Teacher use of students' first language: Introducing the FIFU checklist

Suzanne M. Yonesaka
Hokkai-Gakuen University
Mitsutada Metoki
Hokkai-Gakuen University / Hokkaido Institute of Technology

The decision to use or avoid the students' first language (L1) when teaching is critical because it impacts the pedagogy so greatly. To help teachers articulate their beliefs about L1 use, this paper discusses four possible stances that may be taken regarding teacher use of students' L1 (Macaro, 2001; Yonesaka, 2005). This paper also introduces a practical checklist, *Functions of Instructor First-language Use (FIFU),* to help teachers examine their own classroom use of the L1. Rather than focusing on how much teachers use the L1 or the reasons why, the checklist focuses on the pedagogical functions that teachers are performing in the L1. For ease of use, it organizes these functions around classroom discourse frames (Pennington, 2002) in which teachers play four different roles. Appendices include English and Japanese versions of the checklist.

被授業者の第一言語を授業中に用いるか否かは非常に重要な選択である。本論では、第一言語の使用に関して授業者の信念を掘り起こすべく、先ず授業者による被授業者の第一言語の使用（Macaro、2001；Yonesaka、2005）に関して考え得る４つの立場について議論する。次に、授業者による被授業者の第一言語の使用に関して授業者本人が検討を行う際に便利なチェックリスト"Functions of Instructor First Language-Use (FIFU)"を紹介する。本チェックリストは第一言語使用の量や理由よりもむしろ、第一言語を使用する際の教育学的観点から見た機能について焦点が充てられている。容易な使用を目的として、本チェックリストは授業者が異なる役割を担う教室における発話の枠組み（Pennington、2002）を教育学的観点から機能別に整理分類している。尚、付録にはチェックリストの英語版と日本語版を添付した。

For the teacher of foreign languages, the decision to use or avoid the students' first language (L1) when teaching is critical because it impacts the pedagogy so greatly. In Japan, English education is characterized by a strong reliance on the students' L1, particularly at the secondary level where

classes are often taught by non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs) using traditional methods. The elephant in the room is that many teachers tend to over-use the L1. Thoughtful discussion is needed to find local answers to this issue. Classroom teachers who participate in such a discussion need to be able to articulate their own beliefs toward L1 use, and they need to be aware of how and why they use the L1. One purpose of this paper is to provide teachers with a framework for discussing their beliefs about L1 use. The second purpose is to introduce a practical checklist to help teachers examine their own classroom use of the L1. This checklist, *Functions of Instructor First-language Use (FIFU),* is theory-based but simple to use. This paper will explain how the checklist was developed and piloted.

A framework for beliefs about teacher use of students' L1

A constructivist approach in education attempts to make sense of teacher actions, such as using or avoiding the L1, by uncovering their beliefs. What are the possible beliefs that teachers can hold regarding their own use of the students' L1? According to Macaro (2001), there are three stances that teachers in monolingual foreign language classrooms (classrooms where the students share the same mother tongue) can take regarding the use of the L1. These three positions assume environments in which instruction takes place mostly in the L2, with code switching in the L2-->L1-->L2 direction. To account for traditional language classrooms in Japan, Yonesaka (2005) has added a fourth position, in which it is assumed that instruction

will take place mostly in the L1 and any code switching is in the direction of L1-->L2-->L1. A detailed review of the literature for and against each position can be found in Yonesaka (2005).

(1) The Virtual Position: The classroom is like the *virtual* target country, so the aim of the classroom is the total—or near-total—exclusion of the L1, as long as the teacher is skilled enough.

(2) The Maximal Position: Because there is no pedagogical value in L1 use, teachers intend to use the TL maximally as the language of instruction. However, teachers have to resort to using the L1 because of teaching and learning conditions.

(3) The Optimal Position: Some aspects of learning may actually be enhanced by the use of the L1. We need to discover the pedagogical principles for using the L1.

(4) The Regressive Position: In monolingual contexts, foreign-language classes should rely mainly on L1 instruction, which is the most effective way for these classes to be taught.

Table 1. Possible stances regarding teacher use of students' first language

	Relatively fluent in Ss' L1	**Not fluent in Ss' L1**
Relatively fluent in L2	Maximal or Optimal Position	Virtual Position
Not fluent in L2	Regressive Position	

These four ways of thinking about L1 use are related to the teacher's proficiency in both languages. NESTs who are not proficient in the students' L1, must, by default, teach

from the Virtual Position. NNESTs who are not fluent in the L2 can rationalize their professional lives only by adhering to the Regressive position. This incompatibility probably helps to maintain Japan's dual curriculum (Sakui, 2004) in secondary English education. Very broadly, NNESTs teach reading, writing, and grammar from a Regressive Position, and NESTs teach oral communication skills from a Virtual Position. The above paradigm (see Table 1) would suggest that, if the number of bilingual teachers (both NEST and NNEST) increases at all levels of English education in Japan, there could be a gradual shift away from this dual curriculum into a more mature, coherent curriculum taught from the Maximal or Optimal Position.

FIFU: A checklist for examining teacher use of students' L1

We believe that teaching practices based on the Optimal Position are a reasonable and achievable goal for NNEST teachers in Japan who are reasonably fluent in the L2. Given the present English curriculum and pressures of entrance exams, only teachers in the most fortunate of circumstances can achieve the *English only* secondary classroom of the Virtual Position. Most teachers probably hold the Maximal Position, aspiring for *as much English as possible*; however, after backsliding into using more and more Japanese, these teachers may feel guilty, inadequate, or frustrated. Therefore, we think that secondary teachers should aim to use limited amounts of the L1 in a disciplined and pedagogically meaningful way throughout the curriculum—in reading as well as oral communication classes. The first step is for the teacher to become aware of the functions for which she

is using the L1. At that point, she will be able to consider whether the L2 is a reasonable alternative for that function. To help teachers recognize the functions for which they use the L1, we decided to develop an observational checklist.

Teacher use of students' L1

Research shows that teachers use the L1 in the affective sphere; for example, in some contexts, the L1 can serve as a *we-code* to create solidarity with students (Camilleri, 1996; Canagarajah, 1995; Macaro, 2001). Teachers also use the L1 in the pedagogical sphere; for example, they use the L1 to translate lesson items or instructions (Hosoda, 2000; Liu, n.d.; Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff,1994; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002) and to manage the class (Cole,1998; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002).

Our first step in developing the FIFU was to extract these and other examples of teacher L1 use from the literature. Next, we separated the reasons from the functions.

The term *functions of L1 use* is commonly used to refer to both the *what* and the *why* of L1 use. However, in this paper, we define functions of L1 use (the *what*) as observable pedagogical behaviors. In contrast, the reasons or intentions of L1 use (the *why*) can be provided only by the teacher herself through qualitative methods such as introspection or interviews.

An important point is that various reasons can be attributed to a single function of L1 use, and that a single reason for L1 use can be realized via various functions. For example, a teacher can use the L1 to translate a lesson item. This function can be performed for various reasons: to make the

input comprehensible, to provide repetition, to respond to a student request for a translation, and so on. In the same way, a teacher might intend to use the L1 to strengthen her relationship with her students. This intention can be realized through various functions: checking comprehension, giving feedback, chatting, and so on. By separating the functions of L1 use from the reasons for L1 use, the picture becomes much clearer.

To organize the functions that researchers have mentioned, we borrowed a framework from classroom discourse analysis. Pennington (2002) has proposed that classrooms have several discourse frames that can be pictured as nested boxes. First, in the innermost Lesson Frame, the curriculum is presented: the focus is on language. In the Lesson-support Frame, the teacher helps the lesson take place by structuring student behavior and communication. In the Institutional-Support Frame, the teacher takes care of institutional business. Finally, in the outermost Commentary Frame, teacher and students comment, and sometimes this turns into off-lesson talk.

We used these frames to identify the teacher's roles, from specific to general: as a language teacher or language informant, as a classroom teacher, as a member of an institution, and as a person. We then categorized the functions of L1 use that we had extracted from the literature into each of these roles. This nested organization of the FIFU checklist makes it easier for a teacher to recognize the function that she is performing. If she is not sure how to code an utterance, she can start by considering what role she is taking and where that utterance would occur.

Checklist functions

The following pedagogical functions are included in the FIFU checklist. (In the examples below, italicized words are spoken in the students' L1.)

1. Teacher's role: Language teacher

The teacher is acting as a linguistic or meta-linguistic informant, performing functions that would only occur only in a foreign-language classroom.

1. Translate (Canagarajah, 1995; Hosoda, 2000; Liu, n.d.; Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff,1994; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Translate lesson item or instructions; translate an L2 utterance spoken by a student, team-teacher, or by oneself.

   [a] "Does he make ramen?" *means "Does he make ramen?"*

2. Paraphrase or summarize (Ishida et al., 2004; Macaro, 2001). Make lesson item or content comprehensible by paraphrasing or summarizing rather than by translating; summarize an L2 utterance spoken by a student, team-teacher or by oneself.

   [b] *The next sentence explains how Kamau spent that day at school.*

   [c] Tongue *is in here. (points)*

3. Comment on or elicit L2 forms (Canagarajah, 1995; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Teach grammar, vocabulary formation, or pronunciation explicitly; ask display questions to elicit the target forms.

[d] *You can use the expression* "would like to*" here, like* "I would like to go shopping*".*

[e] *What would you insert here as the subject?*

4. Expand on content (Canagarajah, 1995). Provide supplementary background or cultural information to make lesson comprehensible.

[f] *There is no language called "African" but the Swahili language is spoken as an official language.*

5. Comment on language learning—meta-linguistic commentary on languages or language learning in general.

[g] *It is important to write carefully but also important to write fast.*

2. Teacher's role: Classroom teacher

The teacher is acting as a classroom teacher in order to structure communication and behavior, performing functions that would occur in any classroom where any subject is taught.

6. Give feedback (Canagarajah, 1995; Hosoda, 2000; Macaro, 2001). Give students feedback on their language, progress, etc.

[h] *Good!*

7. Give instructions (Canagarajah, 1995; Hosoda, 2000; Macaro, 2001). Give procedural instructions.

[i] *Just write down the word as you listen.*

8. Check comprehension (Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Ask students whether they understand content.

[j] *Do you understand?*

9. Manage students (Macaro, 2001; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Manage or control student behavior to keep them on task.

[k] *Be quiet and look at me.*

[l] *Any volunteers?*

10. Comment on lesson (Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Comment on the flow or structure of the lesson; link content of lesson to previous lessons or to future lessons, homework, tests.

[m] *There's going to be a gesture session in the last 10 minutes of the lesson.*

[n] *Last time we learned some common expressions over the phone. It's going to be the second lesson today.*

11. Comment on classroom equipment (Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Comment on classroom equipment, materials, supplies.

[o] *Looks like something is wrong with the audiotape… so…*

3. Teacher's role: Member of an institution

The teacher is acting as a an institutional personae in order to take care of institutional business, performing functions that would occur in any institutional space such as a classroom, an office, or the hallway.

12. Give institutional information (Pennington, 1999). Explain any institutional information beyond the scope of this particular class.

[p] *Did everyone sign up for the TOEIC test next month?*

4. Teacher's role: Person

The teacher is acting as a non-institutional person in order

to comment about herself, the students and the world beyond, performing functions that would occur in any non-institutional space.

13. Chat (Canagarajah, 1995; Pennington, 1999; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolan-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). Personal communications; chat with students about topics not related to the lesson.

> [q] *I hadn't seen a movie for many months until last Sunday.*

> [r] *Yuu-kun, are you OK?*

Piloting the FIFU checklist

The original checklist of functions, which had 15 items, was translated into Japanese. From Fall of 2005 to Spring of 2006, the checklist was piloted in 8 junior- and senior-high English classrooms in Hokkaido. These included urban and rural schools, large and small classes, high- and low-level students, and one class that was team-taught with an ALT.

Each teacher was asked to videotape one English lesson and then to use the FIFU checklist to analyze his or her use of the L1. Afterwards a follow-up interview was conducted regarding the clarity of items, ease of use, and usefulness of the checklist. Based on this feedback, further refinements were made, and the checklist was piloted again. Functions that had not been found in the literature were added, other functions combined, and all were refined, resulting in the 13 functions described in the previous section. These were re-translated to create the final FIFU checklist with versions in English (Appendix 1) and in Japanese (Appendix 2). Because classroom teachers with no training in discourse analysis found it somewhat difficult to recognize and count utterances, we also created a self-study training packet using both real and simulated data. (Authors may be contacted for a copy of the packet.)

In the follow-up interviews, teachers said that the FIFU checklist helped them to objectively observe their own lessons, providing a good opportunity for professional growth. One teacher said he realized that he was just using Japanese without any specific purpose; another teacher felt that he was using the L1 effectively. A third teacher realized for the first time that her L1 use was related to specific pedagogical functions.

Discussion

The FIFU checklist can help teachers discover the functions for which they use the students' L1. This discovery should lead them to ask themselves whether those functions might also be met through the L2. If teachers examine their L1 use in even only one class, they are likely to become more aware of unconscious L1 use. If teachers also consider what position they hold regarding L1 use, they should then be able to judge whether their classroom actions truly reflect their belief system.

There are some problems with the FIFU. First, any observational checklist must strike a balance between thoroughness and simplicity. Thus, some teachers may feel that a pedagogical function is missing or that the distinction between some functions is unclear. We have piloted it as extensively as possible, but we look forward to improving the FIFU as more data accumulates from different teaching contexts.

Second, although this instrument is relatively simple to use with no need for special training in discourse analysis, we found that teachers were reluctant to try it. Unfortunately, this was true particularly of teachers who use almost no L2 in the classroom, and who were ashamed to admit it. (These are teachers holding the Maximal, not the Regressive, position.) One solution might be to make a *Functions of Instructor First and Second-language Use* checklist, in which every instructor utterance is coded either as first-language or target language. Although more time-consuming for the teacher, this might ultimately be less threatening and provide more useful data.

For example, Shimura (2006) used the FIFU to code both L1 and L2 utterances across multiple classes and was able to discern his own patterns of L1 use. For example, he found that he used significantly less L1 in Oral English classes than in Reading classes, and in classes with co-operative students than in classes with uncooperative students; however, the size of the class did not affect his L1 use. In Reading classes, he used the L1 significantly more often for summarizing and explaining grammar; in Oral English classes, he used the L2 significantly more often for giving instructions.

We hope that teachers, both NESTSs and NNESTs, who are interested in their own L1 use will try using this instrument and will share their results and insights with us. The FIFU can do more than raise individual teacher awareness. In conjunction with qualitative data such as belief statements or interviews, it may help teachers eventually discover good practices of L1 use.

Suzanne M. Yonesaka is professor at Hokkai-Gakuen University. Her current research is on beliefs about and use of the L1, and on beliefs and dilemmas of student teachers of English. <suzanne@jin.hokkai-s-u.ac.jp>

Mitsutada Metoki has been teaching at Hokkai-Gakuen University and Hokkaido Institute of Technology since spring 2006. His current research interests center on learners' beliefs and strategies in language learning and relating second language acquisition research to classroom methodology. <metoki1972@horse.livedoor.com>

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Appendix 1.

Functions of Instructor First-language Use (FIFU) checklist (English version)

Instructions: As you watch the lesson, listen for utterances by the instructor that are in the <u>students'</u> first language. What is the instructor doing via the utterance? Check the function.

Instructor's role: LANGUAGE TEACHER (This utterance could occur only during a language lesson.)

_____1. Translate (Translate lesson item or instructions; Translate an utterance.)

_____2. Explain or summarize lesson item

_____3. Comment on L2 forms (Teach grammar, vocabulary formation, or pronunciation explicitly.)

_____4. Expand on content (Provide background information to make lesson comprehensible.)

_____5. Comment on language learning (Comment on language or language learning in general.)

Instructor's role: TEACHER (This utterance could occur in any classroom during any lesson.)

_____6. Give feedback

_____7. Give instructions

_____8. Check comprehension

_____9. Manage / control students

_____10. Comment on lesson

_____11. Comment on classroom equipment

Instructor's role: MEMBER OF AN INSTITUTION (This utterance could occur anywhere in the school.)

_____12. Give institutional information

Instructor's role: PERSON (This utterance could occur anywhere outside the school.)

_____13. Chat

Appendix 2.

授業における英語教師の日本語使用

録画した授業を見ながら、教師による日本語の発話に注目し、どのような場面で日本語を使用しているか、下記の機能の中から選んで下さい。

1. 英語の授業でのみ行われる発話

_____1. 和訳（教科書の和訳、英語による発話の和訳、他）

_____2. 授業内容の補足説明

_____3. 文法・語彙・発音の説明

_____4. 授業内容に関連した事項の紹介・説明

_____5. 英語または英語学習についてのコメント

2. 英語以外の授業でも行われる発話

_____6. 学生・生徒への反応・感想

_____7. 授業中の指示

_____8. 理解したかどうかの確認

_____9. 授業の運営（励まし・促し・注意）

_____10. 授業の進行に関連した発言

_____11. 教材や教具に関連した発言

3. 学校生活全体に関わること

_____12. 連絡事項

4. その他

_____13. 雑談