

Literacies in Multiple Languages in Higher Education: A Case Study on How Bi/Multilingual Students Acquire a ‘Voice’ to Strengthen Their Academic Writing

Abstract:

Research suggests that very often bi/multilingual students lean on their entire language repertoire when they are writing in a language that is not their home language (L1). Today it is common that many university students may use their L1 in academic writing and thus find ways to express themselves in their second or third language (L2/L3) efficiently. The focus of this paper will be on the effect of code-switching of university students during the writing process. This is a qualitative study that was conducted on university students in Switzerland and Brazil, where they were asked to complete a written questionnaire in English. An andragogy model was used for the analysis of my data where the focus was on the natural maturation within individuals whereby one is able to notice the move from dependency to ever-increasing self-directedness in their writing. The questions addressed in this paper will be looking at the number of students that use their L1 ‘voice’ when they are writing as well as the way they use their L1 ‘voice’ when they undertake an extended writing task. The voice in this context refers to writers who set themselves up as having an “authorial presence” or identification in their writing. An analytical device was used to analyze my data to understand the complexities that mature writers undergo. Bi/multilingual students believe that when they write in English they think in English, however my findings suggest this is not always the case. In addition to my findings, it appears that L2 students are constantly borrowing words from their L1 when they are writing in their L2/L3. The benefit of this finding for future research is that the lexical switch that L2 students make during writing, should be regarded as the lack of exact equivalent in their L1 and not that they are lacking language proficiency. Finally, this study addresses ways in which bi/multilingual students could use their code-switching to assist them in their academic writing.

Keywords: *code-switching, multilingualism, academic writing, voice*