

# University student opinions on native English teachers using their L1 in the classroom.

外国人英語教師の授業内学習者母語（日本語）使用に対する学習者の意識

Brent Cotsworth and Timothy Medlock

近年、外国語教育の分野では外国語（L2）のみの指導より学習者の母語（L1）を効果的に用いた指導の方が目標言語習得を促進するという見解を示す研究も増えてきている。そこで、本研究では、英語母語話者教師が授業中に学習者の母語である日本語を使用することに対する学習者の意識を調査した。調査参加者は一年次必修科目として外国人英語教師による授業を自ら選択した日本人大学生英語学習者357名である。データ収集には16項目から成る質問紙を用いた。

質問紙調査の結果、学習者は英語使用機会を求めて外国人英語教師による英語科目を選択した一方で、大多数が外国人英語教師が授業中に日本語を使用することを、指導が明確に提示されるという理由や、教師と学習者間の信頼関係が高まるという理由で高く評価していることが明らかになった。本稿は、質問紙調査の結果をもとに、外国人英語教師の授業内日本語使用が受けられる理由を中学・高校での英語教育に関連して考察し、さらに日本人学生により有益な英語と日本語の使用について考察する。

## Introduction

This pilot action research study was inspired by a desire to ascertain just how much or how little Japanese should be used in the English oral communication classroom. In our own experiences as students of foreign languages in high school, the teacher often used English for teaching vocabulary, comprehension purposes and to effectively clarify instruction as no one would have understood otherwise. We can recall this reduced anxiety in the class as we were already overwhelmed with learning a new language. This experience as a learner of a foreign language and now as a teacher of a foreign language is a motivating factor in trying to determine just how much student L1 use is appropriate and in the best interests of student learning. There are a wide range of views on how much of the learners' L1 should be used in the classroom. Some are totally against the use of the students' L1 while others believe it is an invaluable pedagogical tool for refining comprehension and reducing learners' anxiety, and a way to build a rapport with students by communicating with them in their native language. Some even

believe that knowledge of the students' L1 is necessary for effective teaching.

Therefore, in the attempt to clarify just how much or how little Japanese should be used in English oral communication classes, we decided to ask our students what they thought in order to gain some insight into what their opinions are about the native English teacher speaking in the learners' L1, in this case Japanese.

## Literature review

The traditional preference in ESL and EFL is for a monolingual approach to language teaching, which suggests that the only medium of communication should be in the target language (L2). This implies the prohibition of the native language (L1) would maximize the effectiveness of learning the target language. It also implies that translating into or utilizing the students' L1 is detrimental to learning the target language (see Krashen, 1981). Supporters of this approach argue that L1 should be used minimally in learning a foreign language as the path of foreign language learning is very similar to acquiring a mother tongue or L1.

This has been challenged in recent years by scholars who believe that sensible use of the learners' L1 can actually be beneficial to many learners and be more effective in language instruction than the monolingual approach. Dörnyei and Kormos (1998) found that L1 is used by L2 learners as a communication strategy to make up for deficiencies in the L2.

Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) also argue in favor of using L1 stating that it provides students with “additional cognitive support that allows them to analyze language and work at a higher level than would be possible were they restricted to sole use of their L2” (p.670, cited in Stephens, 2006). Cook (2001), who claims that the L2 meanings do not exist separately from the L1 meanings in the learner's mind, states “Treating the L1 as a classroom resource opens up several ways to use it, such as for teachers to convey meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class and for students to use as part of their collaborative learning and individual strategy use. The first language can be a useful element in creating authentic L2 users rather than something to be shunned at all costs” (p.402).

Auerbach (1993) argues that teachers are able to use students' L1 as a bridge between the L1 and the L2, providing a more comprehensible and comfortable learning platform. She states “Starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English” (p.19). Teaching methods promoting the use of L1 in ESL and EFL include the New Concurrent Method, Community Language Learning, and Dodson's Bilingual Method.

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Quantitative studies addressing the opinions of students concerning the use of their L1 in the EFL classroom include Critchley's (1999) study of 160 Japanese students. In his study, the results of the questionnaire showed that respondents wanted an average of 20% of teacher talk in Japanese such as explaining important information by the native English speaking teacher. Tang's (2002) study of 100 Chinese English language students showed that limited and judicious use of the students' mother tongue by the teacher (in the English classroom) does not reduce student exposure to English, but rather can assist in the teaching and learning processes. Stephens' (2006) study of 167 Japanese students suggested that minimal use of Japanese by English-speaking language teachers is in the best interests of the students.

This current study differs from the above as one of our aims was to find out the views of students who study English as a compulsory unit and of those with varying linguistic ability, as opposed to the linguistically competent students of the above studies who are typically interested in English. Another aim of this study was to have a larger sample size than previous studies in order to achieve more reliable data. Therefore, 357 students, all non-English majors from varying faculties taking compulsory English communication classes, participated in this current study.

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire containing 16 multiple choice questions (see appendix) was administered to 357 students studying in English oral communication classes at a university in western Japan on the final day of the academic year in January 2012. The faculties involved in the study were engineering (104 students), economics (49), policy studies (47), commerce (47), sociology (64), literature (23), and law (23). As previously stated, there were no English language majors at all in this sample. The questions were written in both Japanese and English. The students were given 15 minutes, though most completed it in less than 5 minutes. Rather than write their answers freely, they were asked to choose the most applicable answer of several provided for each question to save students time pondering answers and to ease the compiling of the data.

In constructing the questionnaire, rather than referring to previous studies, the questions themselves were based directly on specific personal concerns that had grown throughout the year of teaching in our classrooms. We had observed a potential tension between the students' perceived desire and their sense of propriety: namely that while the course was officially to be conducted in English and the students had enrolled with this in mind, nevertheless there

seemed to be a strong desire among many of the students to have important information conveyed in their own tongue and that adhering rigidly to the L2 frequently frustrated students' comprehension or performance of tasks. Consequently, the questions were intended to stimulate the students to reflect on their sense of comfort and also their sense of propriety about the use of their own language in the classroom particularly by the foreign teacher.

## **Results and discussion**

First, the questionnaire results indicated that there was indeed a tension between the students' desire to learn English in English and their concerns in understanding class content and procedure. As previously stated, all students participating in this study were non-English majors of varying levels of English competency, yet a strong proportion of the students rated themselves confidently (see appendix), with as many as 36% of them rating their English listening and comprehension as high as 2 on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 4 (poor), though just under half (49%) rated the same skill as 3. Moreover, the students surveyed had chosen the course knowing it was taught only by Native English language teachers and, as their replies to question 12 revealed, as many as 85% of them chose to be enrolled in the course because they would be taught in English. Yet, despite the proportion of students rating themselves confidently and despite their stated motivation to study English in English, a strong majority (70%) indicated that they felt more comfortable conversing in Japanese as the results of question 2 revealed. Question 2 asked if students felt more comfortable conversing with their native English language teacher in their L2 or L1. The fact that so many students stated a preference for their L1 despite having chosen to be taught in English highlights an apparent contrast between student desire for a comfortable communicative environment with a desire for the challenge of direct English language communication.

This may be a reflection on the teaching methodology that students are exposed to in secondary education where the native Japanese teacher of English usually instructs in L1. One could argue that this reliance on L1 creates dependence, and does not provide sufficient opportunity to encounter ambiguity and the use of guessing strategies, which are part of successful language learning (Rubin, 1975, cited in Stephens 2006).

The students' apparent valuing of clear communication with the teacher in their L1 over the aforementioned learner independence was further confirmed by the answers to other questions. When asked in question 5, if speaking to native English language teachers in students' L1 helps build a rapport with them, 90% said yes (50% strongly agreed and 40% agreed). This is in line

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with the views of scholars who believe the use of students' L1 creates a relaxed atmosphere conducive to learning L2 (see Auerbach, 1993). This is further supported by the results of question 13 in which 70% of the students agreed that they are satisfied with talking to the native English language teacher in their L1 despite them wanting to challenge themselves by speaking in the L2. Apart from mere rapport purposes, 93% of all students indicated that important information should be explained in both L1 and L2. This could also be another result of high school conditioning as Burden (2001, cited in Stephens 2006) argues that preparation for English exams is achieved more efficiently in the L1, so students are accustomed to this L1 support. Accordingly, 75% also indicated that when the native English teacher first speaks English and then repeats the same phrase in Japanese, they feel relieved as it aids their comprehension, with an additional 14% approving of the strategy as an unfortunate necessity. Only 1% disapproved.

When asked about seeking clarification when students do not understand what the teacher has said, 59% indicated that they ask a fellow student while 37% indicated that they ask their native English language teacher. Student willingness to approach their teacher was higher than anticipated indicating active interaction between the teacher and students.

There are many factors to consider when it comes to the question of how much L1 should be used by the native English teacher including students' level of L2 competency, motivation and class size. Though learning an L2 resembles learning a mother tongue in some regards (see Krashen, 1981), the context of L2 acquisition is so far removed from that of the mother tongue, with formal interaction in large classrooms rather than close interaction with one or a small group of individuals, that effective bridges are necessary to compensate for the lack of direct, personalized interaction common to most classrooms. Selective use of L1 in the classroom can be critical as such a bridge at early stages of language instruction and then deliberately reduced as learners progress to higher levels. Some particular areas of use of the students' L1 may include work with vocabulary, where more L1 might be needed to establish meaning and provide useful comparisons with similar or different words in either language to make a particular nuance clear. For unmotivated learners, moreover, greater use of L1 in setting up tasks can be of help in ensuring students' comprehension of what is expected of them as well as reducing excuses for incomprehension. Communication of important information regarding test contents, syllabus contents or administrative matters in the student L1 can also relieve tension and provide a context for focused use of L2 in communication tasks. Building a rapport with the students in their L1 can also be helpful by personalizing the teacher / student relationship and so increasing the likelihood of co-operation. These recom-

mentations are in line with Cook, (2001) as previously mentioned in the literature review, as using the L1 as a tool to explain meaning, grammar, class organization, and for students' own collaborative learning.

One must take into account the fact that in Japan students have very little chance to use English in everyday life as English is not a second language in Japan but a foreign language. Therefore, students have little need to use English apart from in classes at school or university where daily opportunities to practice are generally few. English conversation schools do exist to cater to students wanting to learn English but at a financial cost. Due to these factors, the use of the students' L1 by the native English teacher should be kept to a minimum in order to maximize student English exposure. The smaller the class, the less reliance should be placed on L1. Also, the simpler the task, the less L1 should be used by the teacher. Keeping the best interests of the students in mind, it is recommended that the native language teacher does not over-exploit the use of Japanese in class but use it when necessary and sparingly. Students using their L1 to learn English is not only pedagogically sound but may be encouraged as part of collaborative learning and individual strategy use (see Cook, Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

While the results of this pilot research study were insightful and showed a surprisingly positive view by students on the use of their L1 by the native English teacher, there are shortcomings of this study that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the structure of the questionnaire could be considered a weakness from a research perspective as it is quite random in nature and does not follow any methodological articles. The rationale for this was that since this is a pilot research study, the main aim was to gauge what the students were thinking and use the results as a platform for a more comprehensive questionnaire in a future study. Another factor to take into consideration is that the engineering department students comprise almost 30% of the sample population which could influence the outcome of the results.

Clearly, students value the native English teacher using student L1 in order to build student rapport and as a teaching tool for comprehension and instruction. As mentioned in the discussion, this could be influenced by their experiences of L1 use in secondary education. This must be considered when deciding just how much of the students' L1 should be used by the native English teacher in class. Incorporating as much L2 into the class as possible and having a greater focus on the skill, as opposed to the knowledge of language, is recommended. One

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could argue it is more important to practice the skill of communication (including listening, reading, writing and speaking activities) rather than teach complex grammar and vocabulary students have little chance of using.

Further investigation into the positive and negative influences on students being taught an L2 in their L1 in secondary education should be explored and could provide a springboard for further research into this very interesting topic of how much L1 should be used when teaching an L2.

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**Appendix**

**Language questionnaire (results listed as percentages under each question)**

Please choose the most appropriate answer for each question.

どうかこの調査への、みなさんのご協力をお願いします。

- 1 : あなたの英語のリスニング力と理解力を、1 から 4 の間で自己評価してみてください ( 1 = 優秀、4 = 劣)

(How would you rate your English listening and comprehension from 1 to 4 (1=excellent, 4= poor).)

Question 1	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	4%	36%	49%	11%

- 2 : あなたは外国人教師に対して、どちらの言語の方が話しやすいですか。

(Which do you feel more comfortable speaking to your native English teacher in?)

- 1) 日本語      1)Japanese  
2) 英語      2)English

Question 2	Ans. 1	Ans. 2
Total	70%	30%

- 3 : あなたのコミュニケーションの教師はどれくらいの割合で日本語を話しましたか。この割合についてあなたはどのように思いますか。次の中から選んでください。

(How much Japanese does your native English language teacher use in class? Please choose from the following.)

- 1) 多すぎると思う                                      1) In my opinion, too much  
2) 少なすぎると思う                                    2) In my opinion, a little too much  
3) ちょうどよいと思う                                   3) In my opinion, just right  
4) あまり十分とはいえないと思う                4) In my opinion, not quite enough  
5) 全く足りないと思う。                                5) In my opinion, not enough by far.

Question 3	Ans. 1	Ans.2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	10%	7%	81%	2%	0%

- 4 : 教師はどのようなときにあなたに日本語で話しましたか。

(When does your teacher speak to you in Japanese?)

- 1) 全員に向かって何かを初めて説明するとき      1) Explaining something to the whole class the first time  
2) 全員に向かって何かを初めて英語で説明した後、それをくりかえすとき      2) Repeating something in Japanese after explaining it first in English.  
3) 何かを理解できない人に、個別に説明するとき      3) To explain something to an individual because they don't understand  
4) 授業中のおしゃべりのとき                                      4) To chat during class  
5) 授業前、あるいは授業後のおしゃべりのとき      5) To chat before or after class



Question 4	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	20%	57%	21%	2%	0%

5 : 外国人教師があなたの母国語（日本語）で意思の疎通をはかることは、あなたとのよい関係を築くことにつながるとお考えですか。

(Do you think the foreign teacher communicating to you in your native language (Japanese) helps build a rapport with you?)

- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1) とてもそう思う    | 1) Strongly agree     |
| 2) 少しそう思う     | 2) Agree a little     |
| 3) あまりそうは思わない | 3) Don't really agree |
| 4) 全くそうは思わない  | 4) Strongly disagree  |

Question 5	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	50%	40%	9%	1%

6 : 外国人教師が重要な事柄（例えば、宿題、締切、授業中の課題について等）について説明する場合、次のうちどのような方法をとるのがよいとお考えですか。

(Do you think the foreign teacher explaining important information to you (for example, homework, deadlines, how to do a task in class) should be communicated in):

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1) 英語と日本語両方で説明する                     | 1) Both English and Japanese                              |
| 2) 英語だけで説明する                         | 2) English only   |
| 3) 日本語だけで説明する                        | 3) Japanese   |
| 4) まず英語で、その後、分からない学生がいればもう一度日本語で説明する | 4) English first and if I don't understand, then Japanese |

Question 6	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	56%	3.5%	3.5%	37%

7 : 教師が、まず最初に英語で何かを話し、そのあと同じことを日本語で言い直した場合、あなたはどのように感じますか。

(When your teacher speaks to you first in English and then says the same thing in Japanese, how do you feel?)

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1) 教師の言ったことが理解できるので、安心する | 1) Relieved. I understand what the teacher is saying now. |
| 2) 少し残念だけど、言い直してもらうのは必要  | 2) It is a bit of a shame, but necessary.                 |
| 3) なんとも思わない              | 3) Don't care.  |
| 4) 不適切だ                  | 4) It is inappropriate.                                   |

Question 7	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	75%	14%	10%	1%

8：外国人教師が英語で話したことが分からない場合、あなたはどのような方法で理解しようと試みますか。

(When your native English teacher speaks in English and you don't understand, how do you seek clarification?)

- |                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1) 理解しようとは試みない                 | 1) I don't seek clarification at all            |
| 2) 教師に、言ったことをもう一度繰り返してもらおうよう頼む | 2) I ask the teacher to repeat what he/she said |
| 3) 友達に尋ねる                      | 3) I ask a fellow student                       |
| 4) その他                         | 4) Other.                                       |

Question 8	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	2%	37%	59%	2%

9：あなたは、教師にもっと英語で話してもらいたいと思いますか。

(Do you wish your teacher spoke to you more in English only?)

- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1) とてもそう思う    | 1) Strongly agree     |
| 2) 少しだけそう思う   | 2) Agree a little     |
| 3) どちらでもよい    | 3) Don't care         |
| 4) あまりそうは思わない | 4) Don't really agree |
| 5) 全くそうは思わない  | 5) Strongly disagree  |

Question 9	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	16%	32%	40%	11.5%	0.5%

10：教師が何かを英語で話して、それを日本語に訳さなかったとき、それが理解できなかつたらあなたはどう感じますか。

(When your teacher speaks to you in English and doesn't translate into Japanese and you don't understand, how do you feel?)

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1) 理解できるまで何度でも英語で説明してほしい | 1) I want him/her to say it again in English until I understand. |
| 2) 日本語で言い直してほしい          | 2) I want him/her to say it in Japanese                          |
| 3) どうでもよい                | 3) I don't care.   |
| 4) しかたがないと思う             | 4) Can't be helped   |
| 5) その他……                 | 5) Other.....  |

Question 10	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	26%	59%	6.5%	6.5%	2%

11：学期途中で、教師の日本語はだんだん増えていきましたか。

(Did your teacher speak more Japanese as the year progressed?)

- |           |              |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1) 少し増えた  | 1) A bit     |
| 2) かなり増えた | 2) A lot     |
| 3) 変わらない  | 3) No change |

- 4) 日本語の量は減った                      4) Less was spoken

Question 11	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	10%	2%	86%	2%

12: あなたがコミュニケーションコースの受講を決めたとき、外国人教師から英語で学べるということが動機になりましたか。

(When you enrolled for this Communication Course)

Was being taught in English by a foreign teacher a motivation to enroll in this course?

- 1) 全くそのとおりである                      1) Strongly yes  
 2) 少しそう思う                                  2) A bit  
 3) あまりそうではない                          3) Not really  
 4) 全くそうではない                              4) Not at all

Question 12	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	41%	44%	12%	3%

13: 理想としては難しいことに挑戦したいが、教師とは容易にコミュニケーションをとりたいというのが現実なので、教師と日本語で話すことに満足している。

(In theory I want a challenge, but in reality I want good communication with my teacher, so I am satisfied with talking with him/her in Japanese.)

- 1) とてもそう思う                              1) Strongly agree  
 2) 少しそう思う                                  2) Agree a little  
 3) あまりそうは思わない                      3) Don't really agree  
 4) 全くそうは思わない                          4) Strongly disagree

Question 13	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	25%	45%	25%	5%

14: 外国人教師が授業のほぼ半分を日本語でおこなったとしたら、それは英語教師としての妥当性をかなり減ずることになるとお考えですか。

(If your foreign teacher speaks to you in Japanese about half the time, do you feel the validity of the teacher as an English teacher is significantly lessened?)

- 1) とてもそう思う                              1) Strongly agree  
 2) 少しそう思う                                  2) Agree a little  
 3) あまりそうは思わない                      3) Don't really agree  
 4) 全くそうは思わない                          4) Strongly disagree  
 5) 学生の理解度によって変わるので、そうともいいきれない                      5) It depends on whether I understand or not

Question 14	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	23%	40%	26%	3%	8%

15：外国人教師が授業の半分以上を日本語でおこなった場合、それは英語教師としての妥当性を大きく減ずることになると思いますか。

(If your foreign teacher speaks to you in Japanese more than half the time, do you feel the validity of the teacher as an English teacher is significantly lessened?)

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1) とてもそう思う                    | 1) Strongly agree                            |
| 2) 少しそう思う                     | 2) Agree a little                            |
| 3) あまりそうは思わない                 | 3) Don't really agree                        |
| 4) 全くそうは思わない                  | 4) Strongly disagree                         |
| 5) 学生の理解度によって変わるので、そうともいいきれない | 5) It depends on whether I understand or not |

Question 15	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4	Ans. 5
Total	30%	40%	26%	4%	0%

16：外国人教師が授業中、わずかでも日本語を使ったら、それは英語教師としての妥当性を大きく減ずることになると思いますか。

(If your foreign teacher speaks to you in Japanese even just a little, do you feel the validity of the teacher as an English teacher is significantly lessened?)

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1) とてもそう思う                    | 1) Strongly agree                            |
| 2) 少しそう思う                     | 2) Agree a little                            |
| 3) あまりそうは思わない                 | 3) Don't really agree                        |
| 4) 全くそうは思わない                  | 4) Strongly disagree                         |
| 5) 学生の理解度によって変わるので、そうともいいきれない | 5) It depends on whether I understand or not |

Question 16	Ans. 1	Ans. 2	Ans. 3	Ans. 4
Total	2%	5%	40%	53%

Thank you very much for participating in this survey.