German or Japanese? Japanese German Students Evaluate Their Teachers' Language

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The aim of this study was to investigate students' impressions of their German teachers' language of instruction. In a nationwide survey by means of a written questionnaire, 2,352 German as a foreign language (GFL) students were asked to comment on their teachers' choice of German or Japanese in class. The data gathered in this survey were analysed according to the variables of the teachers' L1 (German or Japanese) and the students' L2 skills (CEFR A0-B2). Results of the qualitative and quantitative findings indicate in which areas the teachers' language choice meets their students' needs and in which areas there is room for improvement.

この論文は、外国語教育における教師の使用言語について、学習者の意見を調査するものである。調査方法としては、全国2352人 のドイツ語学習者を対象に、教師の授業内使用言語に対する評価について、書面での回答を求めた。収集されたデータの分析は、教師の母語の違い（ドイツ語／日本語）、そして学習者の言語レベルの違い（CEFR：A0〜B2）によって区別されている。質的・量的分析に基づき、以下では、どのような場合に教師の言語選択が学習者の期待に合致しているのか、そしてどのような場合に改善の余地があるかを示している。

THERE IS no agreement among researchers and practitioners as to whether or not, or to what extent, the L1 should be used in L2 instruction. It is generally acknowledged that, in order to learn a foreign language, the foreign language must be used in the classroom. However, it also seems clear that in teaching contexts where students (and teachers) share the same mother tongue, the L1 may be used as a valuable resource to facilitate or enable communication.

Following the ideals of Krashen's (1985) natural approach, many teachers, in particular those who are native speakers of their students' target language, favour using the L2 only, creating a mock target language environment in their classrooms. They argue that the L2-only classroom offers not only the chance to practice the L2 within communicative exercises, but also the chance to use it as a tool for real communication by providing the students with opportunities to negotiate meaning and solve problems in the L2 (Ford, 2009; Leeming, 2011). However, it is frequently observed that students have difficulties following instructions given in the L2 and fall back on their L1 when they are overwhelmed by L2 exposure. For this reason, many studies have recently emerged that emphasize the importance of acknowledging the learners' L1 during L2 instruction (Cummins, 2007; Kim & Elder, 2008; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Some studies that address this matter identify in more detail for which teaching functions the use of the L1 may be beneficial, including organizing class-

room activities (Harbord, 1992), giving instructions (Holthouse, 2006), raising consciousness of linguistic structures (Ihara, 1993), explaining grammar (Polio & Duff, 1994), providing information on the target language or culture (Nakayama, 2002), giving homework and delivering tests (Dickson, 1996; Franklin, 1990; Macaro, 1995), motivating and disciplining students (Harbord, 1992; İşigüzel, 2012; Nakayama, 2002), and building good relations with them (Atkinson, 1987).

In order to provide more context-specific empirical data to this area of research, I conducted an action research study (Harting, 2012, 2013) and a follow-up nationwide survey with German as a foreign language (GFL) teachers and German language students at Japanese universities (Harting, 2014). The data presented in this paper were taken from the student survey, in which I investigated the students' wishes concerning their teachers' language choices for different teaching functions. The aim of the survey was to discover in more detail which language is preferred by Japanese students of German for the various teaching functions under investigation and whether a student's preference for language of instruction changes according to his or her L2 skill level and the teacher's L1. In this paper, I hope to provide an incentive for GFL teachers to reflect on their language choice and, if necessary, to adapt it to their students' wishes and needs.

Participants

The student survey (see Appendix) was carried out by 60 GFL teachers at 50 universities across Japan. The students were asked to comment on their teachers' use of German and Japanese. The largely quantitative-orientated survey investigated the students' preferences concerning their teachers' language choices for certain teaching functions, such as instructions for exercises and grammar explanations, and took contextual variables such as the teachers' L1s and the students' L2 skill levels into account. Based on my own experience, as well as exchanges with other GFL teachers, these two

variables were estimated to be crucial for the teachers' language choices, because teachers may be inclined to teach in their native language for reasons of comfort, identity, and eloquence, and the students' L2 skills provide a necessary requirement for L2 instructions to be understood.

The participants in the survey were 2,352 GFL students of varying L2 skill levels taught by either a German native speaker (GNS) or a Japanese native speaker (JNS). The 60 teachers (30 GNS and 30 JNS) distributed the questionnaire in at least two of their classes. In order to determine the L2 skill level of the students, the teachers had to assess their students' L2 skills according to the L2 levels outlined in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*. To account for absolute beginners, a level referred to as *A0* was included in the choices. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of classes and students that participated in the survey based on the teachers' assessments of their L2 skill levels.

Table 1. Number of Students and Classes Subjected to the Survey

L2 Level	GNS teachers		JNS teachers		Total	
	Classes	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	Students
A0	24	595	27	767	51	1,362
A1	11	190	15	223	26	413
A2	14	179	11	235	25	414
B1	8	101	1	29	9	130
B2	3	27	1	6	4	33
Totals	60	1,092	55	1,260	115	2,352

Note. GNS = German teacher who is a German native speaker; JNS = German teacher who is a Japanese native speaker.

As can be seen in Table 1, the survey was carried out with 115 groups of students with a total of 2,352 students. Most of the students sub-

jected to the survey were elementary; for the higher levels, there were only a few respondents, which reflects the actual distribution of L2 levels of GFL students in Japan (Ohta et al., 2013).

In order to interpret the results presented in the next section, some biographical data of the students who participated in the survey are provided in Table 2, including information on the students' majors and whether the classes in which the surveys were conducted were elective or compulsory. The data are listed according to the CFER level of the students and the native language of their teachers.

Table 2. Students' Majors in the Classes Under Investigation

Student major/ *Kind of class*	A0		A1		A2		B1		B2	
	GNS	JNS	GNS	JNS	GNS	JNS	GNS	JNS	GNS	JNS
German	4	3	3	4	5	3	5	1	1	1
Other languages	3	4	1	2	1	1	1	0	1	0
Social sciences	11	13	3	7	4	2	2	0	1	0
Natural sciences	5	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Compulsory	22	24	7	8	8	8	4	1	1	0
Elective	2	3	4	7	6	3	4	0	2	1

Note. A0-B2 = student GFL levels according to CEFR, as estimated by their teachers; GNS = German teacher who is a German native speaker; JNS = German teacher who is a Japanese native speaker.

As can be seen in Table 2, more than a third of the students who participated in this survey studied social sciences, among which the subjects law, economics, and politics were the most frequent. Students majoring in German made up almost another third. About a fifth of the classes under investigation were majoring in other languages and another fifth in natural sciences or technical subjects.

As the data indicate, the higher the German L2 skill level of the students, the larger the proportion of students with German majors or in elective courses. In order to also include advanced learners, many teachers conducted the survey with German majors; consequently, the proportion of German majors in this survey is considerably larger than it is in the Japanese university context, as found in a recent large-scale survey of Japanese GFL learners (Ohta et al., 2013). The current survey also appears to have a larger proportion of other language majors, but a smaller proportion of majors in natural sciences than among all university GFL learners in Japan.

Procedure

The student questionnaires were in Japanese and mainly contained closed questions to allow for a quantification of the results and to investigate the impact of the variables of the teachers' L1s and the students' L2 skill levels, both of which were anticipated to have a strong effect on the teachers' language choices. The closed questions consisted of statements about teachers' language choices, to which the students had to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale (-2, -1, 0, 1, 2), positive figures indicating agreement, negative figures disagreement. A similar 5-point scale was used to obtain information on the students' preferred languages for certain teaching functions. This scale allowed for a distinction between a slight and a strong preference for either German (negative figures) or Japanese (positive figures); it also allowed students to express no preference (0). The questionnaires also contained open questions aimed at getting the students' opinions on their teachers' language use and their suggestions for improvement.

Analysis and Results

The quantitative results presented in this section will be analysed by means of the percentages (*M*) and the standard deviations (*SD*). For a better interpretation of the quantitative results, quotes will

be presented from the written comments of the students. Because the students' comments were in Japanese, they have been translated into English, trying to stay as close to the original Japanese meaning as possible. The codes following the comments indicate the students' L2 levels (A0-B2) and whether they were taught by a native speaker of Japanese (J) or native speaker of German (G).

In order to understand how the students perceived their teachers' use of German and Japanese as languages of instruction, students were asked to estimate what percentage of class time these languages were used. Table 3 shows how the students estimated the distribution of their teachers' use of those languages.

As can be seen in Table 3, the most striking difference is that JNS teachers predominantly use Japanese as the medium of instruction, regardless of their students' L2 levels, but GNS teachers make more use of the target language the more advanced their students are. Even at the beginners' level (A0), GNS teachers use more German than Japanese for instruction. The *SD*s, which are around and sometimes well above 20%, indicate that the students' perceptions of how much German and Japanese is used is based on quite different individual estimates.

Apart from the perceived Japanese to German ratio, the student survey also asked whether the amounts of use of the two languages were desirable or not. Table 4 shows the students' responses to two statements (S1 and S2) aimed at eliciting whether the students had the impression that either their L1 (Japanese) or their L2 (German) was overrepresented in the teachers' language of instruction:

S1: The teacher was speaking too much in German, so sometimes I couldn't understand.

S2: The teacher was speaking too much in Japanese. I would have liked to hear more German.

As far as the risk of overuse of the German L2 is concerned, students taught by JNS teachers had no such concerns, as the comparatively high negative figures indicate (tending toward disagreement that JNS teachers use too much German). The opinions of the students taught by GNS teachers, however, are only slightly negative and, in fact, at level B1 they are positive (tending towards agreement that GNS teachers use too much German). The relatively high *SD*s indicate that students have strong differences of opinion about the use of German by their teachers. As was revealed in some of the students' comments, an overuse of the L2 might have resulted in difficulties following the teachers' instructions, in particular in classes at the lower levels taught by GNS teachers: "Sometimes when the teacher speaks to me in German, I cannot understand, so I wish (s)he'd use more Japanese" (A0/G) and "Too much German was spoken in class, so I often couldn't follow the instructions" (A0/G).

Table 3. Students' Estimations of Percentage of Class Time Teachers Used German and Japanese (*N* = 2,352)

Teacher's L1	Language used	Student GFL level									
		A0		A1		A2		B1		B2	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
German	Japanese	47.6	24.2	41.4	20.9	34.7	23.6	15.3	15.4	8.9	16.8
	German	52.3		58.6		65.2		84.6		91.1	
Japanese	Japanese	71.5	18.8	73.4	19.0	66.6	19.7	70.3	24.0	74.0	18.2
	German	28.4		26.6		33.4		29.7		26.0	

Note. A0-B2 = student GFL levels according to CEFR, as estimated by their teachers.

Table 4. Student Opinions About Overuse of German or Japanese (N = 2,352)

Statement	Teacher's L1	A0		A1		A2		B1		B2	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
S1: Too much German	German	-0.1	1.5	-0.3	1.3	-0.2	1.2	0.2	1.2	-0.4	1.3
	Japanese	-1.1	1.2	-1.0	1.3	-0.8	1.2	-0.4	1.4	-1.7	0.8
S2: Too much Japanese	German	-1.2	0.9	-1.2	1.0	-1.2	0.9	-1.4	1.0	-1.8	0.5
	Japanese	-0.7	1.0	-0.6	1.1	-0.5	1.0	-0.3	1.2	-0.8	1.2

Note. Numbers are average results obtained from ratings on a 5-point scale: -2 = completely disagree; 2 = completely agree; A0-B2 = student GFL levels according to CEFR, as estimated by their teachers.

As far as the overuse of Japanese is concerned, the opposite trend was revealed. As the relatively weak disagreement to S2 concerning JNS teachers indicates, some of the students wished for less Japanese (and more German) to be used in classes taught by JNS teachers. This was also reflected in the students' comments: "As I am learning German, I would like to use this chance to come in contact with the language" (A1/J) and "It would be good to increase the amount of German in class" (A1/J). Students taught by GNS teachers, on the other hand, strongly negated the need for Japanese: "I was satisfied with the class, because it was mostly delivered in German" (B2/G), "I think it was good that even difficult things were explained in German" (B2/G), and "I think that the teacher should not use Japanese, so that the students put more effort into learning German" (B1/G).

Finally, the survey also asked about the students' language preferences for certain teaching functions (F1-F5), such as instructions for exercises and grammar explanations. For that purpose, the students were asked to indicate their preferred language on the same 5-point scale, from -2 (strong preference for German) to 2 (strong preference for Japanese). Table 5 shows the students' language preferences for the five teaching functions in the survey.

As the largely positive figures in Table 5 indicate, the students' preferred language for most teaching functions is their L1. For the students of JNS teachers, in particular, Japanese seems to be the preferred choice for all teaching functions at almost all L2 levels; only the functions of motivating students and chatting with students indicate a slight preference for German at level B2, the highest level. For the students of GNS teachers, German takes over as the preferred language as the L2 level of the students increases: Already at level A1, it is the preferred language for motivating students and chatting with students. For giving instructions for exercises, German is preferred at level B1 and for announcing tests and homework at level B2. Only for explaining grammar do students of all L2 levels prefer that the teacher use Japanese. As the relatively high SDs (particularly at level B2) indicate, however, there seem to be strong individual differences concerning preferred language choice, even among students of the same German level.

As far as instructions for exercises (F1) are concerned, learners at the lower L2 levels, in particular those taught by JNS teachers, seem to appreciate instructions in their L1: "I am very satisfied with the class, because most instructions were given in Japanese" (A0/J). From GNS teachers, on the other hand, students preferred instructions given in the L2: "As the opportunities to hear German from a native speaker are rather limited, I think that the use of Japanese should be limited as much as possible" (A1/G). Even beginners had the impression that listening to German a lot would benefit their

Table 5. Students' Language Preference According to Teaching Functions (*N* = 2,352)

Function	Teacher's L1	A0		A1		A2		B1		B2	
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
F1: Giving instructions for exercises	German	0.9	1.1	0.4	1.2	0.0	1.2	-0.7	1.2	-1.4	1.2
	Japanese	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.8	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.5	1.6
F2: Explaining grammar	German	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.6	1.1	-0.1	1.3	-0.8	1.3
	Japanese	1.5	0.9	1.4	0.9	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.0
F3: Motivating students	German	0.3	1.1	-0.2	1.1	-0.5	1.1	-1.0	1.1	-1.7	0.6
	Japanese	0.9	1.2	0.8	1.1	0.4	1.1	0.3	1.3	-0.2	1.7
F4: Announcing tests and homework	German	1.4	1.0	1.1	1.1	0.6	1.1	0.0	1.3	-1.2	1.1
	Japanese	1.6	0.8	1.4	0.9	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.1	0.8	1.5
F5: Chatting with students	German	0.1	1.1	-0.4	1.1	-0.6	1.1	-1.0	1.0	-1.6	0.8
	Japanese	0.7	1.2	0.7	1.1	0.2	1.1	0.5	1.1	-0.3	1.4

Note. Numbers are average results obtained from ratings on a 5-point scale: -2 = strong preference for German to 2 = strong preference for Japanese; A0-B2 = student GFL levels according to CEFR, as estimated by their teachers.

listening comprehension: "Although at times I couldn't understand a word, eventually I got used to listening to German instructions, so I think it is good to use German in class" (A0/G). Some learners, on the other hand, raised concerns about not being able to understand L2 instructions to exercises: "I was sometimes in trouble when I didn't understand the German instructions for important tasks" (A2/G).

For grammar explanations (F2), most of the students expressed a preference for their L1 regardless of the native languages of their teachers: "I want Japanese to be used for explanations" (A0/G) and "As explanations were almost exclusively in Japanese, I could follow instructions easily" (A1/J). Particularly for beginners, the need for L1 explanations was emphasized: "For beginners, I wish that explanations are thoroughly carried out in Japanese" (A0/G). Students at the higher levels, however, also welcomed additional L2 explanations: "I'd be happy to receive instructions in both German and Japanese" (B1/G) and "I want both languages to be used, even if it is difficult,

but for understanding grammatical points we need both languages" (B1/G). A few students even welcomed L2 explanations: "Students are spoiled by having too many Japanese explanations; it would be nice to listen to more German" (B2/J) and "I'm grateful that everything was explained in German and that Japanese was limited to some supportive comments only" (A2/G).

As far as the function of motivating students (F3) is concerned, there were no comments directly linked to this point in the data. However, as the comments above for explanations and instructions suggest, a rather strong tendency towards either German or Japanese could possibly inspire some but discourage others.

The comments concerning the teachers' language choices for the announcement of homework or tests (F4) all revealed a strong preference for Japanese, as the following comment stated outright: "Important announcements concerning homework and tests should be made in Japanese" (A0/G). This expresses the students' concerns

about failing to understand crucial points of the class that were directly (or indirectly) related to their assessment.

As the students' comments regarding F5 (chats with students) revealed, those taught by Japanese teachers expressed a wish for more L2 use in class: "I would like to come in contact with real German and use it as a means of communication" (A1/J) and "It would be good to have more opportunities to talk to the teacher in German" (A0/J). In the comments on their GNS teachers' language choices, some students' expressed a wish for more Japanese: "Questions by the students should be answered in Japanese" (A0/G). For other learners, the teachers' language choices should depend on the students' question: "When the students ask a question in Japanese, the teacher should answer in Japanese, when they ask in German, the answer should also be in German" (A1/G). Although some students felt that it was a problem if the use of their mother tongue was restricted: "I was in trouble when the teacher asked me to speak German when I was asking a question in Japanese" (B1/G), others welcomed the challenge of being exposed to the target language: "I thought it was really good that students' questions asked in Japanese were answered in German by the teacher" (A2/G) and "If only German is allowed, students also learn how to express themselves with simple words" (B1/G).

Summary and Discussion

In studying the language preferences of GFL students concerning the language of instruction of their GNS and JNS teachers, the major findings are that, according to student perceptions, their JNS teachers only use the target language around 30% of the time regardless of the L2 skill levels of the students. On the other hand, GNS teachers predominantly use the L2, even for beginners, and the amount that they use the L2 gradually increases with each skill level to more than 90% at level B2. As the quantitative results

indicate, the students taught by JNS teachers expressed a desire to have more exposure to the target language, but students of GNS teachers wished for more instruction in their L1. As far as the language choices for certain teaching functions are concerned, the data gathered in this survey provided more detailed insights into the findings of previous studies that advocate the benefits of using the learners' L1. For grammar explanations and announcing tests and homework, Japanese is the preferred language choice of the students regardless of their L2 level or their teachers' L1. For the other functions under investigation in this study, however, namely giving instructions, chatting with students, and motivating students, German takes over as the preferred language choice as the students' L2 level increases, at least as far as students of GNS teachers are concerned.

In summary, as the data derived from this survey revealed, the native language of the teacher, as well as the L2 level of the students, is indeed a decisive factor for the students' expectations of which language should be used in the L2 classroom. However, high standard deviations emerging from the quantitative data as well as the very diverse—at times even contradictory—student comments concerning language preferences call for a flexible approach concerning the teachers' language choices. It is certainly not possible for teachers to meet the needs and expectations of all learners in a class at the same time, but there should be enough variation in the teachers' language of instruction to allow for motivated students to receive sufficient L2 input and to ensure, at the same time, that students who rely more on L1 instructions are not left behind.

Bio Data

Axel Harting completed his PhD on German and Japanese email writing and is teaching German at Hiroshima University. His research fields are L2 writing, L2 didactics, and pragmatics.

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Appendix
Student Questionnaire
English (Translation)

1. Please fill in your gender, age, and major:

Gender: ☐ male ☐ female   age: _____   major: _____

2. Fill in the percentages of your teacher's use of German and Japanese in class:

    Japanese _____% + German _____% = 100%

3. How do you feel about the teacher's use of German and Japanese in class?

a) The teacher was speaking too much in German, so that sometimes I couldn't understand.

         -2   -1   0   1   2

    disagree ☐   slightly disagree ☐   undecided ☐   slightly agree ☐   agree ☐

b) The teacher was speaking too much in Japanese. I would have wanted to hear more German.

         -2   -1   0   1   2

    disagree ☐   slightly disagree ☐   undecided ☐   slightly agree ☐   agree ☐

4. Are you satisfied with the teacher's use of German and Japanese?

_____

5. Do you see room for improvement concerning the teacher's use of German or Japanese?

_____

6. Which language should be used for each of the following functions in class?

0 = I don't know. Either language is OK.

		-2	-1	0	1	2	
a) Giving instructions for exercises	German	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Japanese
b) Explaining grammar	German	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Japanese
c) Motivating students	German	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Japanese
d) Announcing tests and homework	German	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Japanese
e) Chatting with students	German	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Japanese

Japanese (Original)

1. あなたの性別、年齢、専攻分野を記入してください:

性別: ☐男 ☐女   年齢: _____   専攻分野: _____

2. 授業で教師 は、日本語とドイツ語をどれくらいの割合で使用していると感じますか?

    日本語_____% + ドイツ語_____% = 100%

3. 教師の言語（ドイツ語と日本語）の使い分けについてどう感じましたか?

a) ドイツ語で話す割合が多すぎて、教師が言ったことを理解できない時があった。

         -2   -1   0   1   2

    あてはまらない☐   あまりあてはまらない☐   どちらでもない☐   ややあてはまる☐   あてはまる☐

b) 教師の日本語で話す割合が多すぎた。教師からもっとドイツ語を聞きたかった。

         -2   -1   0   1   2

    あてはまらない☐   あまりあてはまらない☐   どちらでもない☐   ややあてはまる☐   あてはまる☐

4. 教師の言語の使い分け（ドイツ語と日本語）に関して満足していますか?

_____

5. 教師の言語の使い分け（ドイツ語と日本語）をさらに改善するにはどうしたらよいと思いますか?

_____

6. 授業では、どのような場合にどの言語を使って欲しかったですか?

0 = わからない / どちらでも良い

		-2	-1	0	1	2	
a) 演習や問題のやり方の指示	ドイツ語	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	日本語
b) 文法の説明	ドイツ語	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	日本語
c) 学生を注意したり動機づけたりする	ドイツ語	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	日本語
d) 宿題や試験などに関する連絡	ドイツ語	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	日本語
e) 学生との雑談	ドイツ語	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	日本語