Comparison of argumentation in second language in upper secondary and university students’ argumentative texts

Jaana Alila, Eva Kottonen
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Upper secondary students often base their informal argumentation about socio-scientific issues on their values or their personal experiences, whereas university students are expected to know the basics of scientific argumentation (Chang-Rundgren & Rundgren, 2010). In addition, students argue better in their L1 than their L2 (Németh & Kormos, 2001).

This presentation deals with the changes in the content and form of the students’ arguments as their language skills in L2 develop from upper secondary school to university. Our research questions are: 1) What kind of arguments do students use in their argumentative texts, and 2) how are contra-arguments dealt with in the argumentation.

Our data consists of 37 argumentative essays written by second year upper secondary school students and first year university students in their second language (Finnish or Swedish). We analyzed the arguments using the argumentation analysis frameworks of Chang-Rundgren and Rundgren (2010) and Mani-Ikan (2005, cited in Schwarz 2009).

The results show that in comparison with upper secondary students, university students take better account of the opposing view. Both groups of students based their arguments most often in their values, whereas the portion of fact arguments increases and the portion of experience arguments decreases with better language skills in L2. Results are in line with Németh and Kormos (2001) results; the development of students’ language skills tends to lead to better quality of argumentation.

Literature:


Keywords: second language, writing, upper secondary students, university students, argumentation.