Learning subject-specific language: students’ displays of (non)understanding in CLIL classroom interaction

Leila Kääntä¹, Gabriele Kasper²

¹University of Jyväskylä, Finland
²University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, USA

From the perspective of conversation analysis, language learning is seen as a social practice that L2 speakers accomplish as they participate in diverse activities and settings (e.g. Kasper 2006). In the context of teaching subject content via the medium of a second language (content and language integrated learning, CLIL), students’ shift of attentional focus from the ongoing content instruction to subject-specific language (e.g. Nikula 2015) can display their orientation to language learning. However, empirical research detailing the multimodal, temporal and sequential organization of the practices by which students visibly accomplish orientations to language learning is still in its infancy (cf. Morton 2015).

The data for this case analysis come from a 7th grade English-medium physics lesson on the topic of Hooke’s law. Analytical focus is on the practices through which students display their understanding and nonunderstanding of the teacher-led plenary instruction. Specifically, the analysis details the multimodal resources students employ in initiating repair by requesting definitions of scientific concepts from the teacher (i.e. display nonunderstanding) and in responding to the teacher’s definitions by claiming or demonstrating understanding. It reveals the practices that students appropriate from their co-participants’ interactional methods and how students modify these practices to fit their emerging displays of (non)understanding of the defined scientific concepts. The analysis also shows that participants’ orientation to matters of content is intrinsically intertwined with matters of language. These findings contribute to current research on how content and language are practically integrated in CLIL instruction on the ground.

References


Keywords: language learning, multimodality, CA, CLIL, classroom interaction.