

The Case Against the Case Against Holding English Classes in English

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In senior high school, teachers are now officially supposed to conduct their English lessons mainly in English to develop students' communication abilities (MEXT, 2011). However, some researchers in English education have raised the case against this "English lessons in English" principle, asserting that conducting English lessons in the target language of English is not only ineffective, but harmful. This paper aims to refute critics of MEXT's guideline for conducting classes primarily in English by considering studies in second language acquisition (SLA), theories for English learners' motivation in the Japanese context, and offering an alternative for judicious use of the L1, Japanese.

現在、高校での英語の授業は主に英語で行うことになっている。しかしながらこの「英語での授業」には一部の英語教育研究者から、効果が無いばかりか害があるとの強烈な反対意見もある。本稿では、この「英語での授業への反対意見」を第2言語習得理論や日本人学習者の英語を話そうとする意欲、有効な日本語の活用などの観点から反論する。

In the 2013 academic year, the language of communication in Japanese senior high school English classes officially became English. Under the plan announced by MEXT on Dec. 13, 2013, English classes in junior high schools will also be conducted primarily in the English language from the 2018 academic year. However, some researchers in English education take a strong position against this practice by asserting that conducting English classes in the target language is not only ineffective, but harmful. They refute the effectiveness of English classes conducted in English, considering its theoretical basis and its practical implementation by practicing teachers (e.g., Erikawa, 2009, 2014; Narita, 2013; Terashima, 2009).

From the viewpoints of theories of second language acquisition (SLA), Japanese learners' motivation for speaking, and a judicious use of L1 (Japanese) in English-medium classes, I explore the effectiveness of English-medium classes by refuting the case against holding English classes in English.

The Case Against Holding English Classes in English

Arguments against holding English lessons in English can be divided into theoretical, practical, and L1-based objections. From the theoretical perspective, Erikawa (2014) asserts that the idea of teaching English lessons in English is now out of date by introducing Kubota (2014), who suggests the need for effective, creative language activities which utilize the mother tongue. Erikawa presents this as an example of a more up-to-date teaching method that reflects changing attitudes in global TESOL towards using L1 in foreign language classrooms, and therefore dismisses the proposal of English-medium classes as lacking a theoretical basis. Terashima (2009), while attaching importance to students' writing and presentations in English, argues that these output-based activities would be more effectively practiced in Japanese language-based English classes since teachers can teach and students can better learn how to produce English through their shared language, Japanese. Narita (2013) claims that as there are huge differences between English and Japanese phonology and grammatical systems, it is very difficult for Japanese English teachers to speak English fluently and accurately, thus making it impossible for Japanese L1 teachers to conduct effective English lessons in English.

Narita (2013) suggests that effective English classes in English can never actually be realized because both Japanese teachers and students lack sufficient English ability. It is also argued that asking Japanese teachers to conduct their lessons in English would be an excessive burden on teachers (Erikawa, 2009), be physically and mentally exhausted in the current Japanese EFL teaching environment in which students and teachers do not actually need to use English for communication outside the classroom (Terashima, 2009).

As for the effectiveness of English-medium classes, it is argued that the practice will leave some students behind (Terashima, 2009), and will widen the gap of English proficiency among them, thus creating "English haters" (Erikawa, 2009) because of the difficulty of understanding English input from

teachers. In all, Narita (2013) insists that transitioning to English-medium classes will lower their quality, reduce learners' English proficiency, and instill teachers with utterly fallacious, superficial ideas on English education. He even goes so far as to regard this principle as a reckless attempt that could lead to the collapse of English education, though without showing any specific quantitative or qualitative data to support his claim.

The Crucial Role of Input

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) asserts that language acquisition is input-driven, meaning that acquisition is based primarily on what we hear and understand. He claims learners acquire the target language by understanding input that contains structures a little bit beyond their current level of competence ($i + 1$), implying that mere classroom English which is well below their level cannot lead learners to acquisition or learning. This hypothesis has been criticized because it lacked any direct role for output. For example, Swain (1985) argues for the necessity of output in her output hypothesis, and Long (1996) emphasizes the necessity of interaction for target language learning in his interaction hypothesis. However, these influential output hypotheses complement the input hypothesis in that these theories attach importance to input as well. Indeed, there is no lack of theories or hypotheses that demonstrate the crucial role of input in the process of second/foreign language learning (e.g., Robinson, 1995; Schmidt, 1990; VanPatten, 1996). From the theories of input, interaction, and output in SLA, we can argue that a large amount of input from the teachers is essential alongside ample output opportunities through meaningful interaction with effective feedback in English. Contrary to Erikawa (2014), who stated that there is no theoretical basis for teaching English classes in English, it is clear that input beyond simple classroom English is a precondition for learning the language from the point of view of SLA, which implies that there is no justification for English teachers to be unwilling or unable to conduct lessons in English.

Japanese EFL Learners' Motivation for Speaking

To transform classes into "real communication scenes" (MEXT, 2011, p.7), we need to create output opportunities for students as well. However, Japanese EFL learners are, in general, "... reluctant to communicate in English, especially when the main focus of the lesson is on communication" (Tomita & Spada, 2013, p.593). Tomita and Spada

(2013) have reported Japanese high school learners' evident tendency to regard speaking English to their Japanese peers as showing off, as well as on their unwillingness to present themselves as English speakers. This emotional obstacle among Japanese learners should be reduced by improving their willingness to communicate (WTC), and their volition to initiate communication in the target language, since WTC is a prerequisite for language use (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Sato and Koga (2012) and Koga and Sato (2013) examined the development of Japanese EFL learners' WTC. In the first study (Sato & Koga, 2012) with 27 second-year university students, 15 lessons were conducted almost all in English, and students were encouraged to use English, but were also allowed to use Japanese when what they wanted to say was beyond their linguistic level. The class was rather input-based in that students were provided with plenty of comprehensible input and interaction (Long, 1996), without being forced to produce English output. The questionnaire results showed that WTC increased significantly. In the second study (Koga & Sato, 2013), a total of 121 university students were engaged in seven weeks of debate-based lessons. In the lessons, the teacher mainly used Japanese, but students were required to practice and memorize English manuscripts to hold a debate in English. This class can be regarded as output-based in that learners were not provided with a great amount of oral English input from the teacher but were required to produce output. In this study, WTC did not change significantly. Sato and Koga (2013) interpreted that in the first study, students could see a practical example of a successful user of English, or have a clear image of their future ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005), which contributed to the development of WTC. However, this was not the case in the second study (Koga & Sato, 2013).

Though the results of the two studies should not be generalized as relevant to every Japanese EFL classroom, it can be implied that input-rich English-medium classes can improve learners' motivation for speaking and that English Japanese EFL teachers should conduct their classes mainly in English to motivate Japanese EFL learners to improve their L2 communication abilities.

Selective, Judicious Use of L1

As mentioned above, the voluminous provision of comprehensible English input is crucial for language learning. However, what are the effects of L1 (Japanese) use by Japanese EFL teachers or native speaker teachers in English lessons? As students'

first language (Japanese) and the target language (English) cannot exist cognitively isolated even in English-medium classes, the question arises as to whether Japanese EFL teachers (and native speaker teachers) should or should not use L1 in the classroom. In SLA and communicative language methodologies, using the target language only used to be generally accepted, and use of L1 was regarded as a problem to be avoided (e.g., Polio & Duff, 1994). However, this monolingual view has been challenged, and effective, selective use of L1 as a learning and teaching resource in the ESL/ EFL classroom is now acknowledged or even favored (e.g., Butzkamm, 2003; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Cook, 2001). In neighboring East Asian EFL countries, the positive effects of English-medium classes incorporating L1 are reported. In a study with Chinese undergraduate students, He (2012) found that L1 use provided scaffolding which enabled students to raise their conscious awareness of the similarities and differences between Chinese and English, and activating students' existing schema. In Korea, students' improved understanding and active participation are also reported in the settings where both languages (i.e., L1 and L2) co-exist (e.g., Cook, 2001; Lee, 2001). I myself conducted high school English lessons almost entirely in English with some selective, judicious use of Japanese (i.e., explanation of grammar rules, abstract words, or expressions without direct correspondence, class procedures, teaching of pronunciation, feedback on linguistic aspects). The questionnaire results revealed that the English-medium classes with limited code-switching was favored by most of the students (Sato, 2009).

Theoretically speaking, we can conclude that the selective, judicious use of L1 has crucial roles in facilitating learning in English-medium classes. However, one crucial point which contradicts the claim made by those against English-medium classes is that the base language of teaching must definitely be the L2 to create an input-rich learning environment. Ideally, as Macaro (2011) suggests, 80% of classroom time should be spent in the target language. I believe this should be applied not only to communication-oriented classes but also to exam-oriented classes in which L1 can be used judiciously only when needed (i.e., explanation of grammar rules, teaching of pronunciation, feedback to linguistic aspects). I believe that Japanese EFL teachers with high proficiency in English can teach students how to learn effectively since they have experience and direct insight into the learning process, which can be true of native speaker teachers who have learned Japanese. Some may argue

that asking Japanese EFL teachers to possess a fine command of English can exhaust and corner them (e.g., Erikawa, 2009, 2014; Terashima, 2009), but if we are to improve students' English skills, teachers should be highly encouraged to improve their own English abilities.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that Japanese learners need a great deal of high quality input from teachers. However, exposure to input cannot improve Japanese EFL learners' speaking or writing abilities (e.g., Hato, 2013). Learners invariably need to be engaged in interaction through which they can produce output (Long, 1996) and in output-based activities in the classroom (Swain, 1985). However, we have to make clear that the provision of ample input is a precondition for effective output activities, meaning that the facilitating effect of output should never be expected without previous and ongoing input. By conducting lessons mainly in English, teachers will have to provide a lot of high quality, comprehensible input that can facilitate learning and improve students' motivation to communicate as well. Then, students can actively engage in output-based communicative activities.

In summary, I would argue that Japanese EFL teachers should try to provide as much high quality L2 input as possible, and hold that it is not students but teachers who should, at first and continuously, use sufficient English in the classroom to transform classes "... into real communication scenes" (MEXT, 2011, p.7). The principles of contemporary language education require us to teach English classes primarily in English.

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