

## **Kari Sajavaara memorial lecture 2019**

by Dorte Lønsmann (Copenhagen Business School)

Abstract

### **Language and work in transnational settings: Policies and practices**

Transnational mobility and global interconnectedness impact workplaces of many types and in many ways. One obvious consequence of increased internationalisation is increased linguistic diversity in many workplaces. While much previous research on language in the workplace focuses on white-collar, corporate workplaces, linguistic diversity in other types of workplaces has been somewhat overlooked. This lecture focuses on the role of language in what is sometimes called 'blue-collar' workplaces (although this is a contested term) in the context of transnational mobility and linguistic and cultural diversity. I will use two cases to illustrate how the relationship between language and work is conceptualised very differently in policies and legal frameworks compared to how language is used in practice in these workplaces.

The first case is a study of language policy and practice in an internationalising Danish logistics company. While the language policy of this company focuses exclusively on increased use of and training in English as a way of dealing with increasing internationalisation, an ethnographic study of life in the warehouse reveals that the communicative competence required for work on the warehouse floor demands a very different, and more complex set of linguistic skills than envisioned in the language policy. These findings problematise the fact that language requirements within the workplace often mirror the repertoires and practices of high-status employees, but may fail to take into consideration the needs of employees in different positions in the organisation.

The second case is from an ongoing study of a project that combines Danish language classes for refugees with internships. In current Danish integration law, refugees have to work in so-called 'language internships' as part of the integration process. The intention is that these internships will provide opportunities for language learning and for socialisation into the labour market. By focusing on the refugees' experiences in the typically 'blue-collar' internships, the case questions whether these internships actually present the intended opportunities for language learning. The case also raises the issue of whether the concentration of internships in certain types of workplaces has to do with the role of language - and language learning opportunities - in these workplaces or perhaps with a lack of available workers for these workplaces.