

The use and abuse of Japanese in the university English class

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For many years the English-only approach has been popular, but recently this has been challenged. Many scholars suggest that judicious use of the students' L1 is indeed beneficial to many learners. The current study is a survey of the attitudes of 167 university students regarding their preferences for the amount of Japanese to be used in English classes taught by both Japanese teachers of English and native English speaking teachers. Furthermore, students highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of the use of English by teachers. Students indicated a wide range of preferences, but it is suggested that minimal use of Japanese by teachers is in the students' best interests. Students should exploit their knowledge of their L1 in the pursuit of English acquisition, but teachers should restrict themselves to providing both quantity and quality of English input.

THIS STUDY was motivated by the many conflicting messages I received concerning the use of Japanese in EFL classes in Japan. In most EFL conversation schools and some universities, the English-only rule is strictly enforced. Furthermore, my experience as a student of Japanese influenced my views on the use of the students' L1 in the L2 class. Having been used to the exclusive use of the L2, I was surprised when the Japanese teacher utilized the occasional English word as a shortcut to explain a Japanese word. Although initially resistant to the notion of my L1 being used in the L2 class, I gradually came to realize that this did not detract from my acquisition of Japanese. To the contrary, the use of a single English word sped up the comprehension process, which might have otherwise required a prolonged diversion.

Views concerning the use of Japanese in EFL classrooms in Japan range from a hindrance to communication to a tool for refining the comprehension of texts. Perhaps it is not simply the use of Japanese in the classroom that is the issue, but how it is used. Prodromou (2002, p. 5) alerts us to the critical distinction between using and abusing the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom. Clearly both students' and teachers' views on this issue must be solicited.

Literature review

The issue of the use of Japanese in the EFL classroom dates back to at least 1927, when Harold Palmer relented to allow the use of Japanese because of unanticipated difficulties with the Oral Method (Masukawa, 1978, p. 245). More recently, researchers recommend the exploitation of the L1 for a myriad of reasons. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) argue that the L1 provides students with "additional cognitive support that allows them to analyze language and work at a higher level than would be possible were they restricted to sole use of their L2" (p. 760). Guest (2004) reminds us that adult learners "cannot completely bypass using L1, so they might as well use it to their benefit"

(p. 14). Importantly, the exclusion of the L1 is in conflict with the aims of English as an International Language (EIL). Xu (2002) argues, "EIL doesn't repel the students' knowledge and use of their mother tongues. Instead, together with these other tongues, EIL produces multi-competent users of English" (p. 235). Furthermore, the English-only approach has been severely criticized in ESL classes because it reinforces the dominance of the English-speaking majority.

Whether or not we support the use of learners' L1s is not just a pedagogical matter: It is a political one, and the way that we address it in ESL instruction is both a mirror of and a rehearsal for relations of power in the broader society. (Auerbach, 1993, p.10)

Barker (2003) argues that Auerbach's view, although intended to address the issue of ESL instruction, "applies equally to the EFL classroom" (p. 7). However, in one important way it does *not* apply to the EFL context in Japan because of the completely different power relations between English and Japanese. While English enjoys a high level of prestige in Japan, Japanese is the national language and naturally enjoys an even higher level of prestige. The discouragement of Japanese in the EFL classroom is usually for pedagogical reasons and not because of an imbalance of power. Thus, Barker's extension of Auerbach's argument against the exclusive use of English in ESL to the EFL context in Japan is questionable.

Quantitative studies, which have addressed the question of Japanese students' views concerning the use of their L1 in the EFL classroom, include Critchley's (1999) study of 160 students, Burden's (2001) study of 290 students and 73 teachers, and Burden and Stribling's (2003) study of 151 students. The current study differs from the others in two important ways. Firstly, students were asked the proportion of their L1 they would like their JTE (Japanese teacher of English) and NS (native speaker) teachers to use, and aims to find if there are different expectations of these teachers. The second difference is that students were asked to state the advantages and disadvantages of the use of the L1 by JTE and NS teachers.

Methodology

A questionnaire (see Appendix) was administered to 167 students studying English at a university in western Japan. Approximately 10% were English majors with the remainder representing the faculties of law, economics, and commerce. All responses were open-ended in order to avoid

prejudicing the answers by suggesting possible responses, and to allow students to think of a genuinely personal response. It was also hoped that an open-ended question would allow them to provide a deeper level of response than simply selecting from a list. The questions were in Japanese and students were instructed to respond in Japanese. However, a small number responded in English. The students' responses were translated into English and classified according to the categories that emerged. Finally, the opinions of seven JTEs were solicited to uncover any additional perspectives.

Results and discussion

Japanese has traditionally been the language of instruction for Japanese teachers' of English (Hosoda, 2000) and English has been the language of instruction for NS teachers. This dichotomy reflects the beliefs about the acquisition of English; the JTE's role is considered to be the explanation of grammatical rules of English, and the NS' role is to facilitate communication in spoken language. Hence students are presented with models of teachers who almost exclusively use their own L1.

Accordingly, most students (72%) expected the JTE to use more Japanese in the English class than the NS teacher. Furthermore, most students indicated a preference for the teacher to speak in their L1 most of the time, while 60% indicated they would prefer the JTE to speak in Japanese 50% or more of the time, and 81% indicated they would like the NS teacher to use Japanese less than 50% of the time. This response would seem to indicate that the instructor should spend most of their time speaking their L1. Unfortunately, this also suggests that students have low expectations of their teachers as role models of second language acquisition.

The proportion of Japanese the respondents would like the JTE to use (72%) was thus much higher than expected. This may be a reflection of the methodology students had grown used to in junior and senior high schools, and a belief that an explanation in their L1 is necessary for comprehension. However, this attitude may need to be challenged as tolerance of ambiguity and the use of guessing strategies are characteristic of successful language learning (see Rubin, 1975).

The proportion of Japanese that students indicated they would like the NS teacher to use in class was also much higher than anticipated. Several of the respondents indicated they would

like the NS teacher to speak Japanese up to 80% of the time. Only 11% of students said they would like the NS teacher not to use any Japanese at all. Students' perceptions of the advantages of L1 support related overwhelmingly to comprehension (82%). As the responses were unsolicited this suggests that comprehension is a serious concern. This could either be a misplaced belief or a genuine problem.

EFL university classes in Japan differ from many other countries in that usually they are compulsory. Japanese students in EFL classes are composed of a cross section of students, not just the linguistically able. Students who major in mathematics, engineering, medicine or law must obtain credits for compulsory English classes. Many of these students may be less motivated than those who have come to university specifically to study English. In contrast, enrollment at university in a foreign language course in English-speaking countries is not compulsory. Western teachers cannot generalize from their own experience as students in foreign language classrooms in universities that were composed of a select group of students. The widespread preference for L1 support may be because the majority of respondents were non-English majors.

The need for reinforcement in Japanese

Many students often indicate that they would prefer an English explanation to be followed by a Japanese translation. Burden (2001) argues that this is a result of conditioning in high schools in which preparation for exams is achieved more quickly in the L1. The preference for L1 back up is confirmed by many students in this survey:

英語で言われたことを理解することができる点。

We can understand what has been said in English more quickly.

聞き取れなかった英語でも理解することができるから。

We can understand even when we couldn't understand the English.

聞き取れなかったりした場合、授業内容が分からなくなってしまったことを避けられること。

We can avoid not understanding the lesson when we haven't understood the English.

However, these comments suggest that the very purpose of the lesson is not being achieved; if the

teacher has to resort to the students' L1 the objective is lost. The student who made the final comment specified a disadvantage of the NS teacher speaking Japanese as:

きれいな英語に触れ、聞き取りの力などを鍛えるきっかけのチャンスなのでもったいないこと。

It's a waste because it's a special chance to come into contact with proper English and develop our listening ability.

The following view indicates that a message conveyed in Japanese that could have been conveyed in English is perceived as a missed opportunity:

理解できないとすぐに日本語が使われると授業の意味がなくなってしまう。

The lesson becomes meaningless if the teacher uses Japanese straight away when we don't understand.

Disadvantages of speaking Japanese in the EFL classroom

Unlike the previous section in which there was a clear majority of similar answers, the section relating to the disadvantages of speaking Japanese was much less defined. Student responses included the following:

- *Waste of an opportunity*
- *Students become dependant on the teacher speaking Japanese*
- *Students stop thinking for themselves*
- *Loss of motivation*
- *The role of the native speaking teacher becomes meaningless*
- *Loss of concentration when listening to English*
- *Missing out on hearing the native speaker's pronunciation*
- *Students' English does not improve*

Some students indicated that time spent speaking Japanese could be time spent speaking English, and the response *mottainai* (wasteful) was frequently cited as a disadvantage of the NS teacher using Japanese. The reason for the wasted opportunity was that there are relatively few opportunities for the average student to use English in a communicative context:

普段ネイティブの英語を聞く機会があまり無いので授業でしっかり勉強したい。

Ordinarily we don't really have the chance to hear a native speaker, so I really want to study it in class.

Furthermore, most students indicate different preferences for Japanese use by NS and JTEs. Only a minority of students (19%) indicated a preference for the same amount of use of Japanese by NS and Japanese teachers. Describing a disadvantage of the NS teacher speaking Japanese in class, one student argues:

ネイティブスピーカーの意味が無い、せっかくきれいな英語を聞けるのだから英語を使うべき。

It's meaningless to have a NS teacher. The teacher must use English because it's a special chance to hear the proper pronunciation.

One student who indicated she would like the NS teacher to use no Japanese, and her Japanese teacher of English to use 60% Japanese in the classroom, cites an advantage of her JTE using Japanese to teach English as follows:

細かい日本語との違いを分かりやすく理解できる。

I can easily understand in detail the differences from Japanese.

These students expect the NS teachers to focus on their L1, and the Japanese teachers to give detailed and precise explanations of English use in Japanese. A student whose preference was 50% use of Japanese by the NS teacher and 90% by the JTE, lists an advantage of the JTE using Japanese as:

より深く英語を理解できるから。

I can have a deeper understanding of English.

A further disadvantage cited by students is that the use of Japanese creates a dependence on Japanese. They would prefer to be presented with the challenge of the exclusive use of English.

生徒が日本語に頼ってしまうこと。

Unfortunately the students depend on Japanese.

ネイティブスピーカーだから日本語を使う必要がないと思う。言われたことが何なのか考えることをしなければ英語は上達しないという点

Because the teacher is a native-speaker I think there is no need for them to use Japanese. Our English won't improve unless we think about what has been said to us.

日本語慣れをして、それに頼ってしまって英語のリスニングにならないこと。

We become used to hearing Japanese and depend upon it, and we are not doing English listening practice.

L1 support to create solidarity

Hosoda (2000) suggests the use of Japanese by the JTE creates "informality and friendliness" (p. 78). According to Burden (2001), "both teachers and learners recognized the value of occasional Japanese use to relax the students, to serve their basic psychological need of not having their language rejected" (p. 8). In contrast, many students in this study view the relaxed atmosphere created by the use of their L1 as a barrier to the tension that may provide the stimulus to promote learning:

言われたことが何なのか考えることをしなければ、上達しないという点。

We won't improve unless we think about what has been said to us.

少し安心して、英語を本気で聞き取ることがなくなってしまう。

We feel a little reassured and don't need to really try and listen to the English.

先生が英語で言っているときに、生徒の聞こうとする集中力が少し減るのではないかという点。

Maybe the students lose concentration when the teacher is speaking English.

The dilemma is whether the friendly relationship created by the use of a common code leads to an atmosphere that is conducive to good communication, or whether the tension which is inherent in communicating exclusively in a foreign language provides the impetus for learning to occur. The latter view is confirmed by one of the teachers surveyed, who indicated *students may feel more embarrassed speaking English when they really do not have to*. They may try to avoid losing face by the inevitable risk-taking that accompanies communication in the L2.

Teachers' views

Teachers' views largely confirmed the students' views but also included additional comments. Advantages of the NS teacher using Japanese included the explanation of abstract concepts and a model of communicative language use with possibly less accuracy of form. One teacher suggested a demonstration of comprehension of Japanese in order to prevent the students chatting. Disadvantages of the NS teacher speaking Japanese include the absence of negotiation of meaning in English.

Advantages of the JTE using Japanese included the explanation of difficult grammatical points, saving time, and the explanation of abstract concepts. Disadvantages included the class becoming teacher-oriented and reinforcing the dichotomy between learning English and communicating in English.

Conclusion

Although there has recently been a backlash against the English-only movement, limiting the teacher's use of spoken Japanese is still in the students' best interests. Unlike the ESL context, there are few opportunities to use English communicatively in Japan. Both JTEs and NS instructors must resist the temptation to provide a quick Japanese translation when the concept could be explained in English.

Furthermore, there is a place for non Japanese speaking EFL instructors as they provide a genuine opportunity for meaningful exchanges in English without feigning ignorance of Japanese. The issue of whether monolingual EFL instructors should learn Japanese is external to the debate about the students' classroom needs, other than the provision of a role model of second language acquisition.

The students themselves may need to draw upon the resources of their L1 in order to facilitate comprehension, but this is largely external to the role of the teacher. Hence both the use of bilingual dictionaries and note taking in the L1 should be encouraged. Students use their L1 as a basis for developing abstract ideas that can be later expressed in the L2 (see Auerbach, 1993). This position differs from the traditional *all English* position in that it does not demand that students banish their L1 from their reasoning processes. Students should be provided with written explanations in Japanese of grammatical points that are not acquired by mere exposure. A judicious use of spoken Japanese by EFL instructors may occa-

sionally be necessary, but generally the English-only principle provides the impetus for successful language acquisition.

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Appendix

Language preference questionnaire

1. 英語のネイティブスピーカーの先生には、英語の授業でどのくらい（何パーセント）日本語を使ってもらいたいですか。(What percentage of Japanese would you like your native speaking English teacher to use in your English class?)
2. 日本人の英語の先生には、英語の授業でどのくらい（何パーセント）日本語を使ってもらいたいですか。(What percentage of Japanese would you like your native speaking Japanese teacher to use in your English class?)

以下の質問に日本語か英語で答えてください。なお、できるだけ詳しくわかりやすく書いてください。(Please answer the following questions in either Japanese or English. Please give as much detail as you can. Please write clearly.)

3. 英語のネイティブスピーカーの先生が英語の授業で日本語を使うことの良い点は何ですか。(What are the advantages of a native English speaking teacher using Japanese in your English class?)
4. 英語のネイティブスピーカーの先生が英語の授業で日本語を使うことの良くない点は何ですか。(What are the disadvantages of a native English speaking teacher using Japanese in your English class?)
5. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業で日本語を使うことの良い点は何ですか。(What are the advantages of a native Japanese speaking teacher using Japanese in your English class?)
6. 日本人の英語の先生が英語の授業で日本語を使うことの良くない点は何ですか。(What are the disadvantages of a native Japanese speaking teacher using Japanese in your English class?)