Troubles with intersubjectivity when using L2 as language of instruction

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A growing body of studies on learning argue that CA’s analysis of social interaction can help to better understand learning in interaction. One way of analysing both intersubjectivity and learning in interaction is by analysing participants’ epistemic stance and its change. Topicalising one’s own and others’ epistemic stance is an integral part of the organisation of social interaction and socially shared cognition. What one knows and how one knows something are important issues in teaching/learning situations. The empirical material is of a Finnish as L2 program for 7-year-old Swedish-speaking children in Finland. The teacher used the L2 as the language of instruction. The program was organised four days (45 minutes/day) per week.

This paper discusses how the participants handle situations in which the children explicitly display problems of understanding the L2. The aim is to analyse and discuss possibilities and limitations for doing L2 learning as an interactional activity when the L2 is the language of instruction. The focus is on the children’s explicitly topicalised epistemic stances regarding the problems of understanding the L2 and their trajectories during the situations.

The possibilities of doing L2 learning in this context seem to be good when discussing familiar content and when the L2 is related to situated activities and context. The children mostly topicalise an unknowing stance regarding the L2 on a contextual/lexical level. The limitations for doing L2 learning become visible when the problem is on a more in-depth and abstract level. There also seems to be many possible aspects in the situations that can be misunderstood regarding what the child does and does not know (e.g. practical task, lexical, L2, L1, concept etc.). The use of L2 in resolving these matters may lead to extended and expanded misunderstandings and breakdowns in intersubjectivity, rather than contributing to solving the problem.

Keywords: L2 learning, conversation analysis, intersubjectivity.