

Who is a native speaker?  
The diversity of language profiles of young people  
in multilingual urban contexts in Sweden

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Language contact in many contexts around the globe has led to a much-needed discussion – also within the field of second language acquisition – of concepts such as native–non-native speaker, mother tongue and first–second language (e.g. Firth & Wagner 1997, Cook 2002, Block 2003). As interaction becomes more globalized and localized, new varieties of language emerge. In many parts of Europe, interest has recently turned to the varieties of the host language as spoken by both multilingual and monolingual young residents in the multilingual urban contexts resulting from the settlement of postwar migration communities (see, e.g., contributions in Androutsopoulos & Georgakopoulou 2003). At the same time, psycholinguistic studies of advanced and near-native speakers of various languages have also led to a critical discussion of the concepts of, e.g., first vs. second language speaker.

In this paper, we present a *language profile* analysis of data from 222 young people living in multilingual urban settings in Sweden's three largest cities. The young people were interviewed about their language background, language use and language proficiency prior to more systematic recording, transcription and analysis of their speech in different situations. The aim of the paper is to contribute to the critical discussion of the usefulness of the concept of native speaker by exploring a relatively large empirical material. The analysis of the great diversity of language profiles among the young people in our study is supplemented by observations of how the young people talk about the languages in their repertoires in an interview situation. The data is discussed against a background of the sociolinguistic characteristics of the multilingual and multiethnic urban settings in Sweden, which in some interesting respects differ from those of otherwise comparable settings in other European countries.

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Cook, V. J. (ed.) 2002. *Portraits of the L2 User*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Firth, A. & J. Wagner. 1997. On discourse, communication and (some) fundamental concepts in SLA research. *Modern language journal* 81:3. pp. 286-300.