Code-switching as a resource of multilingual interactional competence: a case study from a course in liberal arts

Kanako Nishizumi
Chiba University, Japan

This paper focuses on collaborative learning in multilingual and multicultural class environment and investigates code-switching observed in peer interaction among four participants of group talk; a Thai, an Indonesian and two Japanese students whose Japanese and English are at different levels of proficiency. The group talk data were taken from the course called ”Japanese Culture from Intercultural Perspectives” offered in liberal arts courses at a Japanese national university. Participants in the course are allowed to use both Japanese and English in speaking in classroom and in writing in assignments. I, as the course lecturer, expect students to learn Japanese cultural and traditional aspects of life events through the course and, at the same time, to take this opportunity to be aware of and think what they should be concerned with in language use when communicating with people from different backgrounds in terms of linguistic, experiential and knowledge levels. In this paper, I analyse comment papers, a follow-up interview and recording data sets taken from one group with conversation analysis approach to examine how their way of code-switching has changed and how its change has influenced meaning-makings through peer interaction and relationship-building between participants. Data show that students develop their ”multilingual interactional competence”, with which they can co-construct meanings and jointly establish understanding through peer interaction by using Japanese back-channels, repeating messages by code-switching, etc. (cf. ”classroom interactional competence” in Walsh 2011), and they become concerned about their language levels each other and attentive to interlocutors when switching languages.

Reference:
Walsh, S. 2011 Classroom interactional competence, ”Exploring Classroom Discourse: Language in Action”, Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Keywords: multilingual interactional competence, peer interaction, code-switching.