Presentation title: Codeswitching as a Task Management Resource in EFL Speaking Tests: Testwiseness, Resistance, and Task Instructions

Abstract
In foreign language speaking tests, testees are instructed to stick to the target language and repeated instances of codeswitching (CS) to testees’ L1 during the test often impact test scores negatively (cf. Hasselgren, 1997). However, as conversation analysts have shown (e.g. Auer, 1999; Cromdal, 2000; Wei, 2002), CS is a complex interactional phenomenon, and the dismissal of CS as lacking competence risks resulting in unfair assessment. In the present paper, we discuss the deployment of CS in EFL speaking tests, with the question “Why that, in that language, right now?” (Ustunel & Seedhouse, 2005, p. 321) in focus. Using conversation analysis, we have examined all instances of CS in a dataset of 38 dyadic speaking tests for ninth graders in Sweden. For this presentation, we have focused on instances that appear when testees orient to the task-at-hand (Sandlund & Sundqvist, 2011). By examining the systematics of CS in sequences where the instructions for test-taking are, in some way, unclear to the testees, we discuss how their language choice in situ (L1 or English) becomes part of the task-as-process (cf. Breen, 1989). Aside from testees’ EFL competence, CS can be linked to matters like testwiseness, problem-solving, and disalignment with the task. As such, CS in speaking tests can be viewed as a multi-faceted phenomenon and as a powerful resource for testees, in particular in contexts where they are faced with the challenge of producing assessable talk on preset topics they are unfamiliar with. Our findings indicate that it is important for teachers and examiners to have knowledge of CS and its variants in EFL speaking tests in order to conduct valid assessments, since a testee’s deployment of CS may reflect interactional concerns rather than poor oral proficiency skills.

Summary
This study examines codeswitching in EFL speaking tests and discusses how codeswitching can be viewed as a resource for navigating through a test task. We argue that knowledge of codeswitching variants is essential to valid assessment, as interactional concerns rather than poor proficiency may guide testees’ language choice in situ.

Keywords: Speaking test; CA; codeswitching

References