

L2 interactional competence: empirical findings and implications for praxis

Simona Pekarek Doehler, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Throughout the past decade, the notion of interactional competence has gained unprecedented attention in research on second language (L2) learning, teaching and use. Ensuing Hymes' (1972) conceptualization of communicative competence, various lines of research have for long been concerned with pragmatic development in an L2, mostly focusing on the realization of speech acts. Yet, despite of Kramsch's (1986) call for research that goes beyond an "oversimplified view of human interaction", and despite ensuing systematic conceptualization of the notion of interactional competence (Hall, 1993, 1995; He and Young 1998; Young 2000, 2003), it is only recently that we start to have empirically robust evidence as to how peoples' capacity to engage in specifically oral communicative interaction is affected in their L2, and how it evolves over time (see e.g. Hellermann 2008, and the papers collected in Hall et al. 2011).

How do second language speakers use the linguistic resources at their disposal to accomplish social actions in coordination with others? What does the development of interactional competence in an L2 consist of? Is interactional competence simply transferred from the L1 to the L2 or is it re-elaborated in the L2? How can such re-elaboration be fostered?

In this paper I first briefly outline the conceptual changes that lead up to the current understandings of the notion of L2 interactional competence. I then discuss empirical findings from recent studies on L2 interactional development in instructional and non-instructional settings, and show how the cumulative evidence emanating from the existing research allows us to identify a set of basic features that characterize the development of L2 interactional competence, both in instructed and in non-instructed settings. On that basis, I outline challenges for the teaching and testing.