

Sayonara to the Monolingual EFL Classroom?

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ABSTRACT

The long-running debate over the acceptance of the learner's L1 (first language) in the L2 (second language) classroom is particularly relevant in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings such as Japan (Weschler, 1997). The field of Second Language Acquisition has also seen a recent resurgence of interest in this topic (Bartlett, 2018; Kita, 2018); these studies among others will be discussed below. This paper will consider the views of learners and instructors as well as empirical, classroom-based research into relevant methods and strategies, including translation, code-switching and translanguaging. Factors such as the educational and cultural background of the instructor will also be discussed in relation to the pedagogical strategies employed by instructors. Research looking at a range of educational contexts, learner ages, and languages studied will be explored, in order to present as thorough a picture as possible of the most recent work being done in this area. The bulk of the research presented here points to the need for recognition that language learners are enhancing a single linguistic repertoire rather than attempting to emulate monolingual speakers of a language, and thus the importance of integrating the whole of a learner's linguistic resources into instructional contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Communicative Language Teaching made L1 usage taboo for a lot of language teachers. Many, however, recognize the benefits of using the learner's native language in the classroom. Harmer (2001) and Gebhard (2006) list some guidelines for using the learner's native language in the classroom (as cited in Brown & Lee, 2105). They discuss the importance of setting clear boundaries for when L1 use is acceptable, explaining to learners the necessity of following the guidelines, developing students' intrinsic motivation, and using realia in the classroom to help simulate a foreign language atmosphere.

This paper will address many of these and other factors of L1 use in the classroom. It will look at ways teachers can raise their students' awareness of how they are using the L1 in the classroom, how learners use translation when doing various types of activities, and the code-switching and translanguaging approaches that make use of the L1 in class.

In addition it will explore the influence that agency, culture and educational

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experience play in decision-making and the perceptions of teachers and students in a variety of educational settings.

The traditional monolingual model of language learning views language competencies as distinct and separate from one another. The multilingual model, on the other hand, views the learning of a new language as an integration into the holistic language system of a learner. This paper will therefore also discuss how this shift from monolingual to multilingual model may affect perceptions of the use of other languages within the classroom.

AMOUNT AND TYPE OF L1 USE IN THE CLASSROOM

Raising Learner Awareness of Beneficial Uses of the L1

A teacher of a first-year compulsory English discussion course at a Japanese university, Kita (2018) chose eight students majoring in psychology for participation in this action research, due to their excessive and often disruptive use of Japanese during class. The learners' overreliance on their L1 notwithstanding, they were motivated, energetic and punctual, and they scored well on quizzes. Based on these initial observations, Kita kept a teaching journal for all 14 of the lessons. She was interested in understanding why the learners used their L1, documenting her experiments with various approaches to increase L2 use, and gathering student reactions to these approaches. In addition, she recorded the lessons from week 4 onwards and, using these recordings, also engaged in peer-journaling with a colleague.

Kita (2018) found three consistent patterns in students' L1 use: lack of English proficiency, desire to build rapport, and lack of interest in engaging in the L2. Of these, she focused primarily on the latter and employed strategies aimed at encouraging greater L2 use. Initial strategies were aimed at raising learners' awareness of their L1 use by identifying alternatives for frequently used expressions and prompting learners to ask any questions of the teacher in the L2 if it was deemed within their ability level to do so. While they proved effective, these strategies required constant monitoring and produced only temporary improvements.

The next and ultimately more effective strategies involved engaging learners in discussions of the rationales for using the L2, simulations of communication with non-Japanese interlocutors, and goal-setting activities.

To address learner rationales for using the L2, Kita introduced simulated communication with non-Japanese speakers. One example involved an international company's board meeting, with members hailing from various countries, discussing which of the given candidates they should hire. Learners enjoyed imagining the given scenario, adopting the roles they were given, and pretending that they did not share an L1.

The goal-setting activities involved learners discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using the L1. They also discussed two typical patterns of L1 use in their classroom: the L1 used in order to better understand English (i.e. 'How do you say *yosokusuru* [to estimate] in English?') and the L1 used in lieu of an appropriate English equivalent '*sorena*' [That's it]). Judging the latter as undesirable, they then set goals to reduce this type of usage in their interactions. While this helped, there was no sense of recognizable achievement for the teacher or students. In subsequent lessons, therefore, students set short-term goals for themselves by specifying the number of times they could use the L1 during an activity and recording the results. This proved incredibly effective: all students met their goals for each activity they engaged in, with most students using no Japanese at all.

Overall, Kita (2018) found that learners became more aware of their L1 use, made self- and peer-corrections, used target phrases rather than their L1 equivalents, began initiating communication in English even when off-task or outside of class, and no longer asked questions in Japanese.

Use of Translation in Language Learning

Departing from their customary monolingual classroom policy, Juarez and Oxbrow (2008) experimented with the use of translation activities in an effort to increase metacognitive awareness and introduce a cognitive learning strategy. First-year undergraduate EFL students at a university in Gran Canaria, Spain, served as participants. The researchers implemented translation activities into their English I classes and administered a questionnaire to 25 of the participants at the conclusion of the study.

Target linguistic forms were chosen based on either differences or misleading similarities between Spanish and English (e.g. future forms and articles, respectively). Activities included translating the dictation of L1 sentences, writing translations of short texts from the L1 to the L2 or vice versa, and making comparisons between Spanish and English.

The results of the questionnaire were summarized in four categories. The first was learners' use of translation in language learning. As this was a strategy very frequently used by the learners, particularly in reading or listening to English songs, nearly all questioned (92%) believe that translation enhances their language learning efforts. A majority (64%) also expressed appreciation at receiving translations from teachers for vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Second, learners were asked for their opinions about the use of the L1 in the learning context. While appreciative of grammatical explanations provided in the L1, 40% of the learners strongly disagreed with receiving instructions in their L1.

Third, when asked about the benefits of making comparisons between the L1 and L2, learners tended to disagree or have no opinion on the benefits of contrastive analysis in helping comprehension or avoiding transfer errors, perhaps due to a lack of understanding of the rationale behind these activities (Juarez & Oxbrow, 2008).

Lastly, with regard to the use of translation as a learning strategy, learners expressed a strong preference for English-only lessons (72%). However, only 40% of learners said that they never use their L1 in learning contexts and nearly half (48%) admitted frequent L1 usage when working in pairs or groups. In addition, when speaking in English, 28% reported that they often translate directly from Spanish to English, and when writing in English, the number is even higher at 40%.

Code-switching

Code-switching refers to the use of two or more languages within a conversation or other communication. Rahayu and Margana (2018) looked at the effect of code-switching on oral proficiency. A total of 70 seventh-grade junior high school students at the A1-A2 CEFR level took part in the study, half of them in the code-switching class (CBI) and half in the L2-based class (L2BI).

The assessments used for the pre- and post-test were two types of oral output: a conversation between learners exchanging personal information and a monologue on a given topic. Both assessments were rated on grammar and vocabulary as well as pronunciation, and the conversation was additionally rated for interactive communication. Although there is no

mention of the length of the study or the specific pedagogical methods employed, the difference between the pre- and post-test speaking assessments is significantly in favor of L2BI. Additional observations of the L2BI group noted by the researchers were a greater willingness to communicate in the L2, higher levels of positivity and attention in class, more accurate pronunciation, a wider variety of vocabulary, and greater effort to understand the teacher's utterances. The CBI students on the other hand were seen to rely heavily on their L1.

Translanguaging

The concept of translanguaging differs from code-switching in that rather than toggling between languages, bilinguals select needed features from a single linguistic repertoire, thus shifting pedagogic focus from monolingualism to bilingualism as the norm (Garcia, 2009).

Translanguaging vs. English-medium

Bartlett (2018) began his research by conducting a survey asking learners about their preferences with regard to L1 use in their EFL classroom. The survey results revealed that students preferred the admission of the L1 into the classroom. Based on these results, Bartlett investigated the effect of translanguaging techniques on student motivation and acquisition.

The group of learners were second-year students at a Japanese university enrolled in a compulsory 14-week class. The course was principally focused on reading but also included group discussions on strategies for solving the problems presented in the reading passages and then sharing those solutions with the class. They also engaged in oral interactive book reports presented in small groups.

Participants were placed in one of four groups. Groups 1 and 2 were Translanguaging Groups (TLG), representing the experimental condition. Basic concepts were presented in English with new information presented in Japanese. The L1 was permitted during group discussions and conversations with the teacher, but students were expected and reminded to use English if it had been covered in a previous lesson. Groups 3 and 4 were English Medium Groups (EMG), representing the traditional system used within the university in which English is used at least 90% of the time. Most of the content, including grammar, and any comprehension checks were conducted in English, although there was a quick summary of everything in Japanese at the end of class. At that time students were permitted to ask questions in Japanese, but teacher responses were generally given in English.

Mid-term and final examinations asked students to re-read the passages covered in class, answering new comprehension questions and responding to the text in a new format, by perhaps providing opinions on a given solution or outlining why the problem exists. Test results showed that the TLG groups scored higher, retained more information and were better able to provide personal opinions. The two TLG groups' scores also increased by 5% and 6% from the midterm to final, whereas the EMG groups' scores actually fell by 1% and 2%. The TLG groups also showed more retention for spelling and grammar than the EMG groups.

Presentation scores showed similar trends, with averages 7-9% higher in the TLG groups. More specifically, the TLG students used higher levels of English, covered more content and met more of the requirements.

In addition, a survey conducted at the end of the term revealed higher levels of motivation and learning improvement in the TLG groups. They remarked that they had had better opportunities for interacting with the teacher which had helped them to understand the

material in a more meaningful way.

Proactive and Reactive Translanguaging

Moore (2018) engaged with learners directly on the issues of bilingualism, native-speaker norms and monolingual practices within the classroom. Advanced-level (C1 in the CEFR) third-year undergraduate students majoring in translating/interpreting at a Spanish university served as participants for the study. Having established through a class discussion that many students still held onto the belief that bilingualism refers to a native-like command of two languages, Moore set out to challenge their views on the topic and introduce them to the concept of translanguaging.

Proactive translanguaging techniques included a collaborative written retelling of the opening scene of an Argentinian film and translation of a text containing false cognates in order to explore issues of L1 transfer. An example of a reactive translanguaging technique entailed allowing the students to converse in whatever language they chose while they worked in groups on a leaflet design project. Written interaction via an exchange of letters between individual learners and the instructor was also a component of this course. The instructor initiated the correspondence through letters containing several prompts that learners could choose from, one of which was the topic of multilingualism. Seventy-eight out of 114 chose to respond to this prompt either explicitly, through direct discussion, or implicitly, by translanguaging in their replies.

The letters revealed students' surprise at the idea that what they do all the time has a name – translanguaging – and is a natural process that multilinguals engage in. They also registered surprise at not being asked to speak only in English during group work. Students commented as well on the awkwardness of using an L2 with peers who share their L1.

FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHER CHOICE OF LANGUAGE

Teacher Agency

Bouchard (2016), interested in the effect that Japanese governmental policy has on teacher agency, conducted research using linguistic ethnographic methods. This included recording over 30 hours of classes as well as conducting interviews and distributing a survey to the four junior and senior high school teachers who participated in the study.

Four main themes emerged from the data collected. The first was teachers' overall use of the L1 and L2. Bouchard (2016) found that more than half of each lesson consisted of teacher talk, that Japanese was the dominant language used particularly for grammatical explanations, and that there was little feedback given to students in either language. One notable exception was Ms. Tanaka who taught in a private school and had the highest amount of teacher talk time but also spoke in English the most, as much as four times that of the other teachers.

The second theme was related to what Bouchard labelled intersentential and intrasentential code-switching. The former was generally used for instructions, given in the L1 and then paraphrased in the L2, or vice versa. The latter was more common, seen in the form of a Japanese sentence with English words or phrases embedded. Tag code-switching was also found, predominantly in Ms. Tanaka's data, and included such utterances as *hai* [yes], *ja* [well] and *ne* [right].

The third theme that emerged was the use of English with simultaneous translations. The grammar translation method was the preferred method at all four schools. Immediate

translations from the L2 to the L1 meant that students did not need to do this work themselves and thus many were passive participants in class. Many of the teachers' L2 utterances, apart from Ms. Tanaka's, were ungrammatical as well, which may be why they provided translations (Bouchard, 2016).

The final theme was the use of English without simultaneous translations. Two of the four teachers began class in English, often by giving instructions and conducting choral exercises, which seemed to motivate learners and encourage them to actively participate. Ms. Tanaka, in particular, typically opened class with a Q&A session conducted in English, to which students reacted positively and enthusiastically. Across all classes, during instances of L1-only instructions, students were typically quite passive and unresponsive. However, students were more focused and energetic when instructions were given in the L2. Although the L2-only moments in the data were generally short and formulaic, these types of expressions can help learners to become more familiar with common discourse patterns and more cognizant of the fact that L2 communication is taking place (Bouchard, 2016).

With regard to the government's policy of a monolingual classroom, the teachers interviewed remarked that this push is unnecessary for effective education and often inappropriate when complex ideas need to be conveyed. They also agreed that learners' L2 output in class was inauthentic and forced and therefore did not constitute genuine communication. In addition, they expressed concern over textbooks and implementation of the government's initiatives, for which there was little concrete guidance, especially as they saw the main goal of their lessons as preparing students for entrance examinations rather than communicative competence. Overall, it seems that policy has less effect on teacher agency than teachers' own beliefs and perceptions about quality education (Bouchard, 2016).

Impact of Culture and Education

Turnbull (2018) examined the cultural and educational factors that may influence a teacher's pedagogical choices with regard to language of instruction. Twelve FL (foreign language) teachers at a New Zealand university took part in the study. Even within this small number, there was considerable variety with regard to level taught (beginner to advanced), instructor's L1 (a total of nine different languages), language taught (Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish), country of instructor's English studies (fourteen different countries including both EFL and ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts), and amount of teaching experience (from 3 to 37 years). In addition, a third of the participating teachers were not native speakers of the language they were hired to teach.

Turnbull (2018) used in-class observations followed by semi-structured interviews. Observations were recorded in order to determine the amount of time the teacher spent using each language. During the interviews, teachers were asked the reasons for their choice of language in class, the advantages or disadvantages they perceive in these choices and information about their own previous experiences of learning another language.

Combining the data for all teachers, the results showed that the L2 was used the most (54.6%), the L1 slightly less (34.2%), and a code-switching mix of the two the least (11.2%). While more of the learners' L1 was used in lower-level classes, decreasing as their level increased, there were some notable exceptions. Beginner German, for example, saw only 10.1% L1 usage, compared with 46.2-85.4% in other beginner classes. At the other end of the spectrum, the advanced Japanese teachers used only 1.2% of the L2 in class, whereas advanced classes of other languages were at least 94.6%.

Comparisons based on language reveal that European language classes featured more of the L2 and less of the L1, and vice versa for the Asian languages. Interview responses provided insight into these findings, with the teachers of Chinese and Japanese

citing advantages of using the L1 to translate, explain grammar, and aid comprehension. Teachers of French, German and Spanish, on the other hand, commented on the importance of maximizing exposure to the L2 during class. The French and Spanish teachers did, however, acknowledge the affective rapport-building benefits of allowing L1 use in the classroom.

It was also found that the aspects of an FL class that the teachers felt to be important coincided with their own L2 learning experiences. The French, German and Spanish teachers placed great importance on communicative competence and had learned English through communicative methods. In contrast, the Chinese and Japanese teachers valued a focus on grammar and explicit instruction and had learned English through traditional approaches such as grammar-translation. Of particular interest is the fact that four of the five Asian language teachers had at some point studied abroad in ESL environments where communicative methods are widely used, yet this had little effect on their teaching practices. Turnbull (2018) therefore concludes that the culture and learning environment in which a learner begins the language acquisition process has a greater effect on their perception of effective pedagogical practices.

PERCEPTIONS

Turning now to look more directly at the views and attitudes of L1 use in language learning contexts by both learners and instructors, three studies will be examined. They represent a variety of learning contexts, languages and age levels.

Students in a Private Language School

Neokleous (2017) interviewed a total of 57 upper-intermediate EFL students from four different language schools in Cyprus to ascertain their views on L1 use in the classroom.

Most of the students (84.2%) highlighted the benefits of using the L1 to enhance understanding and ensure comprehension, especially for grammatical explanations, as it enabled them to make connections between their L1 and L2, helping them to avoid problems associated with transfer. Confidence and increased ability to participate in class were also cited by 75.4% of learners. They reported feeling more secure in providing answers or asking questions if allowed to use their L1 to do so.

Lastly, many learners (54.4%) felt the L1 was instrumental in creating a warm and supportive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. Learners commented that not only does sharing the L1 help to instill a sense of belonging amongst students but also between students and instructors. Although not an item on the questionnaire, 68.4% of learners commented on their preference for a teacher with whom they could communicate in their L1.

Students and Teachers in a High School

Findings reported in a survey conducted of three teachers and 91 students at an Indonesian high school (Hasrina, Aziz & Fitriani, 2018) show overwhelming support for use of the L1 in the English classroom. Students were in favor (i.e. agree or strongly agree) of the teacher using the L1 for instructions (90%), feedback (97%), comprehension checks of material from the previous lesson (100%), explaining new vocabulary (99%), and explaining grammar (100%).

The three teachers gave similar yet conflicting responses. All of them either agreed or strongly agreed that it was beneficial for students to speak in their L1 with other

classmates or with the teacher but also felt that students should use the L2 all the time regardless of their level and felt that L1 use can hinder L2 acquisition. Overall, students and teachers stressed the importance of allowing the L1 into the classroom for instructions, introducing new information and creating a positive atmosphere through humor.

Teachers at a University

A questionnaire was administered to the English teaching faculty at a Japanese university to determine their views and attitudes towards the use of the L1 in their English Discussion classes which have a '100% English' policy (Wilson, 2016). The majority of the instructors in the department are non-Japanese and male, however the twenty-four who chose to participate are of mixed gender and represent a variety of nationalities.

Results show that the departmental monolingual policy is largely followed by instructors but there exists quite a range of attitudes about the appropriate use of the L1 within the discussion classes and within language learning environments in general. For example, the majority (91.67%) believed that some use of the L1 by instructors should be permissible and that instructor use of the L1 can positively impact L2 development (70.84%). Moreover, two-thirds (66.67%) felt that instructors should be free to use the L1 at their own discretion.

Conflicting views of the participating instructors were most evident, however, when asked about student use of the L1. A fairly equal number of instructors felt that student L1 use is beneficial (29.17%) as those who felt it is not beneficial (20.83%). Similarly, there were an equal number of instructors who agreed (41.67%) that student L1 use should never be encouraged as who disagreed (41.67%). The majority (91.67%), however, felt that student L1 use should be kept to a minimum in communicative classroom settings. While most felt that student L1 use can interfere with L2 learning (54.16%), many felt it was acceptable if used between activities (45.83%), if it does not interfere with an activity (41.67%), if used to explain something to lower level students (87.5%), or if used as part of lower level classes (58.33%).

SYNTHESIS

How Much and In What Way the L1 Should be Used

One study, although lacking methodological details, claimed an L2-based course was more beneficial for speaking proficiency than a code-switching one (Rahayu & Margana, 2018). The remainder of the studies reviewed here, however, reveal overwhelming support for some amount of L1 use in the language learning classroom. Raising learner awareness of L1-usage patterns (Kita, 2018) and learner use of translation for a variety of activities (Juarez & Oxbrowe, 2008) proved particularly beneficial.

Translanguaging was explored in two of the studies (Bartlett, 2018; Moore, 2018) as an alternative to the monolingual classroom and, more generally, the monolingual bias in perceptions of L2 competency. Both reported positive results such as higher scores and better retention as well as increased motivation and sense of learning (Bartlett, 2018), and greater awareness of the facets of multilingualism and the role that translanguaging plays in the communication of those who speak more than one language (Moore, 2018).

Bartlett (2018), therefore, proposes introducing students to translanguaging methods early in their language learning career, in junior or senior high school, instead of waiting until university.

Factors Affecting Pedagogical Choices

Interestingly, Turnbull (2018) found that it was the learning context in which teachers began learning their L2 that most influenced their pedagogical choices. Teachers whose initial experience of L2 learning involved traditional methods such as grammar translation were more likely to value explicit instruction and more extensive use of the L1 in lessons.

On the other hand, those who had learnt their L2 in a more communicative context valued higher exposure to the L2 and more opportunities for communication, which were in turn reflected in their lessons. These tendencies seemed to hold even if traditionally instructed teachers experienced more communicative methods in subsequent L2 learning.

Learner and Instructor Perceptions

Learners, particularly younger learners, held the strongest views, with the majority in favor of their teacher using the L1 and being able to use it themselves (e.g. Hasrina et al., 2018), even specifying their desire to have a teacher with whom they share an L1 (Neokleous, 2017). Creating a friendly atmosphere, developing rapport and feeling a sense of belonging were also cited as benefits for allowing L1 use in the classroom (Neokleous, 2017).

There was some disagreement about learner views across the studies with regard to instructions, however. While the university students in Juarez and Oxbrow's (2008) study did not want to get instructions in English, 90% of Hasrina et al.'s (2018) high school student participants wanted them. Bouchard (2016) also observed that junior and senior high school students became passive when instructions were given in the L1.

The inauthenticity of learners using the L2 amongst peers with whom they share an L1 was also remarked upon by learners (Moore, 2018) and teachers (Bouchard, 2016) alike. Kita (2018) addressed this issue successfully, however, by using role-plays with non-Japanese speakers to help learners understand the rationale for communicative competence. Goal-setting and discussion of rationales for L2 proficiency also proved effective in helping learners, who had previously shown a disruptive overuse of the L1, successfully complete a series of activities entirely in the L2 with little teacher intervention (Kita, 2018).

Instructors across the studies reviewed here held a range of views with respect to L1 use. Proponents of L2-based instruction cited greater willingness to communicate, more attention and greater effort to comprehend oral input (Rahayu & Margana, 2018). At the other end of the spectrum were Turnbull's (2018) teachers of advanced Japanese whose lessons were conducted almost exclusively in the L1 (98.8%), citing the complexity of grammatical and linguistic concepts. Most, however, held views somewhere between the extremes, advocating L1 use for situations such as low-level classes or breaks between activities (Wilson, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Rather than view the decision to use the L1 in FL classrooms as binary, it seems important to consider a range of factors, including student needs and preferences (Hasrina et al., 2018), and teacher inclinations based on culture and education (Turnbull, 2018). It is also important to consider both the learner's voice by asking for their opinions (Neokleous, 2017) and the voice of colleagues (Wilson, 2016).

Beyond soliciting opinions, it is valuable to experiment in order to find a solution

that will work best for instructor and learner alike. Some useful strategies for accomplishing this include keeping a teaching journal and recording lessons to capture actual behavior (Kita, 2018), using translanguaging techniques to allow students to use their entire linguistic repertoire (Bartlett, 2018), and engaging students in discussions of what it means to be multilingual (Moore, 2018).

The question of how to integrate the use of a learner's mother tongue in the language learning classroom involves a range of factors which vary by context. It seems clear from the evidence reported here, however, that integration is beneficial for learners, as they are not merely adding another language to their curriculum vitae but enhancing and adapting a single linguistic repertoire.

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