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Preface

Re-thinking bilingualism – Challenges of multilingualism and communication in classroom settings. An introduction

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The traditional discourse of bilingualism has in the recent years been strongly challenged. Approaches to bilingualism have tended to assume a monologic understanding of language use. Such a point of departure fails to recognize the dynamic that negotiation of meaning in multilingual settings through social interaction actually entails. These traditional approaches have revealed a monolingual bias in that ‘monolingualism’ has implicitly been regarded as the ‘normal’ state while bi- or multilingualism has been treated as the exception rather than the ‘rule’. A monolingual perspective favours a monolithic view of language on languages as discrete entities – a view which is increasingly contested by, for example, recent research that have revealed the multilingual – and multimodal – complexity of interaction and language use in multilingual settings. The term ‘bilingualism’ is therefore used in this special issue- with a *critical recognition of its limitations*. The research community has started attending to issues related to the broader concept of multilingualism, the implications of communication and the socio-cultural environment of language use. These revealed challenges are particularly relevant for school classroom settings and schooled education.

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The papers collected in this special issue evolved from an international workshop carried out through the work in the research group KKOM-DS, (Communication, Culture, and Multiplicity – Deaf Studies).at Örebro University, Sweden. The workshop became a valuable forum for analysis and discussion of the challenges currently faced by what we might consider traditional approaches to bilingualism. The discussion suggested the need to develop better informed methodologies with which to approach the complex issue of multilingualism. The implications for school practices of new approaches to bilingualism became a major subject of debate. We expect that the articles in this special issue will stimulate the debate and contribute some how to the research needed. !

The Editors !