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Perspectives

Guilt, Missed Opportunities, and False Role Models: A Look at Perceptions and Use of the First Language in English Teaching in Japan

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At the start of the 2013 academic year, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) implemented the guideline set forth in their latest Courses of Study, dictating that English classes "should be conducted principally in English in high school" (MEXT, 2009, p. 8). The new Courses of Study, although not imposing a strict target-language-only rule, are still reflective of the past dogma that takes what Macaro (2001) calls a maximal position wherein the L1 is a necessary evil rather than a pedagogical resource. Teachers and institutions espousing such a view undermine language learning progress by engendering undue guilt for responsive and responsible teaching decisions, inhibiting creative pedagogy, and discouraging teachers from acting as positive and realistic bi/multilingual role models.

　日本の文部科学省は、現行版学習要領に記載された「高等学校の英語教育授業を原則として英語で教えること」（文部科学省, 2009, p. 8）という方針を2013学年度に施行した。対象言語のみの使用を徹底するという厳格な規則にはなっていないものの、新学習要領は、Macaro（2001）がmaximal positionと呼ぶ「母語（L1）の使用は教育上の必要悪である」とする考えを反映している。このような見解を広める教師及び教育機関は、柔軟かつ責任ある教育的決断に対して過剰な罪悪感を生み、独創的な教授法を抑制し、教師が積極的で現実的に対応できるバイリンガル・多言語が使いこなせる模範者として活躍することを阻害し、それによって外国語教育の進歩を妨害する。

A t the start of the 2013 academic year, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) implemented the guideline set forth in their latest Courses of Study that English classes "should be conducted principally in English in high school" (MEXT, 2009, p. 8). This is part of an ongoing endeavor by the Japanese government, still reeling from low rankings in English compared to its neighbors, to improve the English capabilities of its citizens (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). This push to use more English in the classroom is seen as a necessary step in the process of shifting away from the grammar-translation and lecture-style methods of the past towards more communicative approaches, in accordance with goals in the 2003 Action Plan to Cultivate "Japanese with English Abilities" (MEXT, 2011). The new Courses of Study, although not completely banning L1 use, are still reflective of the dogma that takes what Macaro (2001) calls a maximal position wherein the L1 is a necessary evil rather than a pedagogical resource. In this paper, I will attempt to show that teachers and institutions espousing such a view undermine language learning progress by engendering undue guilt for responsive and responsible teaching, inhibiting creative pedagogy, and discouraging teachers from acting as realistic bi/multilingual role models.

Changing Perspectives of the L1's Value in Teaching

Perceptions of the L1's role in second language teaching, broadly referring to anything from translated class materials to code-switching (alternating between two or more languages) by teachers or students, have changed quite dramatically throughout history. Whereas within the traditional grammar-translation method the L1 was the principal means through which language was taught, proponents of the direct method, emerging around the turn of the 18th century, sought to imitate the L1 acquisition process by total immersion in the target language (Cook, 2001; Ferguson, 2009). Assumptions concerning L1 use inherent within the direct method posit that languages are separate systems within the mind and thus best learned in exclusivity or near exclusivity, relying on inductive learning and negotiation of meaning (Cook, 2002a; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2008). Taking this stance, the L1 becomes the enemy of language learning—an interference, a contaminant, a dangerous temptation (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Weschler, 1997). Strong and weak versions of this *monolingual principle,* being "taken for granted as the foundation of language teaching" (Cook, 2001, p. 404), influenced subsequent language teaching approaches like the audiolingual method and task-based learning (see also Butzkamm, 2003; Littlewood &

Yu, 2011). The acceptance of these premises' validity as a "standard feature" (Ferguson, 2009, p. 235) or "sacrosanct principle" (Kramsch, 2012, p. 109) of the widely popular communicative language approach has decisively re-shaped the global educational landscape. Though denigration and avoidance of the L1 in language learning classrooms endures in current mainstream attitudes (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Littlewood & Yu, 2011), the 1990s saw a marked re-evaluation of the monolingual principle from sociocultural, cognitive, and humanistic perspectives (Antòn & DiCamilla 1999; Tian & Macaro, 2012). Research since has yielded further interest in, and empirical evidence for, not only the value of the L1 on a pedagogical level (Ferguson, 2009; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009), but also the vital role of the L1 on the journey towards a bilingual identity (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013; Kramsch, 2012; McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

Not sharing a history of colonization, Japan has not followed the "mono-lingual bias" trajectory (Kachru, 1994, p. 798) that has been seen in coun-tries where enforcement of a target-language exclusivity rule could amount to imperialistic oppression (Auerbach, 1993; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). On the contrary, the L1-heavy grammar-translation method, for various reasons, is still very much alive and kicking and constitutes a substantial portion of private and public English instruction in Japan (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; MEXT, 2011). Nevertheless, Japan has not escaped the influence of the direct method via the prevalent communicative approach (Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Kanno, 2007). Universities and private teaching institutions capital-ize on the lure of *English only* in promotional tactics (Ford, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Nao, 2011) and MEXT's latest and controversial Courses of Study show that ideals of immersion or target language maximization still hold sway in the educational sphere.

Unjustified Guilt

After examining teachers' or institutions' views on L1 classroom use, Macaro (2001) outlined three possible viewpoints: the virtual position (the L1 has no value and can and should be totally excluded), the maximal position (the L1 has no value but imperfect learning conditions necessitate its occasional use), and the optimal position (the L1 has pedagogical value that should be explored). Teachers subscribing to the maximal position of-ten experience guilt or shame for "lapses" into the L1 (Butzkamm, 2003; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Especially in Japan, where students have little opportunity to practice English outside the classroom, many regard any use of the L1 as irresponsibly taking away from precious L2 input time (Kim &

Elder, 2005; Stephens, 2006). Furthermore, there is still the sense that code-switching demonstrates inadequate language skills or determination on the part of teachers or students (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Hosoda, 2000). As a result, teachers more often hear L1 use discussed in terms of avoidance or minimization (Cook, 2001; Ford, 2009). Like so many educators worldwide, a lot of Japanese teachers have been left juggling discordant demands without much guidance (Critchley, 2003; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009).

Although the maximal approach appears benign (what teacher wouldn't want to provide extensive L2 input?), it places quantity of L2 unjustifiably high on the hierarchy of teachers' responsibilities towards students. This priority status of maximum L2 use risks alienating frustrated, uninterested, or otherwise struggling students and falling short of set course content objectives. Teachers who take multiple important considerations into account when making the decision to use the L1 will still feel as if they have failed in relation to their target-language exclusivity aspirations. In personal experience working in the Japanese high school system, I have witnessed firsthand the furtive glances around to see who could be listening and the embarrassed, apologetic faces from Japanese English teachers (JTEs) and assistant English teachers (AETs) alike when speaking of their use of the students' L1 in class, followed up by a common expression typifying the grudging sentiments of the maximal position: "*Shouganai*," meaning "It can't be helped."

Yet, this automatic guilt and perception of inadequacy proves unjustified as there is little empirical backing for the maximal position and a compellingly wide breadth of studies supporting less extreme positions (Auerbach, 1993; Critchley, 2003; Macaro, 2009). As Kim and Elder (2005) stressed, "The proportion of the TL used in classroom interactions should not be the sole basis for judging the linguistic quality of the classroom environment, where various contextual factors come into play" (p. 357). Many have investigated the frequency and purposes of L1 use in the classroom and have identified multiple legitimate and beneficial functions for the L1 and for code-switching in particular (Atkinson, 1987; Butzkamm, 1998; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Ferguson (2009) divided these common uses of the L1 into three broad categories: for constructing and transmitting knowledge, for classroom management, and for interpersonal relations. Enumerating the various situations where L1 would outperform the L2 is beyond the scope of this paper; however, some particularly salient reasons within Japanese classrooms would be (a) reducing anxiety (Carson & Kashihara, 2012), (b) providing an equal playing field for less advanced students in a system that commonly eschews ability grouping (Sugie, 1995), and (c) advancing

content coverage conducive to entrance examination preparation (Yamamoto-Wilson, 1997). In a study done specifically in Japan on teacher codeswitching, Hosoda (2000) revealed that it had a positive effect by fortifying or restoring "the flow of interaction" (p. 89) in classes with low proficiency or unmotivated students, or both—an all too common situation in Japanese high schools or universities.

The benefits of code-switching by students is also strongly supported by sociocultural and cognitive theories. In brief, if we understand language as the primary semiotic tool that mediates thought, we must accept that students' L1 will be the medium through which they process and internalize new information. Far from being an interference, their L1 scaffolds their progress, building new information on old (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009). Regardless of the classroom or institutional policy, the L1, especially for beginners and intermediate students, will be the vehicle by which they focus attention, organize thoughts, and internalize meaning (Swain & Lapkin, 2013). Rather than entertaining the improbable notion of students "reconceptualiz[ing] the world" (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 31) through such finite L2 exposure, teachers should be encouraged to make use of the scaffolding and higher order cognitive shortcuts older learners possess (see also Cook, 2001; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003).

A deeper look at teachers' decisions to use or allow the L1 paints a far different picture than that implied by the maximal position—that is, lazy teachers or students compensating for inadequate linguistic abilities. We see teachers using all their and their students' linguistic knowledge to "facilitate a pupil's access to curricular knowledge in a classroom environment that feels comfortable, familiar and safe" (Ferguson, 2009, p. 232). Undeniably, not all choices to use the L1 will be in the students' best interests. To illustrate, De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) found that rationales for use differed between novice and experienced educators, suggesting L1-use optimization is a skill to be developed over time. Cook (2001) advocated that teachers be encouraged to weigh the merits (efficiency, learning, naturalness, and external relevance) against "the potential loss of L2 experience" (p. 413), a far cry from uncritical adherence to an arbitrary target-language-only rule. The maximal position apparent in the latest Courses of Study has the effect of focusing teachers' attention towards which language to use rather than how to make the most of either. In lieu of an untenable edict of L1 avoidance, support and guidance on pedagogically justified uses of L1 within realistically imagined classroom contexts could be provided (Ferguson, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011). From simple things such as telling a joke in the L1 to lighten

the mood to in-depth cross-linguistic analysis, there are times when the L1 not only has a role, but is a superior means to achieve the desired end.

Missed Opportunities

Support for principled and judicious use of the L1 as responsive and effective teaching for which educators need not feel ashamed is extensive and comprehensive (Butzkamm, 2003; Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). In contrast, the maximal position does far more harm that just imposing a sense of guilt on teachers compelled to use the L1 when necessary. It stifles the creative pedagogy vital to assisting students on the arduous journey towards bilingualism. Under the maximal position, teachers resort to code-switching with hesitation and fear of possible recrimination. This reluctance leaves a powerful tool on the shelf to collect dust. Especially for advanced learners who will need far less scaffolding from the L1, the maximal position may lead teachers to abandon code-switching the very moment students can function adequately without it. Yet, far more intriguing than code-switching, an economic and efficient classroom strategy, as a means to an end is code-switching as an end in itself. This idea makes a profound departure from conceptions of parallel or isolated monolingualisms (Cook, 2001; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2008) to view learners as "aspiring bilinguals" developing their full linguistic repertoires to create their own voice and identity (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p. 251). This view also recognizes code-switching not as a deficient interlanguage, but as sophisticated and complex discourse strategies constructed by "savvy navigator[s] of communicative obstacles" (Kramsch, 2012, p 108; see also Ogane, 1997).

This exciting potential for code-switching in the classroom is easiest to appreciate when looking at advanced writing students who, in the face of new audiences and unfamiliar linguistic self-presentation strategies, "are observed to experience struggles in their representation of discoursal selves" (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013, p. 7). Even in circumstances where the final product must be entirely within the target language, highly advanced students can utilize their L1 writing skills to enhance their writing content, make appropriate word choice, and come to various stylistic and rhetorical decisions (Friedlander, 1990; Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2013; Lally, 2000; Woodall, 2002). In Nichols and Colon's (2000) longitudinal case study, a bilingual student in the U.S. reported that when encouraged to make use of either Spanish or English when freewriting and outlining drafts, "she was able to tap the full range of her linguistic ability for class assignments" (p. 504).

Likewise, in their study of 64 writing students from a multilingual perspective, Kobayashi and Rinnert (2012) found that L1 and L2 knowledge evolved and merged, allowing multicompetent writers "to exert more control over the text they [were] constructing by choosing the most appropriate features from their repertoire of writing knowledge" (p. 101). Teachers unencumbered with arbitrary L1 avoidance can see the students' first language as the powerful resource that it is and thereby are in a better position to facilitate and enhance learning.

Although it has been noted that code-switching is a natural process and therefore does not require explicit modeling from teachers (Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2009), Canagarajah (2011) argued that students could greatly benefit from further guidance into the exploration of discourse and rhetorical strategies in what he called codemeshing. His study was on the progress of a Saudi Arabian student who, within an environment that provided modeling and encouragement for codemeshing, developed her deeply rhetorically powerful recontextualization, voice, interactional, and textualization strategies. Perhaps that level of mastery and refinement is beyond the reach of the majority of Japanese high school students, but having that possibility promoted—unthinkable from a maximal position—opens the door to more level-appropriate but equally fulfilling classroom activities.

Teachers as Bilingual Role Models

The pressure towards monolingual classes neither reflects the current English-as-a-lingua-franca reality nor provides positive bilingual role models from either Japanese English teachers or teachers from abroad. The current era of globalization has brought a proliferation of questions about the primacy of the native speaker, the appropriacy of exonormative versus endonormative grammar, and the goals of language learning itself (Alptekin, 2002; Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; Kramsch, 2012). As with any high-stakes, complicated issue, answers to those questions can be exceedingly emotive and controversial. Nevertheless, there seems to be a turn in the discourse away from the undisputed monolingual native-speaker ideal to greater interest in bi/multilingualism (Kramsch, 2012; Levine, 2012). This shift has roots not only in philosophical theories, but also in pragmatic assessments of the global landscape where the monolingual native speaker of English is now the minority (Cook, 2002a). "Globalization is reshuffling the cards," so to speak (Kramsch, 2012, p. 115). As it is MEXT's (2011) stated goal to develop students' skills and sensibilities in preparation for the international stage, it would follow that they should deeply examine how to recreate a

"multilingual social space" reflective of the wider international community in which they wish to be players (Levine, 2012, p. 3). In such a multilingual social space, languages can no longer be thought of as simple on/off binary phenomena in which only one predetermined set of grammar, lexis, and pragmatics can be used at a time. Instead, the flexible, dynamic possibilities within linguistic diversity are acknowledged.

Although a significant part of the societal and governmental efforts to promote the learning of English is in aid of producing Japanese citizens capable of communicating in English-only situations, that particular goal is truly only relevant to an elite minority of the population (Seargeant, 2011). What should not be forgotten is that Japanese citizens, as their country grows evermore linguistically diverse (Kanno, 2007), will be encountering more and more bi/multilingual situations in which the language of interaction must be negotiated by all parties. This can require a tremendous amount of skill, as the speaker must take into account the possible linguistic abilities and preferences of all participants and the social or discoursal significance of a language choice (Auer, 2010; Blom & Gumperz, 1972). Depending on the participants and situation, a decision to conduct a conversation solely in one language may be perceived as impolite, alienating, or even offensive (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Conversely, skillful use of code-switching can help speakers carry out an array of interpersonal and discoursal aims. The classroom can be a place where students are shown and can learn when it is best to use English or Japanese and when and how to mix them. Cook (2002b) urged that teachers "develop the systematic use of the L1 in the classroom alongside the L2 as a reflection of the realities of the classroom situation, as an aid to learning and as a model for the world outside" (p. 332).

The monolingual-oriented status quo raises serious questions of inequality and practicality (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Rivers, 2010). In the current climate of a widespread maximal position, the new Courses of Study, although they do not advocate a strict English-only policy, may lead many to erroneous conclusions about what are effective teaching methods or even what the goals of teaching should be. That is, should teachers focus on preparing students for an imagined monolingual community or on facilitating a broader multicompetence? The current dictates, rather mildly worded as they are, are still directing attention towards the quantity of L2 spoken in class rather than the purposes or benefits of either L1 or L2 use. The focus towards maximizing L2 usage rather than encouraging discussion and creativity on how best and when to use either language reinforces the false monolingual native speaker paradigm that is inconsistent with the glo-

balized reality (Alptekin, 2002; Nao, 2011). In this paradigm, the authority and legitimacy of the nonnative speaker are diminished (Cook, 2002a) and the native speaker can be forced to occupy a reductive stereotype (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Mahoney, 2004; Nao, 2011). In this system, the JTE can never be a true authority; JTEs are held up against the native speaker compared to whom they will always be "deficient" even within their own classrooms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). Likewise, at the expense of valuable pedagogical and interpersonal tactics, the native speaker teachers may feel pressured to hide their knowledge of Japanese (Barker, 2003; Breckenridge & Erling, 2011) to maintain "facsimiles of a monolingual L2 environment" of dubious value (Levine, 2012, p. 3). This not only creates "an unequal linguistic divide" between native speaker teachers and JTEs (Rivers, 2010, p. 105), but furthermore robs students of the chance to experience the classroom as a space for developing code-switching norms and strategies more in line with their future communication needs and through which they can "see themselves, in real-world ways, as nascent bilinguals and legitimate peripheral participants" (Levine, 2012, p. 8). After all, if we take bilingualism instead of parallel monolingualisms as our objective, students "need to be presented with proper role models of L2 users to emulate" (Cook, 2002b, p. 336). For MEXT to accomplish their objectives to foster a "global perspective" and provide "opportunities to see how people actually use English" (MEXT, 2011, p. 6), a monolingual native speaker paradigm is hardly a step in that direction.

Conclusion

From interference, danger, and obstacle to ally, asset, and resource, the rhetoric surrounding the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom has undergone a remarkable reversal. Whether one focuses on the possibilities of L1 use through perspectives of cognitive acquisition, pedagogical efficiency, or larger personal or political functions, it is undeniable that the use of the students' first language demands deeper inquiry and consideration. Thus far, it appears Japan's educational institutions remain constrained by an unfounded devaluation of the mother tongue. To move away from unwarranted guilt and false prescribed roles impeding creative teaching, it is imperative to critically address the monolingual bias and "integrate into our pedagogy the reality of L1 use and orientation toward bilingual development" (Levine, 2012, p. 4).

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