Scaling Classroom Code-switching: Nexus Analysis and Learner Identity

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Nexus analysis provides a framework for studying discourse processes across scales of time and space that draws on methodological approaches from various fields (Hult, 2010). This study focuses on the interaction order (i.e. the organization of everyday behavior) of a communicative EFL class to explore how use of the shared dominant language, Russian, is shaped by students. More specifically, I examine the role of narrative tasks as a site of engagement in which students construct identities and discourses in place that mediate code-switching practices. The study contributes to a finer grained understanding of the potential of conversational narrative for nexus analysis (Al Zidjaly, 2006; Scollon & Scollon, 2009) as well as scales of action in the classroom.

The study draws on data collected in an adult EFL class in St. Petersburg, Russia. Data include focus group discussions, monthly videotaping of class sessions, and interviews and collaborative data analysis with the classroom instructor. Five class sessions were videotaped and transcribed over the course of one semester (October-December). The data were analyzed using the tripartite lens of participants’ historical bodies, interaction order, and discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

One aspect of the interaction order of the foreign language classroom is an attention to separation of ”target” vs. ”native” languages that is often enforced by the teacher (e.g., Macaro, 2001). This study demonstrates how the negotiation of local and global discourses of gender and sexuality, e.g. the promiscuous Russian woman (Skapoulli, 2009) or the obedient Russian son, in narrative tasks connected with the teacher’s ratification of the use of Russian by individual students. Accordingly, this study demonstrates how nexus analysis can draw together different scales of discourse for understanding how the use of linguistic resources are intimately tied to learner identities and discourses in place that emerge in classroom narrative activities.

Keywords: nexus analysis, code-switching, interaction order.