As a complement to informing there is also a tendency of affecting participants. While
providing information is a communicative action where information about certain matters is
mediated, affecting is rather to incorporate certain ways of behavior into the daily life, and in
that way hoping that a change in participants’ behavior will take place. This act of affecting
was seen regarding democratic and equal values. It is not simply that information concerning these values is mediated. These values are also supposed to permeate SFI as an institution and thereby also be reflected in the teaching. By creating an environment consisting of democratic and equal values, the hope is that people will make these values their own. In a wider perspective this means that there is an expectation that when certain values are part of a persons daily life then that person might begin to act according to these values. The tendency to affect participants was also noticed during the information about Swedish medical care. The health communicator did not simply give information to the participants, but encouraged them to change their behavior. My interpretation of the situation is that the message, to change behavior, was openly stated by the communicator.

These two examples show that it is not enough for immigrants to have knowledge about how things are done in Sweden, or how to relate to things in Sweden. With the knowledge, a change in behavior should follow. It is understandable that having the knowledge of how things are done in a new society is helpful in order to understand the new society. With this knowledge each person then has the possibility to decide in what way they wish to act. But as these examples demonstrate, society also wishes to change how these people behave in the new society, not only their understanding of the new society. According to Parsons’ theory there are existing functions within a society and these functions exist because there is a need for them. This means that in the Swedish society there is a need for informing immigrants about the Swedish medical system as well as democratic and equal values. Furthermore, there is also a need for immigrants to change the way they behave. If immigrants already behaved in a way that corresponded to the norm of behavior in Sweden, there would not be any need for this information and thus the information would not have a function. When members of a society act in the same way regarding one aspect, the act of behaving in the same way tends to have a joining function. It is something they have in common and it creates coherence among the members.

According to the AGIL schema, coherence within a system is essential for the survival of the system, in this case the society. So, the health communicators fill the function of latency, L in the AGIL schema, when it comes to the Swedish medical system. They attempt to change immigrants’ current way of approaching illness or health and to internalize the Swedish way of approaching illness and health. Teachers also fill the function of latency when it comes to
democratic and equal values. As immigrants internalize these norms regarding medical care and democratic and equal values, coherence is maintained, or perhaps one should say that coherence is created. Whereas the information part can be said to belong to several parts of the AGIL schema, I argue that the act of trying to influence other peoples’ behavior is more concentrated to the function of latency. The reason for this is that the act of encouraging people to change their behavior is a long-term process. Information, on the other hand, takes a certain amount of time to give to the target group. The information is given once and when it is done the act of informing is finished. The act of changing behavior is rather a process which takes long time, and in some cases the person whose behavior is changing, might not even be aware of it. During a period of time persons’ behavior changes so that it corresponds with the environment. Therefore, the function of affecting belongs to the latency part of Parsons’ AGIL schema. Nonetheless, the function also belongs to the adaption part of the schema. Adaption concerns how a system adapt so that it works successfully together with its existing environment. In this case one can say that the environment, society, has expectations of how members of this society are supposed to behave. Therefore, SFI has the task of transforming these new members so that they fit into the existing society. This is how the act of affecting participants also becomes part of the adaptive function within a system. SFI also has the function of preparing its participants for the Swedish society.

5.3 Prepare

I have found that SFI prepares its participants for life in the Swedish society by helping them to produce, or put together, a portfolio. This portfolio contains information about work experience, education and skills. It is similar to curriculum vitae but more extensive. Participants produce this portfolio continuously during their studies, and in general, the portfolio is a requirement for graduating. This portfolio is useful to a person when applying for a job or an internship when the studies are finished. I also noticed that participants where taught that it is important to raise your hand when you want to say something. In some classes, not the majority, this was used throughout the everyday teaching. In other classes participants were told that it can be necessary to raise your hand in other situations, in work situations mainly. They were told that it is seen as polite by other persons, and that it can lead
to difficulties if a person does not do it. This example as well as the example of the portfolio illustrates how SFI tries to prepare immigrants for the Swedish society.

The mere fact that immigrants are prepared in these ways indicates that there is some kind of demand from society on citizens. One of these demands seems to be that persons who apply for jobs or perhaps internships are expected to show some sort of resume of what they have done earlier. In the same way it seems to be very important that certain rules are followed when being with other persons in a job situation. One of these rules is to raise your hand when you want to say something. This demand from the society does not exist in family situations but its existence is very evident in work situations. Therefore it is mediated to participants that this way of behaving is useful regarding work situations or when many people are gathered together. Thus, there is a need from society to prepare participants for a life within this society. SFI is the institution who is given the function to fulfill this need. Again, one of the goals of SFI is to prepare participants for their future, or more correct, existing life within a new society. This way of preparing immigrants for the Swedish society also belongs to the latency function of the AGIL schema as it is a form of internalizing which is taking place. The final aspect brought up is the function of preventing.

5.4 Prevent

Several actions of preventive kind have been found during the study of SFI. One of these actions concerns the health communicator mentioned earlier. The health communicators’ mission is to inform about public health and thereby also to improve the health situation among immigrants.\textsuperscript{44} So, when they inform about the Swedish medical system they are not only trying to provide immigrants with an understanding of the system, they also strive towards preventing illness and disease in the future. This means that they try to encourage people to live as healthy as possible in order to avoid illness or disease that they can affect themselves. The example of information about dental care is also an example of preventive action. This is probably done with the underlying meaning of improving the status of

\textsuperscript{44} Primärvården Skåne.
immigrants’ dental hygiene. (Dental hygiene appears to be a general problem in society as it shows to be linked to a person’s income) SFI also engages in other preventive activities such as easy training exercises, massage and relaxing exercises. These kinds of activities are performed because they are meant to improve the well being of the participants. The participants also do an eye exam and an ear exam to check that their vision and hearing is not impaired, and they are both done within the frame of SFI teaching.

All these preventive actions lead to an improved health in different ways for people. The wellbeing of society’s members is hopefully one reason for why these preventive actions are performed. However, one cannot deny that there is also a strong financial motivation for performing these actions. The more healthy members of a society are the less costs society has to pay for medical care. Whether immigrants are ill to a greater extent than others, is something I do not have any knowledge about. But the fact that these preventive actions exists, suggests that there is a need for them. This need could of course depend on the fact that many immigrants, thus participants of SFI, have experienced a lot of misery and warfare in their countries, and therefore they might suffer from more physical and psychological problems. That SFI has the function of informing about health care and taking preventive actions indicates that the need of improving immigrants health status, or at least preventing illness in the future, exists. Again, the fact that checkups, such as eye- and ear exam, and preventing actions are performed also contain the assumption that these people are in need of these checkups and this information about how to take care of ones body. The wonder whether immigrants who start working directly are offered an eye- and ear exam through their jobs arises, however I do not have any knowledge about this subject. Perhaps they are offered, these exams, but are they then offered to the entire work force or are they only offered to immigrants. Assumptions like the ones presented, and thus the way of acting carry stereotypes with them, and that will be further developed in the next section.

5.5 Stereotyping as a result of information

Generalization takes place when this information is passed on to all participants without any consideration of their previous knowledge and experience. It is understandable that generalization takes place because it is the easiest way to provide this information to many
people. The result is that instead of trying to figure out who already has knowledge about how to see a doctor in Sweden, according to the Swedish norm, the information is given to everyone. It could be argued that it goes against the guidelines of SFI as the curriculum for SFI states that “[t]he education shall be . . . adapted to the students interests, experiences, all-round knowledge and long-term goals” (my translation). On the other hand, the purpose of the guidelines might be more intended to guide the actual Swedish language education. But as elements concerning the Swedish society appear to be quite substantial perhaps the guidelines should give guidance about this subject too. The guidelines of the introduction by The Counties Agency also emphasize individuality. According to the guidelines the introduction should be individual. That is, it should “consider the person’s previous experiences, qualifications, ambitions and future goals” (my translation). So, in guiding documents it is stated that individuality is important. I would argue, so important that it should permeate the teaching at SFI. Yet, during my observations I have discovered that this does not take place in practice regarding how this type of knowledge is mediated. There is a lot of individuality in the linguistic part of the teaching, in the sense that tests can be taken throughout the term and if a participant passes the test it is possible to move to a higher level in the middle of the term. This means that participants who learn fast also have the possibility to finish fast while those who need more time also are given this time. So, there appears to be a great individualistic perspective in the linguistic part of the education, yet not in the societal part. I have also discussed this during my interviews, and here too, the problem of generalizing is noticeable. Some of my interviewees are aware of the fact that generalization takes place and they are not pleased with it yet they are not able to suggest how to act in order to change the situation.

While providing information concerning these subjects to all participants of SFI the risk of stereotyping is evident. Craig McGarty, Vincent Y. Yzerbyt and Russell Spears define stereotype as “any impression of groups held by anybody regardless of whether the accuracy

45 SKOLFS 2009:2 Original: “Utbildningen ska . . . anpassas till elevens intressen, erfarenheter, allsidiga kunskaper och långsiktiga mål”.


36
of that belief is disputed. Stereotypes are impressions of groups held by people.”

They mean that stereotypes often are used by people in order to achieve some kind of structure of the surrounding society. It is a way to categorize people in order to understand the world in a better way. Furthermore, the usage of stereotypes is a way to save time when encountering a new person. Instead of getting to know the individuality of a person, the person is linked to a group of which knowledge already exists, regardless the character of that knowledge. Finally, stereotypes depend on being held by a group of people. This group has common beliefs about another group of people. The common beliefs, the stereotypes, are accepted within the group and sometimes even seen as normal.

When talking about stereotypes, the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is often mentioned as an indicator. The usage of these terms was very clear in the example with the health communicator.

When the health communicator described the difference between how immigrants and Swedish people behave concerning medical care, he used the terms us and them frequently. By doing so, immigrants in Sweden became one group and all other people in Sweden another group. One can imagine that some generalization can be made if it concerns a group of people who all come from the same country. Yet, everyone knows that there are huge differences within a country as well. However, among the group of immigrants that was listening to him not all the persons were from the same country. So, among people from all over the world he generalized and made a group out of all the persons listening. At the same time he gave the information about medical care it also implies that everyone in that group behaves in the same way and furthermore that this behavior is wrong. One reflection of this is that the way of informing might create even stronger division between immigrants and Swedish people. Perhaps the differences between people from different cultures are pointed out even more than the similarities that people have in common. Or, if differences are to be appointed in this way, it is of vital importance to appoint similarities too. As explained earlier, the society seems to demand a certain behavior from its members with reference to medical care. The level of deviance that exists among immigrants is clearly not a level which can be accepted. But, if the

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48 McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears, 2.
correction of behavior in turn means that other differences are emphasized, and that the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ gains a stronger foothold, perhaps the information does not have a positive function within society.

Another example of how immigrants as a group are stereotyped occurred during a conversation between a principal and some teachers. The problem of admitting more participants to SFI without having available classrooms was discussed. One person suggested putting tents on the roof of the school building. Another person replied that they, immigrants, should be used to it. This shows how immigrants, regardless of background, are thought of as people who live in tents, or at least are used to live tents. Apart from generalizing, my opinion is that this statement also represents prejudices. My interpretation of the situation is that the suggestion was ironic and that the answer was said as a joke. However the comment still occurred, and if this is the feelings and the beliefs of a person working at SFI then it is a problem. Feelings and beliefs like these suggest that the person thinks less of immigrants, problematic beliefs when working together with immigrants. Even if these thoughts are expressed among a small group of people and not among participants these thoughts should be acknowledged. Thoughts like these can also make relationships between teachers and participants complicated if they are expressed in a different situation. Even so, one can imagine that as a participant it would not be comfortable to know that ones teacher have these opinions.

Regardless of the individual person’s background, information concerning democratic values, health and dental care, and the tax system is provided to all participants. Concerning democratic values one might argue that there can never be too much information about this, as it holds such an important and foundational position in society. Some of the other types of information might not, however, seem as important to someone who already knows it. Anyway, a necessary risk to point out is that at the same time as it is decided that immigrants must be informed about these subjects, it is also, to some extent, decided that immigrants do not have knowledge concerning these subjects. This means that the Swedish society makes an assumption that those immigrants who come to Sweden do not have the same democratic values and the same knowledge about health care, dental care and the tax system as already existing members of society do. Of course, this is not the case as immigrants come from all over the world and they all have different experiences and different previous knowledge.
Anyhow, an image of immigrants having certain knowledge and behaving in a certain way is created even if the intention is good.

It is important to acknowledge that in all these examples the act of stereotyping takes place on a high level in society. The things immigrants must learn, and thus do not already know, in order to become good citizens are decided upon by powerful people holding leading positions. This becomes even clearer when one considers that a political party in Sweden has proposed that an introduction course for immigrants should be introduced. This introduction course should inform about exactly the same things as explained above, yet it is done in an open way. The political party has proposed a ‘citizen course’ which will teach immigrants ‘how things are done in Sweden’. This means that it is not only the average citizen in the Swedish society who believes that immigrants need to learn certain things, and therefore decides to inform about this. Instead it is the government which takes on the role of socializing immigrants into the new society. This raises the question why this information is not mediated to newcomers in the daily activities and interactions with other people, but instead has to be mediated by the government. In turn, it can be seen to represent power relations between the government and the members of society, where the government tells its members how to act and think. Now that the risk of stereotyping has been addressed the attention is turned to the risk of infantilizing when informing about certain matters.

5.6 Infantilization as a result of information

During the study of SFI it was difficult to ignore that infantilization to some extent took place. How teachers in some situations appeared to address participants as children instead of adults. This was more noticeable in classes where participants had a lower degree of education from their home country. During an interview infantilization was also acknowledged. The interviewee agreed that it can be difficult, especially in classes on lower levels, to keep the teaching on an adult level. It is sometimes easy to talk to participants as children and to think

of them as children. And this infantilizing was noticeable in the way teachers talked to participants. Sometimes even in the way of sitting down next to the table in a way which represents lowering to another level. This is naturally my interpretation of the situations, but it was difficult not to feel that in some situations the teacher’s way of behaving with adults was very similar to a teacher’s way of behaving in a class with children. Whether this is something that happens in all classes is something I do not know. It was not possible to see whether it was a one-time thing either, as observations only were performed once in each class. Anyway, this is an observation which is important to address as it is something that can have consequences for participants.

This subject also came up during another interview when I brought up that the risk of infantilizing seemed to be present. The interviewee agreed that it does happen sometimes and that it is something that the school works towards eliminating. That infantilizing behavior exists does not seem unlikely as other literature about SFI also address this phenomenon. Both Carlson and Douglas point to the fact that teachers sometimes fail to treat participants as adults, and that teachers also take on a fostering role towards participants (see chapter 3.3). When infantilizing behavior is present it can also create hierarchies between the teacher and the participants. This means that participants may feel that they are in a subordinate position because the teacher treats them like children. The fact that they do not know the language and therefore may have great difficulties communicating with their teacher, as not all people speak English, leads to a possibility of participants feeling that they are in a subordinate position already. When the teacher then treats them like children and tries to teach them how to do things they already know how to do, yet not according to the Swedish norm, the relationship between the teacher and the participant changes and becomes a relationship between an inferior and a superior. A power relation is established where the participant is in a lower position even if this is not supposed to be the case.

These hierarchies can become even more evident as some participants receive social welfare payments during their studies. The social welfare office requires that participants have a certain percentage of attendance in order to keep the welfare payments and teachers’ role is to report attendance to the social welfare office. This can create uncomfortable situations both for participants and teachers. This was supported in conversations with teachers as some of them explained that it was not positive for their relation with participants. Even if this last
example does not mean that teachers are showing an infantilizing behavior towards participants, it can contribute to the creation and maintenance of hierarchies. There is also a risk that these hierarchies lead to participants finding themselves in a position of dependence. This does not correspond with the desire, from society, that immigrants as soon as possible shall become self-sufficient.

6 Conclusion

Swedish for immigrants, SFI, teaches so much more than just the Swedish language. SFI is an institution with the function of informing, affecting and preparing immigrants so that they become good citizens in the Swedish society. Examples of important things to know in order to be a good citizen are presented above. In short this knowledge concerns how to use the Swedish medical care, how to take care of your teeth and knowledge about what is expected of a person in society. SFI also engages in preventive activities in order to improve the health status of immigrants and thus prevent “unnecessary” illness and disease in the future. In the Swedish society there is a need for immigrants to learn how things are done, and the responsibility of teaching immigrants how things are done seems to have been given to SFI, even if that was not the intention from the beginning. Now that the empirical data is presented, we return to Talcott Parsons’ AGIL schema. In the beginning of the previous chapter SFI as a system was demonstrated with the use of Parsons’ theory. Now I use the same theory for the same system but with a more explanatory labeling of the different functions. Language is left out as the interest of this study is to describe what SFI teaches apart from the practical learning of the Swedish language. Instead this model shows SFI as a system which mediates other types of knowledge.
This figure shows that the four categories of the schema have different functions compared to fig. 4 in the beginning of the previous chapter. The reason is that the Swedish language has been removed, and the other remaining parts of SFI are presented. Firstly, the adaptive function is no longer to create linguistic adaption. Once the Swedish language is removed, it is not about teaching Swedish language so that immigrants speak the same language as other members of the Swedish society. Instead the function is to adapt participants to the existing Swedish environment. Not to make a change on one level, a linguistic level, but rather to make a change on many levels so that participants become more and more like the members of the rest of society. This, however, suggests that there is some sort of norm of a Swedish member. Furthermore, it suggests that immigrants are so different from the standard member that immigrants need to change in order to fit in. Secondly, the goal-attainment in this figure has changed from teaching Swedish to producing citizens. It has changed from one single goal – teaching Swedish to an overarching goal containing several parts – producing citizens. SFI has the function of forming people so that they fit society both during their study time, but also when they have finished their studies and wish to enter the labor market.

Thirdly, the integrative function of SFI is to act as a forum where meetings between institutions and participants take place. As the previous chapter explains, not all the information participants are given is part of the regular education. It is rather the case, in some
situations, that institutions contact SFI because they want to come there to inform participants. So, even if the information is not provided as part of the regular SFI education, it is provided within the frame of SFI, and therefore the school has the integrative function of a forum. Finally, the latency function of SFI is to socialize participants into the Swedish society, and through socialization, participants shall internalize Swedish norms and values. This is done by informing about certain matters, but it is also done by incorporating norms and values into the teaching so that they become a natural way of behaving. This is where the actual transformation of behavior and thoughts take place. One can wonder whether this type of knowledge should be mediated at a Swedish language course, where the primary aim should be to teach Swedish, even if this is not the case today.

In itself it is important to be aware of the fact that this information is spread at SFI, as it means that SFI is an important actor in the integration process for many immigrants. Since there are consequences to the spreading of this information it becomes even more important to be aware. With knowledge of how the spreading of this information can lead to stereotypes being created and maintained it is possible to discuss feasible and necessary changes. The fact that infantilizing behavior is noticed during my own observations as well as brought up in literature indicates that a change concerning this phenomenon also is needed. In the Swedish society, as a system, SFI has the function of teaching immigrants the Swedish language, but more significantly, SFI has the function of socializing immigrants so that they fit in the new society. This was very eloquently pointed out by one of interviewees who meant that SFI does not teach Swedish; instead “Swedish is a tool which is used in this factory where citizens are produced”. This idea captures very well what this study shows, and therefore it gets to serve as the conclusion for this chapter.

7 Discussion

If the description of SFI as a system with these non-linguistic functions is valid then SFI functions as a forum where institutions can spread information to immigrants about society. The reason institutions want to inform at SFI is naturally that this is a place where it is easy for institutions to reach a large group of people whom they feel are in need of certain information. This function does not seem to decrease, rather more and more institutions
contact the school with a desire to come and inform. This shows how SFI is a part of the integration process, perhaps even more than the linguistic part does. Of course the language is important for integration, yet a language course could be provided by both public and private actors. So, a problem is whether this type of knowledge really should be taught at a language course. The original purpose of SFI was to be exactly that, a language course. The societal aspect was brought in later and such information is not likely to be included in a traditional language course. Perhaps this is a consequence of the fact that Integrationsverket, The Swedish Integration Board, was shut down in 2007, something that could be further investigated.

Another way to continue from this study is to compare how these integrative functions are performed in other countries. Are they carried out within a language course like in Sweden, are they mediated by the members of the society or by the government like in this example. If there are differences, which there probably is, then it would be interesting to examine why these differences exist and what consequences they may have. If the wish is to continue on this track regarding SFI in Sweden it would be possible to study if there is a difference between the information mediated in day-time classes compared with classes in the evenings. As only one observation was done in an evening class it was not possible to see any distinct difference for me, but it is very possible that such a difference is present. If that is the case it might indicate that there are different ideas of what immigrants need and what previous knowledge they have depending on what time during the day they study. Perhaps there are different images of immigrants in the Swedish society without a discourse concerning this. I believe that when a person thinks of the word ‘immigrant’ the picture appearing is not of a person from Italy working with computers, still this person is an immigrant as much as any other immigrant.

SFI is going through organizational changes right now and hopefully they will lead to improvements both for participants, teachers as well as surrounding staff. SFI has often been criticized for not performing well enough, with participants not reaching adequate results. Some means to improve this have been implemented since 2008. A time limit for SFI was introduced in order to prevent participants from studying for years without making progress while obtaining welfare payments. National tests were also introduced as a way of decreasing regional differences. An investigation with the aim of evaluating the education was another
mean, among others.\textsuperscript{50} Means are put into force in order to improve participants’ results. These means all seem to concern the linguistic part of SFI, whereas it has been shown in this study that the part informing about societal matters is extensive. Maybe this part of SFI also needs to be studied more thoroughly in order to see necessary changes. Today there is so much more to SFI than just the Swedish language teaching and it is important that the other parts also get attention as they are very important for all actors within the institution. Hopefully, this study can help to understand SFI as a system within society, a system with several different functions of great significance for immigrants’ integration process. Especially since these functions appear to be of both positive and negative character. Consequences such as stereotyping and infantilization should not be trivialized; instead they deserve much more attention.

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