Benefits and drawbacks to L1 use in the L2 classroom

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Reference data:
Norman, J. (2008). Benefits and drawbacks to L1 use in the L2 classroom.
In K. Bradford Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This study examines the results of a survey conducted on 191 Japanese university students regarding their views on three main topics: 1) How much Japanese should be used by the NEST in the EFL classroom, 2) Whether it is more desirable to have a NEST who can speak Japanese or not, and 3) The benefits and drawbacks of Japanese use by NESTs in the EFL classroom. Results showed a difference between those students with study-abroad experience and those students without it for both question 1 ($p<0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.02$) and question 2 ($p<0.001$, phi = 0.58). Benefits and drawbacks given by respondents were similar among both groups and revealed that a large majority of students believe the main benefit of the NEST using Japanese is for back-up comprehension support. Results suggest that NESTs need to consider the EFL level of their students more carefully when contemplating their use of the L1 in the L2 classroom.

この論文では、191名の大学生に対するアンケート調査の結果を考察する。調査は、主な3つの項目からなる：1）ネイティブ・スピーカーは、英語の授業でどのぐらい日本語を使うべきか、2）日本語ができるネイティブ・スピーカーとできないネイティブ・スピーカーのどちらが望ましいか、3）英語の授業でネイティブ・スピーカーが日本語を使うことの長所と短所は何か。結果としては、留学経験のある学生とそうでない学生の間には、問1（$p<0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.02$）と問2（$p<0.001$, phi = 0.58）にそれぞれ統計的な差が見られた。長所と短所に関しては、両グループの回答は類似しており、学生の大多数はネイティブ・スピーカーが日本語を使うことの長所は、主に「（授業を）より深い理解のため」だと思っていることが明らかになった。調査結果からネイティブ・スピーカーが、英語の授業での日本語の使用を検討する際には、クラスの学生の英語のレベルをより考慮する必要があるようである。

Teaching English at the university level in Japan can often be a trying experience. Students are often unresponsive, inattentive, and/or unwilling to speak in class. However, there are those times during a class when students are exactly the opposite. In my experience, teaching low-intermediate to intermediate level university students in the Japanese EFL setting, I have found the latter to be the case when I mix Japanese in with my English.

It has traditionally been the accepted norm that Japanese teachers of English will speak mostly in Japanese in order to explain grammar points more clearly and effectively, whereas native speakers of English will speak mostly in English, because it is one of the students' few chances to hear "real" English. In addition, it has often been pointed out that the JTE's role is most often considered to be to explain grammatical rules of English, whereas the native speaker's role is to facilitate communication in spoken language (Stephens, 2006, p.14).

However, although I try as much as possible to explain things in the students' L2, there are times when it just doesn't work and I rely on my Japanese to get my point across. And in almost every case I have found that explaining difficult expressions, idioms, and even individual words in Japanese doesn't hinder but rather enhances my students' learning of the L2. My own experiences in the Japanese university EFL classroom led me to ponder what the students themselves were thinking regarding my level of L1 use in the L2 classroom, as well as what they believe are the advantages and disadvantages of its use. The answers to these questions have broad-based implications for how English should be taught in the university setting in Japan.

Literature review

The debate surrounding use of the L1 in the L2 classroom is certainly not a new one. The English Only movement gained traction after a 1961 conference at Makere University in Uganda, during which five main tenets of ELT were formulated. According to Phillipson (1992, p.185), these tenets became an unofficial yet unchallenged doctrine:

1) English is best taught monolingually.
2) The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker.
3) The earlier English is taught, the better the results.
4) The more English is taught, the better the results.
5) If other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop.

However, it is clear from recent literature written on the subject that there are many positive aspects to L1 use in the L2 classroom. Auerbach (1993) is clear in her disapproval of the English Only movement, commenting that evidence from research and practice is presented which suggests that the rationale used to justify English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound. She professes the positive aspects of L1 use in the L2 classroom by noting that since students don't start by thinking in the second language, allowing for the exploration of ideas in the L1 supports a gradual, developmental process in which use of the L1 drops off naturally as it becomes less necessary.

Atkinson (1993, p.2) argues it is impossible to talk of a right balance or a perfect model for using the L1, and that the L1 can be a valuable resource if it is used at appropriate times and in appropriate ways. When learning the L2, "there are many possible means toward that end… there is a time and a place for everything, and one of those means is, without a doubt, the timely use of the students' first language (the L1): in our case – Japanese" (Weschler, 1997).

Yamamoto-Wilson (1997) points out that "the assumptions that hold good in students' native languages will often not be applicable to the new language that they are seeking to

acquire. But that is precisely where the teacher's awareness of those assumptions may be of value." Furthermore, Barker (2003) asserts that a teacher with a detailed knowledge of the differences between the L1 and the target language will be better equipped to anticipate and overcome the linguistic problems that students face. For instance, some teacher knowledge of the students' L1 is valuable for understanding learners' mistakes caused by L1 interference (Lee, 1965). This statement is even more relevant to modern Japanese society, as compared with in the past, because the amount of katakana, foreign loan words, and *waseieigo* (Japanese-English) words has increased dramatically, due to Western influences.

Another consideration is that although good learners or advanced students are more willing to take risks and use circumlocution, paraphrase, cognates, or gestures to convey meaning (Burden, 2000), this is very often not the case with low to intermediate level students. With this in mind, the case for the prudent use of the students' L1 is even more substantial. "Students want the teacher to use the target language exclusively when it is being used in communication, but expect the teacher to have a knowledge of, and an ability to use MT when it is appropriate to explain the usage of English" (Burden, 2000).

Discussing the results of a survey he conducted on 290 college students, Burden (2000) notes that a majority of students in all the different levels of English classes believe that the teacher should use the L1 to relax the students. This thought is echoed by Cole (1998) in his discussion on the use of L1 in communicative EFL classrooms. Furthermore, Burden (2001) also discusses the importance of relaxing students from the point of view of instructors, commenting that "when deemed necessary, the student has recourse to the language they are most comfortable with, thus serving their basic psychological needs." He points out the obvious yet understated truth that "there are undoubtedly occasions when both native English speaker teachers and learners feel the lesson cries out for Japanese language input."

Furthermore, Weschler (1997) astutely observes:

> "The use of Japanese in and of itself in text and in the classroom is not the problem. For the student, it can act as an obstacle or a tool in the struggle to master English. And like any tool, it can be used skillfully or misused. It can have good or bad effects. Whether it is useful or detrimental depends entirely on the goal to which it is applied, the type of language being translated, the materials used to apply the method, and the procedures used in the classroom."

Yamamoto-Wilson (1997) notes that "the contrast between the virtually universal success of children in acquiring their mother tongue and the high failure rate of L2 learners remains as stark as ever. There may be many reasons for this – social, cultural and psychological – but one possible contributory cause may lie in the failure of teachers to make meaningful connections between the target language and the mother tongue". Keeping this in mind, it is important for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) to learn Japanese and use that knowledge to help their students' gain a deeper understanding of the English language. So the key word for NESTs to keep in mind in the classroom setting is "flexibility" – and of course there is very little flexibility in an outright ban on the students' language (Barker, 2003).

Survey methodology

To get a clearer grasp of the benefits and drawbacks of NESTs using Japanese in the EFL classroom from the perspective of the students, as well as discover to what extent students want NESTs to use Japanese, a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered to a total of 191 students who were studying English at two different universities in western Japan. Ten students (5.2%) were 3rd-year and 4th-year English majors who had previously studied abroad in the U.S. for 10 months, 145 students (75.9%) were 1st-year students majoring in Human Life Science, and the remaining 36 students (18.9%) were 1st-year students majoring in rehabilitation at a Health and Sciences University.

In particular, I wanted to test the statistical validity of two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Students with a remarkably higher level of English proficiency (in this case, those who have studied abroad) prefer the NEST to use less Japanese.

Hypothesis 2: Students of different proficiency levels within the same type of English class have differing views regarding the amount of Japanese they prefer the NEST to use.

The questionnaire consisted of four questions. The first two questions were closed-ended: the first asked students what percentage of the teacher's speaking during the lesson should be in Japanese, and the second asked them to circle which they preferred, a NEST who was competent in Japanese, or one was wasn't. The third and fourth questions asked students to write out what they felt were the advantages and disadvantages of having a NEST use Japanese in the EFL classroom. Both of these questions were designed to be open-ended, so that students would have the freedom to answer as much or as little as they wanted, and also be able to give a more personal and thoughtful response.

The entire questionnaire was written in Japanese to avoid any misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the questions. Although respondents were instructed to answer questions three and four in either Japanese or English, almost all responses were in Japanese. Responses in Japanese were then translated into English and grouped according to the major categories that emerged.

Survey results and discussion

As can be seen in the results to question 1 (Table 1), it appears that students want the NEST to use Japanese somewhat frequently in the EFL classroom. The average among all surveyed was a remarkably high 41.9%. Furthermore, only four students answered "zero" to the question, three of whom were students who had studied abroad and whose English level was much higher than others who completed the questionnaire.

Similarly, Stephens (2006) found that only 11% of the 167 students who responded to her questionnaire said they would like their NEST not to use any Japanese at all. Also, Critchley (1999) reported that 91% of the students he surveyed indicated a preference for some degree of bilingual support in class. He commented that one important reason for that high number was that "respondents expressed concern that without some Japanese-language support they sometimes can't understand what they consider to

be essential aspects of the lesson, for which they are held accountable" (Critchley, 1999).

Table 1. Student preference for NESTs speaking Japanese in the EFL classroom

Question 1. About what percentage of the time would you like your NEST to use Japanese in the EFL classroom?			
L.S. (n=144)	**Rehab. (n=36)**	**S.A. (n=10)**	**All (n=190)**
45.8%	38.2%	20.0%	41.9%
Key: L.S. = 1st-year Life Sciences department majors Rehab. = 1st-year Rehabilitation department majors S.A. = 3rd-year and 4th-year English majors who have studied abroad			

To test Hypothesis 1, a t-test was run for independent samples using SPSS. Students were divided into two groups, one consisting of 3rd-year and 4th-year English majors who had studied abroad (i.e. the S.A. group) and the other consisting of those who had not (i.e. the L.S. and Rehab. groups). There was a significant difference between the two ($t = 3.826$, $df = 188$, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, Cohen's d was calculated to test for effect size and was equal to 1.02, which suggests a strong effect.

To test Hypothesis 2, a multiple linear regression model was run using as, the predictor variable, the final exam scores of only the students in the L.S. group (who were all in the same type of English class) and, as the dependent variable, "desired use of Japanese by NEST". (The final exam scores were used as a proxy in order to be able to quantify the level of the students.) The result was $R^2 = 0.07$, indicating that there is very little correlation in this case between high and low achievers in the same English class regarding the amount of Japanese they prefer the NEST to use in the EFL classroom. (A similar multiple linear regression was run using "final exam listening only score" as the predictor variable, but the same $R^2 = 0.07$ result indicated that there is very little correlation between the two variables.)

The second question of the survey asked students if they would rather have a teacher in their English class who could speak Japanese or not. Considering the relatively high percentage of Japanese that students would like NESTs to use in their English classes, the results to the question (Table 2) were not surprising.

Table 2. Student preference for NESTs being able to speak Japanese

Question 2. Would you rather have a teacher in your English class whocan speak Japanese or one who cannot?				
Preference	**L.S. (n=144)**	**Rehab. (n=36)**	**S.A. (n=9)**	**All (n=189)**
Can	97.2%	97.2%	33.6%	94.8%
Cannot	2.8%	2.8%	66.7%	5.2%
Key: L.S. = 1st-year Life Sciences department majors Rehab. = 1st-year Rehabilitation department majors S.A. = 3rd-year and 4th-year English majors who have studied abroad				

Almost all of the 1st-year Life Sciences and Rehabilitation majors wanted a NEST who could speak Japanese. On the other hand, a majority of those students who had studied

abroad appeared to prefer a NEST who could not speak Japanese, perhaps because they wanted to use only English in the classroom, as they likely had done during their time abroad. For this question, a statistical analysis of the data revealed a very significant difference between the responses of those students who had studied abroad and those who had not (chi square = 63.83, df = 1, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, the phi value was calculated to test for effect size and was equal to 0.58, which suggests a strong effect.

The third and fourth questions of the survey asked students to express their opinions regarding what they believed were the benefits and drawbacks to the NEST using Japanese in the EFL classroom. Responses written were classified into main categories whenever appropriate.

An overwhelming majority of the 191 respondents to the survey (147 people = 77.0%) wrote that one of the benefits is being able to understand the content of the class better and/or that explanations are easier to understand. This number corresponds very closely with another recent study that found students' perceptions of the advantages of L1 support related overwhelmingly (82%) to back-up comprehension support (Stephens, 2006, p.15).

Other main benefits given by respondents were: 1) *I can use Japanese to ask questions when I don't understand something in English* (31 people = 16.2%); 2) *The NEST knows and can explain common mistakes that Japanese make in English / easier to communicate* (13 people = 6.8%); 3) *It's useful for the NEST to speak Japanese when something that has been said many times in English just can't be understood* (12 people = 6.3%); 4) *I feel favorably toward the teacher / It's easy to talk to the teacher* (11 people = 5.6%); and 5) *The class proceeds smoothly* (10 people = 5.2%). (A more complete list of responses is given in Appendix 2.)

As for drawbacks to the NEST using Japanese in the EFL classroom (question 4), there was no one clear response. The largest number of respondents (57 people = 29.8%) wrote that students tend to rely on Japanese or that students tend to become lazy because they don't feel there is very much pressure to speak in English when the NEST speaks in Japanese. The second most popular response (43 people = 22.5%) was simply *nothing in particular*, compared to only one respondent who gave the same response regarding the benefits of the NEST using Japanese.

Other main drawbacks given by respondents were: 1) *If the NEST uses Japanese too much, the number of chances for students to hear "real" English decreases* (26 people = 13.6%); 2) *English ability (especially listening ability) of students does not improve much* (26 students = 13.6%); 3) *If the NEST uses Japanese too much, the whole point of taking a class from a NEST loses its meaning* (21 people = 11.0%), and 4) *If the NEST mostly uses Japanese, students will stop trying to comprehend the English being spoken* (20 people = 10.5%). (A more complete list of responses is given in Appendix 3.)

Overall, fewer responses were given for drawbacks than benefits, lending credence to the view that the Japanese students themselves see more positives overall than negatives regarding use of Japanese by the NEST.

Conclusions

It is clear from the results of the questionnaire that a large majority of Japanese students have a desire for the NEST to speak Japanese in the EFL classroom. So, from the perspective of the students, it is obvious that teachers need to look more carefully at the EFL level of the students in their classes when contemplating what amount of Japanese (if any) to use. Higher level students, especially those with study abroad experience, can be expected to handle more difficult explanations in English. In addition, Auerbach (1993) asserts that, although beginning-level students often say they prefer a bilingual approach, more advanced students may feel that the use of the students' L1 slows English acquisition. The best means to determine student opinion on this matter is to carry out a quick survey of students during the first class to gauge what amount of Japanese the students would like the NEST to use.

Proponents of the English Only movement assert that the best way for students to progress in their English skills is by using only English in the classroom. However, regardless of how much L1 students actually utter in their L1 in class, it cannot be denied that students who are learning a second language quite often have trouble expressing themselves, because L2 expressions do not come readily to mind. This is something that is beyond the teacher's control. So, although the blatant overuse of the L1 should be discouraged, students should not be punished for trying their best to communicate what they want to say in the L2 through the help of their L1. Of course, to a proponent of the English Only movement, the above scenario might seem preposterous and out of the question. But no matter how much we as educators try to teach in the "best interests" of our students, the fact remains that the wants of the students need to be addressed as well.

The results of this study clearly support my first hypothesis that students with a remarkably higher level of English ability (e.g. those who have studied abroad) prefer the NEST to use less Japanese. Furthermore, it came as somewhat of a surprise that my second hypothesis was not confirmed, since there was very little correlation between final exam score (i.e. EFL proficiency) and desired use of Japanese by the NEST. I had been under the impression that higher level students in large university English classes in Japan were somewhat bored and wanted to be more academically challenged by something akin to an "all English" environment, but this doesn't necessarily appear to be the case.

Since a majority of the respondents (92.1%) were students at a women's college, the external validity of the study is somewhat limited. It should also be noted that three respondents to the survey answered "100" to question 1, possibly indicating that they had misinterpreted the question (even though it was written in Japanese), thinking it was asking how much English they wanted the NEST to use in class instead of how much Japanese. However, the conclusions reached in this study (including statistical figures) were not significantly affected by this possible misinterpretation.

Further research in this area would benefit from a larger representation of university students from a variety of universities (both public and private) as well as majors. It would be interesting to look into whether there is a marked difference between not just students who have studied abroad

and those who have not, but also between students at high level public universities and those at lower level private universities.

Shimizu (1995) asserts that "Japanese English teachers are valued [by their students] more for scholarship skills such as intelligence and knowledge, whereas foreign instructors are valued more for personal characteristics such as friendliness" based on the results of a survey she conducted on 1,088 Japanese university students. However, I would like to encourage fellow native-speaking university educators to make students value our professional knowledge more through the occasional use of Japanese to give further personal insights into the English language that JTEs might not have and that are difficult, if not impossible, to explain in English.

In conclusion, although an "English only" policy might make sense in an ESL environment abroad, where there are students from various countries studying together, it is just not practical or feasible in a country such as Japan, where 99% of the students speak the same L1. Although many educators believe it is in the students' best interest linguistically for NESTs to speak English as much as possible in the EFL classroom, the emotional and psychological needs of the students must also be taken into account. This is where the occasional, prudent use of Japanese by NESTs can both lighten up the atmosphere and aid in student learning.

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Appendix 1

Language preference questionnaire

匿名のアンケート調査となっていますので、正直に答えてください。)
(This survey is anonymous, so please answer all of the questions honestly.)

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。___%
(About what percentage of the time would you like your native English-speaking teacher to use Japanese in the English classroom? _____%)

2. 選択肢があれば、英語の授業では、日本語ができる先生と日本語ができない先生とどちらがいいですか。○をつけてください。
(If you had a choice, would you rather have a teacher in your English class who could speak Japanese or one who couldn't? Please circle one.)

日本語ができる先生 _____
(A teacher who can speak Japanese)

日本語が出来ない先生 _____
(A teacher who cannot speak Japanese)

以下の質問を日本語または英語で答えてください。なお、できるだけ具体的に書いてください。
(Please answer the following questions in either Japanese or English. In addition, please give specific answers as much as possible.)

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 having a native English-speaker use Japanese in the English classroom?)

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 having a native English-speaker use Japanese in the English classroom?)

ご協力をありがとうございました！
(Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire!)

Appendix 2

Responses to question 3

(n=191; multiple responses possible; only those responses given by two or more people listed)

147 people (77.0%): 内容を深く）分かりやすく理解してもらえる。（英語と日本語の言葉のニュアンスの微妙な違いを教えてもらえる。）勘違いが少なくなる（今時分が聞いている英語が間違いではないかを確認できる）。説明のときは分かりやすい。
(Able to understand the content of the class better. / Explanations are easier to understand.)

31 people (16.2%): 英語が分からなくて質問する際に、日本語で質問できる（しやすい）ところ。
(Can use Japanese to ask a question when I don't understand something in English.)

13 people (6.8%): 先生自身も日本語が分かるので、日本人の間違えやすい英語を知っているので、意思疎通がしやすい（間違えた英語でも理解してくれる）。コミュニケーション（意思疎通）をとりやすい。
(NEST knows and can explain common mistakes that Japanese make in English. / Easy to communicate.)

12 people (6.3%): 何回も同じこと言われても通じないときにいい。
(Useful for the NEST to speak Japanese when something that has been said many times in English just can't be understood.)

11 people (5.6%): 好感が持てる・親しみやすさがある。（先生に）話しかけやすい（気軽に話せる）。
(Feel favorably toward the teacher. / Easy to talk to the teacher.)

10 people (5.2%): 授業が円滑に進む。
(Class proceeds smoothly.)

7 people (3.7%): 先生の指示が伝わりやすい。
(Easy for the teacher to communicate directions.)

5 people (2.6%): あまり英語が分からない人でも授業に参加しやすい。
(Even those who are not that good at English can join in the class easily.)

4 people (2.1%): (It's interesting to hear a foreigner's Japanese. It's fun!)

2 people (1.0%): テスト範囲を聞ける（言ってもらえる）。
(Can find out what is going to be on the test.)

2 people (1.0%): 英語と日本語を比較して考えられる。
(Can compare and think about what the differences are between English and Japanese.)

2 people (1.0%): 日本語を使ってもらえると、今時分が聞いている英語が間違いではないかを確認できる。
(If the NEST uses Japanese, students can confirm if what they just heard in English is correct or not.)

2 people (1.0%): 英語だけだとわからなくても流してしまう。（やる気がなくなる。）
(If the class is only in English, things that I don't understand just go right over my head. Loss of motivation.)

Appendix 3

Responses to Question 4

(n=191; multiple responses possible; only those responses given by two or more people listed)

57 people (29.8%): 生徒も日本語に頼ってしまう。（生徒が積極的に英語を話さなくなる。）英語を使わなければならないというプレッシャーがあまりかからないので、怠けてしまう（甘えてしまう）。
(Students tend to rely on Japanese. / Students tend to become lazy because they don't feel there is very much pressure to have to speak in English.)

43 people (22.5%): 特にありません。
(Nothing in particular.)

26 people (13.6%): 日本語を使い過ぎると、英語を聞く機会が少なくなる（聞く力が衰えてしまう・英語に慣れにくくなる）。本物の英語を聞ける貴重な時間が少なくなる。
(If the NEST uses Japanese too much, the number of chances for students to hear "real" English decreases.)

26 people (13.6%): 英語力（聞き取る力）はあまり向上しない。（勉強にならない。/ 自分で考えずに覚えてしまう。）
(Students' English ability, especially listening ability, does not improve much.)

21 people (11.0%): 日本語を使い過ぎると、ネイティブ・スピーカーの先生が授業をしている意味がなくなる。（英語の授業ではなくなってしまうこと。）
(If the NEST uses Japanese too much, the whole point of taking a class from a NEST loses its meaning.)

20 people (10.5%): 日本語ばかり使うと逆に英語を聞き取ろう（理解しよう）としなくなる。
(If the NEST uses almost all Japanese, students will stop trying to catch (comprehend) the English being spoken.)

4 people (2.1%): 聞いて耳が慣れてくるので、日本語は日本語、英語は英語で統一しないと、混ざるとまぎらわしい（区別をつけにくい）。
(Since the ear becomes accustomed to a language by listening to it, it becomes confusing if the two are mixed.)

3 people (1.6%):（自分が）英語を使うときが減ってしまう。
(The amount of time I use English would decrease.)

2 people (1.0%): 自分から調べようとしなくなる可能性がある。
(There is the possibility that students would stop trying to look up the meaning of words by themselves.)

2 people (1.0%): 自分で学び取る（解読する）ことが出来なくなる。
(Students would stop being able to learn (decipher things) by themselves.)