Towards scientific argumentation in a second language

Eva Kottonen
Jyväskylä university, Finland

In scientific reports researchers should argue for the problem(s), research questions, methods, data and analysis (Phillips & Norris, 2009). However, complicated cognitive functions, such as scientific argumentation, are negatively affected by the use of L2 in comparison with the use of L1 (Floyd, 2011).

University students’ skills in argumentation in L2 have not been sufficiently addressed in Finland. Therefore, my research questions are 1) in what kind of situations do students present arguments in bachelor’s and master’s seminars in their L2, and 2) how do their skills in scientific argumentation in L2 differ from one level to another.

The informants are Finnish university students who have Finnish as their L1 and major in Swedish in a Finnish university. The data consists of transcripts of 2 videoed seminars where students discuss their thesis.

I applied qualitative content analysis to separate the arguments. I then examined their distribution into the different discourse elements (Phillips & Norris, 2009) in a scientific report, and compared the distributions of arguments on the two levels.

The results indicate that on the bachelor’s level students argue for the background, topic and their data, and on the master’s level their argumentation covers more discourse elements and is verbally more nuanced. The findings are in line with Neméth and Kormos (2001) who showed that the development of students’ language skills tends to lead to better quality of argumentation.

Literature:

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