

Language switching as a strategy of communication in modern-day interactions

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Abstract

The study examined the communication strategies used by healthcare trainees in oral presentations. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) determine the frequency in which various communication strategies were used; and (2) compare communication strategies used by the healthcare trainees in monologues and dialogues during the oral presentations. The trainees were final year diploma students in healthcare. Their project Presentation and the Question-and-Answer session of 11 healthcare trainees were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The results showed that language switching is the main communication strategy relied upon to clarify jargon, clarify issues and emphasise key points during the oral presentation. The monologue has a higher frequency of language switching but the chunks of switching are smaller, as compared to the dialogues which have fewer instances of language switching because the chunks are larger. The findings indicate that when language proficiency is limited, language switching may compensate for linguistic inadequacies and enhance negotiation of meaning.

Introduction

Many second language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language and value ability to converse more than the ability to read write or comprehend oral language. On the other hand, many teachers of second languages view mastery of language as the ability to apply the learned rules such as syntactic features, vocabulary specifications and possible prosodic features, and they use drills and communicative practice to instill accuracy and confidence in speaking. These conceptualisations of language ability are restricted. Communicative competence is defined as comprising grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). A language learner develops in communicative competence when they learn to express, interpret, negotiate meaning in oral or written text (Savignon, 1983). Using these definitions of communicative competence, the focus of second language teachers' focus is clearly grammatical competence. Fluency, the target of second language learners, is a component of communicative competence. In comparison, strategic competence has received less attention.

Strategic competence is the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, as defined by Canale and Swain (1980). "An evolution of the speakers' interlanguage towards the target language norm affects their strategy use" (Paribakht,