

## Keywords

first language (L1), second language (L2), code-switching, classroom discourse

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain a better understanding of student L1 use in EFL classes by analyzing an audio-recording of Japanese learners. The study found that there were many instances of low-volume (volume of spoken output) L1 use. Volume and code choice mark student exchanges as private, and Hancock (1997) labels such exchanges off-record. Not all L1 exchanges examined in the present study could be considered off-record as Japanese students expect to be able to use their L1 in class. However, when low-volume L1 use did occur, it distinctly marked an exchange as off-record for the purpose of avoiding embarrassment. Natural breaks in the flow of the lesson also enabled students to clarify meaning in Japanese without recourse to low volume L1 use. Recognizing off-record exchanges is important, teachers need to respect and appropriately deal with classroom discourse which students do not intend for them to overhear.

本論の目的は、日本人学習者の録音を分析することにより、EFLクラスでの学習者の第1言語(L1)使用に関してよりよき理解を得ることである。本論では、多くのL1使用例が低音量(発話の音量)であることが分かった。音量とコードの選択は学習者間のやりとりが私的なものであることを意味し、Hancockはこれらのやりとりをオフレコと名付けた。日本人学習者は授業でL1を使うこともできることから、本論での全てのL1使用をオフレコとみなすことができるとは限らない。しかし、低音量のL1使用が実際にあった時、それは明らかに困惑を避ける目的でのオフレコを意味して使用されていた。また、授業での自然な流れの中で、発話が途切れるような時には、低音量でのL1使用に頼ることなく、学習者が日本語での意味を確認することも見受けられた。オフレコを認識することは重要であり、学習者が教師に聞かせるつもりではないクラス内での会話を、教師は尊重し適切に関わる必要がある。

# Behind the scenes: An examination of student L1 use

Gregory C. Birch

Seisen Jogakuin College

In EFL contexts, a limited use of the student's first language (L1) is generally considered beneficial as it fulfills an important pedagogic function. For example, students often clarify a point privately with another student before speaking publicly. As a result, these student L1 exchanges should not be discouraged. The difficulties which teachers face are that students expect to be able to use their L1 in class (Burden, 2000), and it is not always apparent when these exchanges are intended to be private.

How do teachers know when they are not considered ratified participants in student-student L1 exchanges? During a test of spoken proficiency, Hancock (1997) found that low-volume L1 use marked exchanges as private, whereas natural volume L2 use indicated output for evaluation. The present study attempts to verify these findings. Student L1 use in a small class of lower-level adult learners was examined to verify whether volume continues to mark L1 exchanges as private, and where it does not, to examine what other factors may play a role in the marking of private speech. The hope is that knowledge of these cues can enable teachers to recognize, respect, and appropriately deal with classroom discourse which students do not intend for them to overhear.

## Literature review

Code switching (CS) is a change by a speaker from one language to another. The focus here is classroom CS. Within the Japanese context, examples of common teacher uses are (1) explaining prior L2 utterances, (2) defining unknown words, (3) giving instructions, and (4) providing positive/negative

feedback (Hosoda, 2000). More importantly, Hosoda examined CS during teacher-student exchanges and discovered that student inquiries in the L1 did not necessarily result in teacher L1 use. The teacher only reverted to the L1 when students failed to give an appropriate response in a timely manner, and subsequent teacher L1 use resulted in *the resumption of the flow of the interaction* (Hosoda, 2000, p. 86).

With respect to student CS, Ogane (1997) found that, in addition to enabling students to gain thinking time, smoothen the conversation, communicate important points, and signal for help, CS also served an important social function, enabling students to express *their dual identities of L1 speaker and L2 learner* (Ogane, p. 119). This last point is particularly interesting as the social function of CS in maintaining social relationships is often overlooked, particularly in institutions that have adopted strict target language-only classroom language policies (Rivers, 2009). In summary, the pedagogic justification for L1 use is that it *may provide learners with additional cognitive support that allows them to analyse language and work at a higher level than would be possible were they restricted to sole use of their L2* (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003, p. 760).

CS, however, is multi-layered. In Japan, students often converse with Japanese teachers in the L1, but with native-speaker (NS) English teachers, students tend to prefer the L2 (Stephens, 2006). In the latter scenario, the L1 still plays an important role as students often consult classmates in Japanese privately before speaking publicly in English. This layered discourse has been illuminated in a testing situation. Based on recordings of student-student exchanges used to evaluate speaking proficiency, Hancock (1997) makes an important distinction between *on-record exchanges* (student L2 exchanges which are meant to be overheard by the NS teacher), and *off-record exchanges* (student L1 exchanges which are treated primarily as the property of the students).

These terms, *on-record* and *off-record*, are Hancock's labels for discourse discussed in terms of Goffman's (1974) concept of frame – *speakers' definitions of the kind of activity they are engaged in* (Hancock, 1997, p. 219). The two frames identified in Hancock's data are the *literal frame*, where

students behave as themselves, and the *nonliteral frame*, where they are role-playing. Hancock argues that when students used the target language in the nonliteral frame (e.g. role-play), they regarded their teacher as a ratified participant, as L2 exchanges are like performances which require an audience. On the other hand, in the literal frame when students were discussing how to perform the task, *there is a strong tendency for low volume* (Hancock, 1997, p. 220). In other words, both code choice and a decreased volume of spoken output are used to signal a private, off-record exchange.

Signals such as these meta-messages are often referred to as contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982), which can be *any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions* (Gumperz, 1982, p. 131). Hancock justifies this assessment using Myers-Scotton's theory of markedness (1983), *where code choice symbolizes what the speaker wishes to be the rights and obligations set in force in a given exchange* (Hancock, 1997, p.220). By marking an exchange as off-record, the students are establishing their right to privacy with the understanding that the teacher is not a ratified participant in the conversation.

## Research questions

While Hancock (1997) focused on student-student L1 exchanges in a test setting, this study examines these exchanges in a classroom setting to answer the following two questions:

- Are all private or off-record student-student L1 exchanges marked by low volume output?
- When volume is not an indicator, what other factors play a role in signaling private or off-record exchanges?

## Method

The data was taken from the first 30 minutes of a 90-minute low-intermediate listening class. Six occurrences of student-student L1 exchanges were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed; however, only three are examined in this paper. Two of the discarded exchanges were rather short, and in the third, the L1 was used for a similar purpose to Exchange 2, which is detailed

below. The class consisted of three low-intermediate adult students. During the first 30 minutes, a worksheet with lexical items relevant to the topic was reviewed.

When the recording was taken, all students had studied for about one year with the teacher, but the English ability of one student, a housewife in her late 50s, was much weaker than the other two students, a male and female in their late 20s. All were studying English as a hobby at a small conversation school and did not use English at work.

The three students were seated on either side of a small table and the teacher's chair was in front of the white board so that every time the teacher wrote on the board, his back was to the students. A recorder was placed between them after the students consented to a recording for research purposes.

### Transcription conventions

The transcription conventions found in Hancock (1997) were used as they distinguish between language spoken in normal and low-volume (Table 1). The latter was underlined. The weakness of this convention is that underlining does not capture dynamic changes in volume. A sentence may start in whispers and gradually increase to natural volume. This is commented upon but can not be reflected in the transcriptions.

### Other factors

When volume was not a clear indicator, other relevant cues are pointed out. Unfortunately, there was no video recording to enable a more detailed examination of non-verbal cues. Nevertheless, it was obvious from the audio recording what was happening (e.g., the teacher was writing on the board).

### Analysis

In this section, three student-student L1 exchanges from the data are examined to see if low-volume marks private exchanges, and when it does not, what factors do.

### Exchange 1

This exchange followed an exercise where the students were translating into Japanese the following sentence: *University students often rent a basement suite near the university*. The transcription starts with the teacher's attempt to exemplify the meaning of *basement suite* after Student M read it with rising intonation, indicating that he was unsure of its meaning.

This example was chosen because it exemplifies when an off-record exchange is and is not possible. For example, Student R's initial use of low-volume L1 (Line 4), a clarification request directed at the other students, was likely abandoned due to the teacher's proximity. He was sitting facing the students, meaning that it was difficult to continue this off-record exchange.

**Table 1. Transcription Convention, based on Hancock (1997)**

T:	T: Teacher, M: Male student, N: Older female, R: Younger female
<i>Hai, kaigi</i>	<i>Italics</i> indicate Japanese
{Yes, conference}	Translation of Japanese appears within curly brackets
[	One square bracket indicates overlapping speech
(inaud)	Recording inaudible
(comments)	Researcher's comments appear within parentheses
...	Three periods indicate a pause of half a second to a second
(1.5)	A pause of one and a half seconds
?	Question mark indicates rising intonation
<u>Is that right?</u>	Underlining indicates low / whispering voice
AND	Capital letters indicate louder than normal voice

The students may have considered it rude to talk amongst themselves instead of asking the teacher for clarification. This L1 inquiry, though, was restarted in Line 11 and spoken more or less at full volume. There was little need to whisper since the students had some privacy while the teacher first crossed the room to get a dictionary (curtains being drawn audible on tape), and then consulted the dictionary (turning of pages audible); therefore, he was unlikely to have been paying attention to the students' exchange.

### Transcript 1

- T: See a basement suite is like... in the basement?
- M: Mmm
- T: [There is a bedroom, a kitchen, laundry room. Okay? It's very cheap...to rent.
- R: *Sore mo setto ni natte iru?* {That is a set, isn't it?} *Suite to iu no wa kitchen toka de.* {So a suite has ... like a kitchen and (Voice fades away)} Basement is a *chi.. Chika ne?* {Basement?} (Directed at teacher)
- T: *Chika.* Yeah. {Basement} Suite means ... It's like an apartment ... but ...it is maybe in a house. (2) What does suite mean? (Rhetorical question as teacher crosses room to get dictionary)
- M: [Aaa so ka  
{I see}]
- R: *So ka.* {I see} *Isshiki toka te ...jiisho wa notte iru.* *Kagu toka ga sorota.* {(Suite,) maybe a complete set (of furniture) ... It is in the dictionary. Furniture is also there}
- M: Mmm
- N: (2 sec inaudible) *kagu toka tsuite iru dayone* {It seems furniture is included}
- M: *tsuite iru ne* {Yeah, it's included}

### Exchange 2

This exchange shows how volume and proximity combine to distinctly mark a conversation as off-record for the purpose of avoiding embarrassment. Student M was asked for a translation of a sentence (Line 1) and the word *mortgage* (Line 8), an invitation to openly use the L1. From Line 10, two students did converse in natural-volume

Japanese to clarify the meaning of the word even though a correct translation was initially given. What is interesting is that while the teacher's back was to the class, Student M resorted to low-volume Japanese to seek further clarification (Line 18). Perhaps student M felt it necessary to keep the exchange distinctly off-record as the teacher could not confirm the translation, a face-saving measure for both student and teacher.

### Transcript 2

- T: Some people have an expensive mortgage so they must rent out their basement. (Read from worksheet)
- M: *Oku no hitobito wa...takusan no okane wo karite iru no de...karera no heya wo kasanakereba naranai.* {Some people... who are borrowing a lot of money...must rent out their room.}
- T: Okay. Yeah.
- M: *Karera wa heya wo kasanakereba naranai* {They must rent out a room}
- T: Hmm. I think so. What is? How do you say mortgage in Japanese?
- M: Mortgage?
- R: *Teitou toka janakute?* {Isn't it mortgage?}
- M: *Kariru* {Borrow}
- R: *Kariru toka ne* {Yeah, it's like 'borrow'}
- T: Ohh. Really? Uhm? (Rising intonation questions translation)
- M: *Te kaite aru* {So it's written}
- R: *Teitou ni haite iru* {to mortgage (a house)} (2 seconds inaudible)
- T: [Like. For example, if you buy a house? (Teacher starts to write on board.)
- M: Hmm *Shakin shite iru to iu no janai* {It's to be in debt, isn't it?}
- R: *Ahh so ka ne.* {Ahh. That's it}
- T: Please look in your dictionary. (Five seconds inaudible talk as students consult dictionaries)
- M: *Ie wo teitou ni irete iru dakara* {To mortgage a house (Read verbatim)}

### Exchange 3

This exchange was a product of a misunderstanding that started after the teacher accidentally asked for the English equivalent of *kagi* (key), instead of *kagu*, (furniture). The confusion continued after a student suggested that the Japanese word the teacher was looking for was *kaigi* (conference), a suggestion agreed upon by the teacher (Transcript 3, line 1).

This exchange was also distinctly off-record as the students did not want to draw attention to the teacher's mistake. While the teacher wrote on the board with his back to the students, Student M used a Japanese utterance, *ale*, in a rising intonation to indicate confusion. The students slowly negotiated in whispers about whether the teacher meant *furniture* or *conference*.

Regrettably, the use of underlining does not capture the dynamic changes in volume. It does not show that although an utterance started in whispers (Line 5), it gradually increased to a natural volume (Line 13). It was only at this point that the teacher became aware of the conversation.

### Transcript 3

T: *Hai, kaigi.* {Yes, conference} Okay, furniture, so you should ask ... What ... FURNITURE ... is in ... the... living room? (Teacher writing question on board)

M: [*ale?*] (Japanese utterance indicating confusion)

M: Furniture? (rising intonation)

R: *isu toka ... Tsukue toka...* {For example, a chair, a desk} furniture

M: *kagu no koto janai?* {It's furniture, isn't it?}

N: *so* {That's right}

R: *kagu toka* ... {Furniture and ...}

M: *kaigi to iu no wa ?...* {What does conference have to do with it?}

R: *kaigi ni wa ... Kaigi no toki ni wa nani ga aru* {in a conference ... Things in a conference room (Normal volume)}

M: AHH.

Ss: (laughing)

M: I see, I see.

### Conclusion

EFL classroom discourse can roughly be divided into two layers of discourse, namely on-record and off-record. In Hancock (1997), the cues to distinguish between the two were volume and code choice. In this study, these concepts were applied to student L1 exchanges in a classroom setting, where the division between on-record and off-record was less clear as students oscillated between them over the course of an exchange.

Although limited in scope, the data indicates that when students chose to use their L1, it appeared that volume was a reliable cue to indicate whether or not the teacher was considered a ratified participant in the exchange. This occurred when natural volume Japanese might be considered rude, and when students wanted to seek clarification while avoiding drawing attention to a potentially embarrassing situation. However, volume cannot be viewed in isolation. During natural breaks in the flow of this lesson (e.g., teacher writing on board), students could clarify meaning in their L1 without necessarily reverting to low volume use. Other indicators, such as non-verbal cues (Hosoda, 2000) may also be significant, but they were not apparent due to the absence of a video recording.

Although showing these transcripts to teachers and students might be a useful exercise towards reducing L1 use in class, it is also important to consider that some L1 use reduces confusion and allows a class to flow smoothly (Ogane, 1997). It is hoped this small-scale study raises awareness of the importance of recognizing, respecting, and appropriately dealing with student L1 exchanges that learners do not intend the teacher to overhear.

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**Gregory Birch** is an associate professor at Seisen Jogakuin College in Nagano, Japan, holds an MSc in TESOL from Aston University, and an MA in Japanese Language and Society from the University of Sheffield. His research interests include task-based learning, in-service teacher training for ALTs and JTEs, and the teaching of mixed-ability classes.

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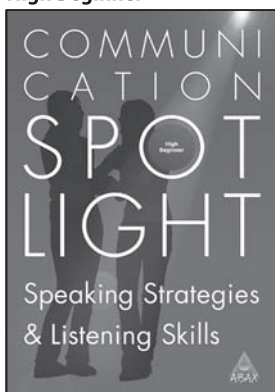
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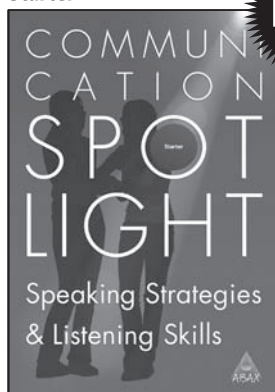
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