CROSS-LINGUISTIC TRANSFER OF L2 WRITING STRATEGIES: DEVELOPING L1 AND L2 WRITING THROUGH METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY USE

Karen Forbes
University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

In an increasingly multilingual world, the way in which learners draw on their mother tongue (L1) when learning a foreign language (L2) and the role of one language in supporting the use of another in various ways is an important topic. There is much evidence to suggest that effective strategy use can be of great benefit to language learners (Cohen, 2011; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990), yet it is almost taken for granted within the literature that any reference to the transfer of such strategies between languages implies the one-way transfer of pre-existing skills and strategies from the L1 to the L2. However I would hypothesize that the reverse may be equally valid. If the use of metacognitive writing strategies is explicitly developed within the L2 classroom, then it seems logical that this knowledge could not only benefit L2 writing tasks, but may also positively affect L1 writing.

This ongoing PhD study seeks to examine how an explicit focus on metacognitive strategy use within secondary school foreign language lessons impacts pupils’ proficiency and attitude towards writing in the foreign language, and whether any such effects transfer to the first language. This study employs a mixed methods approach, using quantitative methods in the form of attitudinal questionnaires and student assessment data and qualitative methods in the form of open-ended strategy questionnaires, stimulated recalls and interviews. It is based on a quasi-experimental research design and involves a two-phase intervention of strategy instruction primarily in the Foreign Language classroom, and later in the English classroom of a Year 9 class in a Cambridgeshire secondary school.

This presentation will discuss some preliminary findings from the initial data analysis and suggest a number of pedagogical implications for both L1 and L2 teachers and learners in relation to improving writing skills. It is hoped that this study may also contribute in some way towards making a case for more explicit cross-curricular links between English and Modern Foreign Language lessons in secondary schools.
