’You are very clever, Jordi!’: Students’ use of politeness strategies in peer interaction in CLIL classrooms

Natalia Evnitskaya
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain

The present case study draws on recent research on L2 and CLIL classroom interaction from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Politeness Theory perspectives, with a particular focus on the learners’ use of politeness strategies in the target language when carrying out small group activities. The study aims to push this area of research a step forward by identifying and characterizing (a) conversational intricacies and (b) linguistic means through which learners’ use of (im)politeness is revealed in peer interaction within the distinctive context of CLIL classrooms and the way in which this use is categorised by L2 learners themselves and other participants.

With this aim the study combines two methodological approaches to classroom data: SFL and Multimodal Conversation Analysis (CA). The natural video-recorded data come from a bilingual Catalan-Spanish secondary school classroom in Barcelona (Spain) in which thirteen-year-old students learn Maths in English as a third language. The analysis of a series of excerpts taken from small group peer interaction shows different patterns of turn-taking, discourse modalisation and the use of a variety of face-saving strategies among the group members despite a limited repertoire of linguistic means available to the learners in the L2. All this evidences (a) the students’ knowledge of pragmatic aspects of the target language and (b) their joint orientation towards the progress and the successful fulfilment of the academic activity in course. The analysis also reveals that on certain occasions male students may use impoliteness as one of politeness strategies as an indication of friendship and belonging to the community of practice of ‘being (male) adolescents in school’. The study hence brings to the foreground the importance of sequential aspects of classroom interaction for enlarging our understanding of students’ use of (im)politeness in CLIL classrooms.

Keywords: student-student interaction, (im)politeness, CLIL.