Novices and experts: students’ embodied and artefactual resources for managing knowledge in a content-based language classroom

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Recent conversation analytic (CA) research on epistemics has shed light on the ways in which participants’ orientation to distribution of knowledge not only represents a pervasive aspect of everyday conversation (see e.g. Heritage, 2012; Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011) but is also a key feature of the social organisation of institutional settings such as classrooms (see Koole, 2012; Sert, 2013). Instead of seeing notions such as ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge’ as an exclusively intramental phenomenon, this line of work explores how speakers use talk, embodied actions and other semiotic resources for displaying and claiming knowledge states, as well as for managing individual rights and responsibilities related to knowledge. In the classroom, teacher-assigned learning objects are frequently represented in written form in pedagogic artefacts such as course books, task sheets, etc. What this presentation investigates is how the very same artefacts, and the way they are handled, also organise the interactional management of knowledge in the classroom by functioning as resources for the students to formulate and resolve emergent knowledge gaps.

Data for the presentation are video recordings of secondary school students working on pedagogic tasks in an English-medium history classroom in Finland. Focusing on sequences in which students either request information related to some aspect of the task, or invite their peer(s) to share tasks answers with them, the presentation examines how embodied resources and the handling of classroom texts may be used to construct a ‘knowing’ (K+) or an ‘unknowing’ (K-) epistemic stance (Heritage 2012) regarding the knowledge objects pursued in these sequences.

The findings are expected to shed light on the epistemic practices of peer interaction and illustrate the complex nature of resources that students in bilingual classrooms routinely assemble together for the construction of institutionally relevant social actions.

Keywords: classroom interaction, multimodality, epistemics.