Academic writing in the CLIL classroom

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Academic writing is a task that places a lot of cognitive demands on university students, many of whom have little to no experience with the processes or genres involved (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2002; Ong, 2014). In an academic writing classroom these fundamental processes and genres can be introduced and scaffolded by the teacher. However, this is more difficult to do in classes that need to combine the learning of content with the learning of a foreign language and, as CLIL classes are becoming more popular, there are few studies that show how students perform on academic writing activities in the CLIL classroom.

This presentation looks at research involving writing samples taken from second year students (N=38) enrolled in a CLIL class at a private university in Japan. The writing samples gathered from these students were analysed for discourse-level rhetorical text features using categories adapted from Kobayashi and Rinnert (2008). These findings were then correlated with the results taken from a previous analysis of the rhetorical structures found in writing samples that were submitted for an academic writing class. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data reveal that, while most students were able to transfer the writing skills learned in their academic writing classes to the CLIL class, weaker students showed an increased tendency to struggle with the cognitive demands of academic writing in this type of learning environment. These results highlight the need to integrate activities that can be used to help scaffold the academic writing process into CLIL classes.


Keywords: L2 writing, CLIL, rhetorical features.